

WEST LOTHIAN SCOUT COUNCIL THE CRAIGS

Introduction

The following extracts are copied from The Craigs Anniversary Booklet: "The First Forty Years 1958 -1998". Edited in 1998 by Dr Andrew Bain.

The following extracts are included:

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1. An Opening Message

Ian Rodger, who formally opened The Craigs on 18th October, 1958, was a well-known and influential national Leader. At the time of the opening day he was Scottish Training Commissioner.

2. Importance of Camping

In declaring the site open, Mr. Rodger said that was a great day for Scouting in West Lothian and it was a great honour for him to be asked there and to meet them. West Lothian had always been a famous county for Scouting and what an adventure this was going to be for them. Camping was a most important part in Scouting. In fact Scouting began in a camp. About the only people to camp in those days were Scouts and many people thought they were mad. Since then things had changed and nowadays many people camped. Keeping this in mind Scout camps should be the very best, the most adventurous and the cleanest. Such camps provided the means whereby boy leaders and grown ups could learn to be good Scouters. He urged them to look after their site. It was their very own - And those who came after them and visitors from other counties who came to see them would judge them by what they saw there. When they left their camp they should leave two things. First no trace whatever of having been there, and, secondly, their thanks. Their thanks that day were to those who had made that camp possible. He wished them good luck and good Scouting. When the - centenary of Scouting came round he knew that the Craigs would be a famous camp. Some of them would probably come there to celebrate the golden Jubilee of the Craigs site. Mr. Rodger then broke the green pennant and declared the site officially open. Three ringing cheer greeted this declaration and a rocket went soaring into the sky as a signal that the county camp site was now in being.

3. Planting of Oak Trees

A more permanent memorial of the occasion was the planting of an oak tree by Mr. Rodger. Preliminary to this Mr. Wolfe expressed thanks to him for his encouragement and said that in due course the occasion would also be marked with a plaque. The oak, which was incorporated in the county Scout badge. Symbolized the Scouting spirit which they hoped to cultivate. This particular oak had been grown by Col. Cadell from an acorn he had picked up at Dalmeny - about eight years ago.

From the *Linlithgowshire Journal and Gazette* for Friday, October 24, 1958, where those interested in further details can find a very full account.

4. Purchase of The Craigs

The opening of the site took place on Saturday, 18th October, 1958, when a large gathering of Cubs, Scouts, and Rovers attended the formal ceremony performed by Mr. Ian Rodger, Scottish Training Commissioner. It was not, however, until the following year that the legal formalities were completed, and the title deed dates from its recorded entry in the General Register of Sasines for 9th April, 1959. This document, which is five pages long and is accompanied by writs and maps, gives undisputed ownership to West Lothian County Scout Council, and, apart from small parcels of land on the margins that have been bought and sold over the years, The Craigs is now as that deed described.

For fear of disbelief, I shall not quote here the sum that was paid for the site: suffice it to say that -even with the great changes in the value of the pound over the years since -this was probably the best bargain that West Lothian Scouts have ever made. The purchase value forty years ago was, of course, that of a primitive site bare even of trees, whereas the value now is of a developed site with buildings and led-in services of water, gas and electricity; and such facilities do make a difference. That such potential difference was perceived by those individuals who were responsible for the purchase of the Craigs is now something that can be both marveled at and fully appreciated.

5. The Beginnings

Those walking nowadays throughout the site will find it difficult to imagine that it was once very different from what it is now, and it is one of the purposes of this first part of the Booklet to explain how the present scene has come about, and why.

Try to imagine a strip of land of about twenty acres, much longer than broad, following at a lower level the line of quartz-dolerite escarpment that dominated the then treeless ground. The eastern end was closed to Scouts, and the only way in was by the old stone bottomed road that began at the western end near Broompark Farm and went steeply uphill for its first fifty yards.

That road is still visible, but as an entrance it fell into disuse after the present road was built in 1963. Other than the old road and a few trees left by the imber merchant's clearing operations, the site was virgin land, and far from level on an underlying boulder clay that was marshy in some parts and covered with bracken and willow herb in others. No buildings, no protection from strong southerly winds, no fireplaces, little firewood, no piped water, no sanitation, no level ground, no drainage - no anything, in fact, that Scouts would need for a camping centre! The imagination boggles, doesn't it?

