

Ging Gang Goolee Goolee

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(Article from *A Miscellany of Merriott Memories*)

*T*here came a time when the simple fin, fur and feather pleasures of the countryside were no longer enough for the boys of the village. As we grew older, we needed to be organised. Fortunately, Bill Andrews, a Welshman who came to work in the village at Merriott Mouldings Ltd, organised the 1st Merriott Troop of boy scouts, with a supporting wolf cub pack. This was in 1944 or 1945 and the troop continued for a number of years thereafter.



First Merriott Troop boy scouts and wolf cubs

In the photograph above, Bill Andrews is third from the right in the back row. He was known to us all as 'Skip', short for 'Skipper'. The 'dignitaries' sitting in the centre from left to right are: the Rev Kemmish, the last Minister of the Baptist Church; Lieutenant Colonel Payne-Galway of Merriott House, supporting the village activities by his honoured presence, but little else, in the way this type of person deemed to be their natural duty back in those days; and Mr and Mrs Webb, troop benefactors (see below).

Most village boys were members of the scouts or cubs, according to their age. I believe the uniform had much to do with it. We were so excited as the various items - shirt, shoulder flashes, scarves and woggles - individually became available, presumably as the funds allowed them to be purchased.

I was originally a wolf cub where I proudly rose to the rank of Senior Sixer. But at the age of eleven, I transferred from the cubs to the scouts and it is the scouting activities I can best remember.

We met once a week, the venue a wartime Nissan hut in the orchard next to the tithe barn, opposite the church. This hut had originally been a cookhouse for the American soldiers who were stationed in the village prior to D-Day. Part of this structure remained standing until 1999.

We partook in all the usual scouting activities such as first aid and tying knots. I also recall that we took part in the very first 'Bob-a-Job-Week'. On summer evenings, we went tracking in the fields down over Park Hill, or learnt to prepare flower-and-water twists and cook them on sticks over campfires. We later ate these twists, washed down with smoky cocoa poured from sooty billycans into chipped enamel mugs. All this was supposedly in training for our big objective, to 'go away' camping.

Initially we were somewhat limited with regard to camping as the only tent available was an old ex-army bell tent that someone - come to think of it, it was probably the Lieutenant Colonel I rather belittled earlier! - donated for our use, but it did provide the nucleus for our first major camping expedition. This was at the foot of Castle Hill, a prominent landmark some two miles from the village. The bell tent, a couple of very small ridge tents, and a miscellany of other gear, including food and our blankets, were excitedly transported to the site on a very ancient, overloaded vicarage handcart. (It fell to pieces on the return journey a few days later.)

Skip slept in one of the small ridge tents; the other was used as a food store. The rest of us slept in the bell tent in a circle, shoulder to shoulder, feet to the central pole. There was great excitement; most of us had never slept away from home before. We were told to bring just two blankets each; no one had sleeping bags back then. A friend of mine had only one blanket and even that was rather thin. We pooled our resources and made a double bed from our three blankets. In terms of being warm in the middle of the night, this was very much at my expense.

With the exception of a bulk purchase of loaves from the Laurel Bakery, we all brought food from home, including fresh vegetables from our gardens - practically every household grew their own vegetables - and various tinned stuff. A typical hot meal would consist of boiled potatoes plus a mixture of the contents of many tins - various soups, beans, processed peas, stewed steak and goodness knows what else, maybe the odd tin of peaches! - all poured into a large billycan and heated over the campfire. It tasted wonderful. There was never enough.

Then, before bedtime and after dark, there was the campfire. Blazing logs, more smoky hot cocoa, and of course the sing-song.

A particular favourite song was *Ging Gang Goolee Goolee*, and I wouldn't mind betting that if you have had experience of scouting you will know this song just as well as I do. So why not sing along with me?

*Ging Gang Goolee, Goolee,
Goolee, Goolee Watcha
Ging Gang Goo Ging Gang Goo
Ging Gang Goolee, Goolee,
Goolee, Goolee Watcha
Ging Gang Goo Ging Gang Goo*

*Hayla, Hayla Shayla, Hayla Shayla Hayla Ho-o-o!
Hayla, Hayla Shayla Hayla Shayla Hayla Ho-o-o!
Shalawally shalawally shalawally shalawally!
Oompah, Oompah, Oompah, Oompah!*

And can you remember this one?

