

EASTER CAMP at BLAIRMORE, April 1958
(Extract from the Fox Patrol Log (1955-1959))

Easter Camp, 1958 (Blairmore)¹
WED 2nd April to Monday 7th April 1958

The Patrols² were

Panthers

John Nisbet
Kenneth Johnson
William Harkness
Robert Howison
Robert Harvey

Seal

Kenneth Conway
Trevor Jones
Stuart Scott
J. Dyer³
Ritchie Muir (came on Saturday afternoon)

Beaver

Hamish Rankin
Brian Elliott
Alistair Nicol
Jim Blair

Wednesday 2nd April 1958

The boys assembled at Gourrock pier on Wednesday, a fine warm day. The boat left at 10:35 a.m. and arrived at Blairmore at 11.5 a.m. The tents etc were loaded on the waiting lorry⁴, which arrived at the camp at 11:20 a.m. The patrols fixed their kitchens and pitched their tents.⁵

Lunch was at 1 p.m. (a packed lunch). After dinner, the boys went to the wood to collect timber.⁶ Tea was at 5:30 p.m. and, after tea, a game of handball was played. At 7:45 p.m. the boys went up Blairmore Hill and arrived back at the camp at about 9 o'clock. Cocoa was at 9:30 but there was no campfire as it was rather cold.

Thursday 3rd April 1958

Thursday morning the boys got up at 7:30 a.m. (though some stayed in bed till 7.45!!!), After breakfast, the kitchens were tidied and, after flag break, J. Nisbet and B. Howison⁷ departed on their first 1st class Hike.⁸ (Marks for inspection – 3⁹).

In the afternoon, the boys went a walk up the valley and found an old mine¹⁰. Skipper¹¹ said they would explore it on Friday afternoon. Sandy Whiteford¹² arrived in the evening.

Friday 4th April 1958

Inspection – 0^{9,13}

Skipper¹¹ went home as it was his pay day. J. Nisbet and B Howieson returned from their hike and W. Harkness and A. Nicol left on theirs at about 12 .00 p.m. In the afternoon, the boys went with the Scouters to the old mine¹⁰. The Scouters took back some specimens of the stones inside the mine for examination. In the evening, we went a walk along the Forestry Commission Road¹⁴ – through the forest and returned via the main road.
Distance 6-7 miles.

Saturday 5th April 1958

On Saturday morning, the Scouters were first up at 8:30 a.m. Sandy¹⁵ came round the tents dragging us out of our sleeping bags. Inspection was at 10 a.m. as usual (4 points,⁹ but no patrol got good marks this morning). After dinner, various tests were passed and S. Whiteford and J. Harvey¹⁶ laid a trail in the forest for those who wanted to pass tracking.¹⁷ After tea, a game of football was played and at 9:30, cocoa around the Scouters' fire and campfire. As it wasn't so cold, there was a ghost story told by Skipper.¹¹

Sunday, 6th April 1958

A fine warm day and the boys got up at 7:15 a.m. After breakfast, there was inspection (8 points)⁹ and the dinner¹⁸ was half prepared. We didn't go to church¹⁹ as the service started at 12 o'clock. After dinner, S. Whiteford, J. Harvey, I. McFarlane left to hike to Dunoon for the boat to Gourock.²⁰ Skipper¹¹ took us a climb up past the mine and up onto the ridge and from there, there was a magnificent view. We could see up the length of Loch Long, up past Dumbarton Rock and down to Largs.²¹ We arrived back at camp at 4:30 p.m.. After tea, we played the Sandshoe game²² and then under the direction of R. Miller A.S.M., we (J. Nisbet, B. Elliott, H. Rankin, J. Blair, K. Johnson) made pancakes on the campfire. At camp fire, as there was no cocoa, we had rice and stewed apples with pancakes and syrup. We turned in at 10:30 p.m..

Monday 7th April 1958

We got up in good time this morning and after breakfast cleared up our kitchens and washed. At 10:30, there was inspection of dixies and the kitchen. After inspection, the kits were packed and the tents taken down and packed. The dixies, axes etc. etc. were packed and the heavy gear was carried up to the gate at the top of the site. Dinner was at 12.30 and consisted (with cold meat and tinned fruit) of clearing up the extra stores that had not been eaten. At 1:15, we formed a long line and walked through the camp and picked up any odd scraps of paper that were lying about. At 1.40 p.m., the lorry came and we loaded onto it the gear. We arrived at the Pier at 1:55 p.m. and unloaded the lorry. Most of us made a beeline for the cafe and sweet shop. The boat was late and didn't arrive until 2:35 p.m. and left at 2:45 p.m.. We arrived at Gourock at 3.05 p.m. (approximately) and the heavy equipment was put in the left luggage office.²³ The boys then went home.

All those who had been at the camp thought – and said –that they had thoroughly enjoyed it.

Sig. John Nisbet (P.L.)