6. Initial Policy

For those who were endowed with the foresight to purchase The Craigs, the priorities seemed urgently clear, and were all associated with making the site accessible to any Scouts who were hardy enough to accept the primitive conditions of its earliest years. Taking the advice of the legendary Sir Ian Bolton, a Chief Commissioner for Scotland and major developer of the Barrwood Campsite in neighbouring Stirlingshire, tree-planting was considered essential on the almost bare site: essential for protection against the elements; essential for future firewood; essential for pioneering timber; essential for the education of Scouts. For several years, therefore, both Scout Groups and individuals set out young trees in plots that had to be fenced against the feeding habits of rabbits and deer. Those first trees are now more than fifty feet high, and have been added to throughout the following decades. More recently the policy has been one of planting specimen trees for education and variety (there are now about forty species) rather than the initial policy of planting in plots for firewood and tent shelter. A few of these earliest plots, being now mature, are currently being thinned out and used for various purposes on the site, while a list of the newer specimens is displayed in Cadell House. Another early priority was the provision of camping areas on a very inhospitable surface. The whole twenty-plus acres occupied an uneven downward slope below the escarpment.

There were areas of marsh, areas of bracken, areas of large boulders, and areas of huge tree stumps left by the saw miller who had cleared The Craigs for commercial timber. On a site like this, no "field" camping seemed possible or sensible, and it was decided to construct about a dozen patrol-size sites, with a larger central area (or "gathering ground") to allow for the coming together of campers at briefings or Scouts' Own services. Imagine the manual labour required by spade and pick-axe - no money for a JCB in those days! Imagine, too, how much was owed to those local (ex-Scout) contractors who ferried free in their lorries the top soil from local building sites. To many of its users now, The Craigs may well seem far from level; but they should have seen it in 1958!

In the first years, the only access was up the old road by Scout pulled trek-carts, a very tiring operation after walking to Torphichen in the first place, and so a third priority became a level road into the site. After a legalised swapping of plots of land, this road was cut along the line of the present access, and for many years older Scouts, their Leaders, and Lay workers continually re-surfaced that road with lorry loads of donated blaes. Now, of course, there is a more permanent surface, and the road leads direct to the car-park, which eventually replaced the insecurity of leaving at the road-end or the farm the few cars that were possessed by Leaders in those days. So, by 1963 here was an easier road into The Craigs, and there were more-level and more-sheltered patrol sites once Scouts were in. But there was still no piped water right into the used areas; nor were there any kitchen shelters (described by one early user as "taking the hell out of camping") or any fireplaces. Worst of all, perhaps, there was no modern sanitation. The contemporary mind retreats from those early attempts at personal hygiene: "horrendous" might not be an inappropriate word springing to the lips of those used to hot showers, flushing toilets, and internal wash-hand basins. All of these facilities still lay in the future.

7. Steady Work

Dedicated work by Scouts, Leaders and Lay Members continued regularly over the next few years, mostly -but not always -at weekends. More plots of trees were planted throughout the site, many of them made up from trees donated by the Forestry Commission, the Central Scotland Woodland Trust, and local well wishers.

Water was piped in from the west end (only later from the east) to supply the first standpipes, the arduous labour of digging a trench for the pipe being undertaken by what was becoming a regular and dependable Lay workforce -occasionally assisted by press-ganged Leaders from the Annual Church Parade and Executive Meetings! The plastic water-pipe, which is normally an expensive item, was donated free by the employer of one of the then Leaders.

Once the patrol sites began to be used regularly, kitchen shelters were constructed from timber salvaged from old houses being demolished in Bathgate; and concrete altar fireplaces were built to avoid setting alight the peat that underlies parts of the lower Craigs. In making both of these - as in so many other contributions to the development of the site -West Lothian Scouting was indebted to the unstinting voluntary work of Alexander Rodger, who in time became the first Assistant Area Commissioner(Craigs).Both shelters and fireplaces survived for very many years, whatever the elements and the vandals might do, and it is only relatively recently that some of the original shelters have been replaced by later models made from money donated by the Gannochy Trust.