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven in an old Ford car
'Cause an old Ford car won't get that far*

Chorus:

*I ain't gonna grieve, my Lord no more
I ain't gonna grieve my Lord,
I ain't gonna grieve my Lord,
I ain't gonna grieve, my Lord no more.*

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven in a ping-pong ball
'Cause a ping-pong ball is much too small*

Chorus:

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven in a rocking chair
'Cause the Lord don't want no lazybones there*

Chorus:

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven in a wicker chair
'Cause the Lord don't want no baskets there*

Chorus:

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven in a biscuit tin
'Cause a biscuit tin's got biscuits in*

Chorus:

*Oh, you can't get to Heaven on roller skates
You'd roll right by them Pearly Gates*

Chorus:

That one used to go on and on and on, twenty odd verses, some very RUDE, like this one:

*Oh, you can't go to Heaven in a girl guide's bra
'Cause a girl guide's bra won't stretch that far*

To the boys of the 1st Merriott Troop, we present these tents in loving memory of our only son Leading Airman Harry Trevor Webb, Air gunner Fleet air arm and Scout of the 43rd Renfrewshire Troop, Scotland, who lost his life in carrying out his duty to the scout law and in defence of our convoys, made his sacrifice so that those of his brother scouts, and sons of our Country, Empire and Allies may not have been in vain. It is to you the Scouts of today, who we hope will become good citizens of the future, that we look to avoid if possible through the brotherhood of Scouts all over the world such a war ever coming again. May God bless you all wherever you may pitch your camp and may you spend many happy hours beneath this canvas.

Mr and Mrs Webb's message to the Merriott scouts

Oh! how we loved the rude ones! (As does my grandson, who tells me they still sing similarly rude verses nowadays.)

The photograph at the head of this chapter records the official handing over to the troop of four large ridge tents, each accommodating six boys. These had been purchased by money donated by the shipmates of Mr and Mrs Webb's only son, Harry Trevor Webb. He was a leading airman in the Fleet Air Arm and was killed at sea in 1944 when he was just 21 years of age. His name is included on the village war memorial in All Saints churchyard.

Apparently, Trevor, as he was known, had been a scout in his earlier years. On the red pole of each tent there was a brass plaque inscribed:

'To The Memory Of Scout Trevor Webb' followed by the years in which he was born and later died in the service of his country.

These four tents and a miscellany of other equipment purchased with the donated money meant our camping activities were greatly enhanced. For instance, one cold and wet Easter weekend we took part in a district competition camp on the Windwhistle estate, near Chard. We didn't win, but we had a wonderful time competing. I met a Yeovil lad there, Pryce Jones, who became a lifelong friend.

The following summer we went of to camp at Uphill, near Weston-Super-Mare. This was a highly successful week, with glorious weather. We were by that time organised into four patrols: Pewit, Wolf, and two others I can't recall, each patrol occupying one of the tents pitched in line along the field, with the kitchen area at one end. Kitchen chores were fairly shared. When not on duty, there were competitions and other activities and, in particular, rounders, to keep us fully occupied. On several occasions we walked through the village of Uphill to the sea and then all along the seafront into Weston-super-Mare where we bought ice cream and rock and visited the pier to stuff handfuls of large brown pennies into slot machines that rarely paid out and laughed ourselves silly in the Hall of Mirrors before walking all the way back again.

But our big adventure came the following year when we camped in South Wales, near Maesteg, Bill Andrew's hometown. We camped on a hilly site with a rushing stream in the valley below and with mountains, something we had never seen before, as a backdrop. It was a wonderful experience even though by the end of the week we had been washed out and ended up sleeping in the farmer's barn. We travelled there by train, which we caught at Yeovil Pen Mill station, having been transported there by a bus hired from Joe Wintle from Martock. But I remember nothing else of the journey to Wales, or the return journey. It is only as an adult that I appreciate what a major undertaking it must have been for Bill Andrews getting us there, and back again.

Similarly, I appreciate the generosity of Mr and Mrs Webb. Their kindness and forethought in creating such a unique memorial to their son provided hours and hours of camping pleasure for lots and lots of village boys and for those boys, I am sure, many happy memories to cherish down the years.

I'll finish with another campfire song, which we used to sing to the tune of Lily Marlene.

*With the scent of wood smoke
Drifting in the air
Comes the thought of campfire
We always love to share
Visions of campfires will return
And as the logs flame up and burn
We dream of bygone campfires
And long for those the come.*

We used to sing that one very softly, at the end of the evening, the once-blazing campfire reduced to a heap of glowing embers and not a drop of smoky cocoa left. Oh dear, pass me the tissues, I feel a tear coming on.



Sloping camp site
Maesteg, Wales



Flag break
Uphill
Weston S Mare



Departure for Wales



Wash time,
Uphill,
Weston S Mare



Lunchtime,
Uphill,
Weston S Mare