Editorial notes

1. The campsite was near Blairmore Farm about a mile and a half north of Blairmore pier. The exact position was on open hillside below a cottage situated at grid reference 188832. The 70th used the campsite on a number of occasions throughout the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, but 1958 may have been the first time that it was used.

2. Although the Scouters were not listed, the daily log book entries show that the following were present for at least part of the camp – Ian Blake, Sandy Whiteford, Jim Harvey, Ian McFarlane and Bob Millar.

3. J. Dyer's Christian name has not been identified in the available Troop records, but it might have been John, based on the fact that a John Dyer was born in Gourrock in 1946 and would have been aged about 12 in 1958

4. According to Douglas Brown, various pier masters had a lorry available for hire in order to transport goods and equipment arriving by ferry. It is not known for certain whether the lorry used here was hired out from the pier master, but it seems likely, especially as there is clear evidence that a lorry was hired from the pier master to transport gear to and from Blairmore Farm for the Easter Camp of 1960.

5. Each Patrol in camp was self sufficient in terms of camping and cooking. It had its own tent and kitchen shelter and all meals were cooked over wood fires.

6. As well as collecting firewood, wood have been collected in order to build camp gadgets such as plate racks, mug trees etc.

7. John Nisbet and Robert (Bob) Howison.

8. The 1st Class journey was a two-day hike with an overnight camp, which involved 2 Scouts covering about 18-20 miles. The hike was unsupervised and the Scouts only found out their route when they opened sealed instructions on their departure. The Scouts hiked in uniform and were responsible for finding their own campsite en route. All meals were to be cooked over a wood fire and there were a number of projects that had to be completed during the hike. Once the hike was over, each Scout had to write up a detailed account of the hike including information relating to the set projects. Diagrams and sketches were also expected and it was not unusual for Scouts to be asked to improve their log book before they were passed. A District Examiner set the route and the projects for the hike and issued the instructions, then assessed the log books once the hike was over. The hike was one of the last tests completed before gaining the 1st Class Badge. Scouting had a progressive training scheme that involved four principal badges – Tenderfoot, 2nd Class, 1st Class and Queen's Scout. In the 70th, PLs were expected to have their 1st Class Badge and were encouraged to gain their Queen's Scout Badge.

9. As John Nisbet was P.L. of the Panther Patrol in camp, this mark relates to that patrol.

10. The exact location of the mine and its former purpose have still to be determined. However, it is likely to be the mine identified on the Secretscotland websit which can be accessed at

<https://www.secretscotland.org.uk/index.php/Secrets/BlairmoreMine>

This indicates that the mine lies on the north bank of the Blairmore Burn, about half a mile above Blairmore Farm. It can be accessed by a horizontal tunnel (adit) that is about 100 feet long with a side branch leading off. It is believed locally that tin was mines here, but historical records identify it as a lead mine. There is also evidence of a narrow ditch and embankment running down the hill towards the road, as well as a small spoil heap. Four cottages used to be present near the mine. Two of these were renovated into one large cottage in the early 2000s. Oddly, the house still has two staircases. The other two cottages were also renovated and turned into a single property, and a large extension added at an unknown date. A date of 1876 is carved into a modern date stone set on one of the new buildings.

11. Scout Master Ian Blake

12. A.S.M. Sandy Whiteford was presumably at work on the first two days of camp.

13. This was underlined several times by John Nisbet who was not in camp that morning as he was on the second day of his 1st Class hike.

14. *The exact route is not known, but it is likely that they took the forestry road just above the campsite that went south into the woods and followed that to reach the coats road at Kilmun, then returned by the coast road. This was certainly the route followed during a night hike at the 1959 Easter Camp at Blairmore.*
15. *A.S.M. Sandy Whiteford.*
16. *A.S.M. Jim Harvey*
17. *Tracking was one of the Scout skills that was assessed during the 1950s for both the Tenderfoot and 1st Class Badges, and involved following signs made from natural materials. In principle, the signs had to be subtle such that they would only be spotted by those looking for them. In practice, some of the signs may well have been probably fairly obvious, such as arrows made with wooden twigs.*
18. *During the 1950s, dinner was the equivalent of lunch, and was the main meal of the day. Tea was a lighter meal taken at the end of the afternoon.*
19. *It was standard practice for the Troop to attend a Sunday Church Service when in camp.*
20. *Sandy, Jim and Ian were all A.S.Ms and were probably returning because of work on the Monday. The hike back probably took a couple of hours.*
21. *The exact route was not specified, but it is likely that they climbed to the ridge above the campsite then travelled south to Kilmun Hill.*
22. *This may have been introduced to the troop for the first time on the 7th March 1958 and involved a Scouter swinging a sandshoe on the end of a rope round in a circle. The Scouts had to jump over it and were out if they were hit.*
23. *Presumably, this was collected later on and transported up to the Church.*