In undertaking all of this important early development, spades, pickaxes, and wheelbarrows (mostly from Wolfe's Shovel Works!) were as essential as the voluntary labourers who used them; but there came a time when something on a larger scale was seen to be necessary, and the first dumper appeared on the site. Two old and

abandoned scrap machines, each useless in itself, were made into one serviceable dumper by Tom Binning (later Deputy Area Commissioner) and this did yeoman service for many years - without brakes, with a very chancy belt-driven clutch arrangement, and with a very wide range of skill in its drivers! Eventually it was replaced only in extreme old age. This first dumper proved to be indispensable, not only for transporting soil to patrol sites and heavy boulders to a flag-pole platform under construction, but also for distributing blaes (usually dumped by contractors' lorries at the road-end) to various points throughout the length of a constantly pot-holed road surface.

Perhaps this is an appropriate place to draw more specific attention to an aspect of development implicit in any account of those earliest years -and indeed since. The basic policy of the Craigs Committee and its Advisers was to make the greatest possible use of volunteers. The first reason was, of course, the economic one that adult volunteers were able to work on five-year plans within the very tight budget that was allowed in an always financially hard-pushed Area. The second reason was equally important, and an educational one: that Scouts themselves should, through their active and regular participation, come to feel that The Craigs was their site, and at least in part of their own construction. To encourage this feeling of participation, wooden plaques were awarded annually to Troops for work well done, and some headquarters still display an array of such awards. The legion of dedicated adult workers who were indispensable in the development of the site in those years needed no such token awards: the knowledge that they were repaying through their labour some of what they owed to Scouting in their formative years was enough in itself. Nevertheless, West Lothian Scouting owes them a considerable debt. "

8. Buildings on the Site

In the early 1960s the only building on The Craigs was a small corrugated asbestos hut that, for humorous reasons, was always referred to as "Johnston's Folly", after one of the builders from the Bo'ness B.P. Guild. It was lined by "the Willie Walker method" (Willie was Northern D.C.) and painted by the 25th Rovers. In bad weather it served as shelter for workers or the occasional campers; and in all weathers as a tool store. Unfortunately, it had no dependable Winter heating, and sometimes the only alternative to freezing was a gradual "kippering" in the smoke generated by the ancient and truculent stove. But better things were coming.

Between 1963 and 1965 much thought was given by the Craigs Committee to improved facilities.

For a time, a decision was postponed while the advantages of a permanent building were balanced by those of a swimming pool. In the end, however, accommodation won, and two members (Chae Marshall and Charlie Richardson) were given the task of designing what became in 1967 the original Cadell House.

As ever, the major concern was financing any improvement to the site, and to attract assistance from the Local Authority and the Scottish Education Department 25% of the total cost had to be found by the West Lothian Scout Association itself. The Area Chairman at that time, Col. Alan Hardie, set about the problem with his customary intelligent enthusiasm, and most Leaders and Lay Members soon found themselves harnessed to the task of approaching individually as many members of the public as possible with a view to extracting promises of help. Over 130 contributed, many of them by annual covenant; the grants were given; and in 1967 Cadell House was opened as a permanent brick building for both non-camping use and training courses.

At the opening ceremony, Col. Hardie magnanimously passed over the chance of attaching his own name to the building in favour of the name of his lose friend and former County Commissioner, Col. H.M. Cadell. The original Cadell House was built, not only to a tight budget, but also upon assumptions different from those of thirty years later. Inside toilets for both sexes were, of course, deemed to be essential; as was inside meeting (or play) accommodation in a large hall; as was a kitchen; as was storage space for tents and equipment. But much of what is now considered basic provision was not thought then to have a priority claim on very limited funds, and so the meeting hall doubled during the day as a dining room and served as a dormitory at night.

As a result of the consequent increase in demand for water, a second main supply pipe was led in -again with much breaking of sweat! -from the east end, and several new stand-pipes were built into concrete housings along its length. In time, too, there were constructed on branch lines to the new supply, The Thorburn Chalet and The Joe Hall Chalet. The first of these wooden buildings was named after the then Area Commissioner, Major D.S.Thorburn; and the second after a Western District Chairman whose name had been given previously to the refurbished -and then demolished - "Johnston's Folly". Both of these wooden buildings were donated at no cost to the Committee, and have provided acceptable accommodation for many purposes down the years.

Through time, pressure arose even upon these increased facilities. A small separate brick toilet block was provided in 1971 for all those who were not actually staying in Cadell House; and a brick outside store was added in 1982 to the end of the main building, thus freeing the inside store to become a Leaders' lounge. As a further stop-gap two ex-British Telecom trailers were purchased in 1990: the first to provide extra toilet accommodation for the increasing number of female users and also to cater for any large events on the site.

The second was intended to serve as a combined Warden's Lodge and tuck shop, but in the event its existence was more usefully diverted to a much-needed replacement for the now rotting dumper garage. Yet, in spite of such additions, it was soon obvious to the Committee that something more radical was necessary if the still very much dated provision was to be improved attractively. That major step still lay in the future.

9. More Steady Work

There is always a danger of passing over the routine by recording the highlights of any developing situation, and attention again has to be drawn to an aspect that was summed up succinctly by a former Area Commissioner when he said: "Anybody can build; it is the maintaining of what has been built that takes a lot more effort". He was - and is - absolutely right. Over the years The Craigs has benefited from the cheerful dedication of a long succession of Uniformed Leaders and Lay Members, but never has their work been more necessary than in the maintenance of the buildings of all kinds on the site. It is a contribution that, because it is ongoing, can be easily over looked by users-until the timbers rot, or the paint flakes off, or some ,essential equipment fails to work. It is a contribution that has become even more necessary with the latest addition to habitable accommodation: the Cadell House Extension and Refurbishment.

10. The New Cadell House

Although it had been apparent to the Committee for some time that fundamental thinking was necessary about the facilities on The Craigs, the difficulty was a recurrent one: shortage of capital. What users required was well known, but finding sufficient finance in order to provide what they required was not so easy. Small grants had been available in the past (toilet block, brick store, etc.), just as individual donors had always been helpful. What was now needed, however, was a sum that would match the outcome of fundamental thinking about what facilities were required at a modern camping

and training centre. And in order to generate sufficient income to develop the whole site, any building had to be attractive enough in its provisions to justify acceptable charges.

The likely cost of what was needed was investigated, and it was found that an extension and refurbishment of the original Cadell House of 1967 that would provide improved cooking, dining, sleeping, and toilet accommodation was likely to cost upwards of £100,000 (in the event, the cost was in excess of £130,000). Of this capital sum the Committee would have to find 25% in the usual way of grant-aid schemes, and unlike in 1967 the conditions did not allow for a system of individual and protracted fund-raising to find this large sum. It had to be found quickly, or not at all.

To cut a very long story short, the total Scout contribution was raised by selling off to a private builder a piece of the site that few realised was there, and the remaining 75% was given by the Local Authority (at that time Lothian Region) and the Scottish Education Department. However, a shell of a building was just that, and the contents to fill it were bought from donations made by a large number of individual well-wishers and charitable groups, both local and national, whose names are remembered on a plaque in the Marshall Room of Cadell House. With a further input of voluntary help, Uniformed and Lay, the task set was completed, with the result that users now find a much more modern version of the original building that Col. Hardie opened in 1967. The volume of its use in the past few years seems to suggest that, within the overall budget, the Management Committee and its ad hoc sub-committees got things just about right. Yet it has always to be remembered that Cadell House is not self-contained, and that it has ever to be seen in the context of a whole natural site with potentialities of experience and education for all ages of Scouting.

Andrew Bain

Doc was not one of the "Founding Fathers", but became involved in The Craigs only in 1963 as a result of the persuasion of Sir Ian Bolton, and of Billy Wolfe, who appointed him Craigs Development Adviser. Later - and for nearly three decades - he served as Chairman of the Craigs Management Committee.

11 Living Memorials

A During the first forty years (1958-1998) various specimen trees have been planted that are associated with persons identified in some way with the development of the site. These trees can be readily located in the situations indicated below.

Sir Ian Bolton	-	a Maple at the Jubilee Gateway
Col. H.M. Cadell	-	a plot of Oak, Lime and Plane at the road junction
Joe Hall	-	a purple Acer on the Gathering Ground
Col. Alan Hardie	-	a Maple and a Chestnut opposite Cadell House
John (Denny) Henderson	-	a Maple at the Gateway
Charles Marshall	-	a Hawthorn to the east of the Gateway
John Paul	-	a Service Tree to the south of Cadell House
James Richardson	-	a Yew opposite Cadell House
Alex. Rodger	-	Five Chestnuts to the right of the entrance road
Matthew Shedden	-	a small plantation of Rowan, Cherry, Lime and Copper Beech to the west of the new 31st W.L. site
The Marquess of Linlithgow	-	a small plantation of Larch, Spruce, and Fir at the west end of The Craigs

B Visits by Chief Scouts

Lord Charles Maclean	-	Oak (1968)	-	Gathering Ground
Sir William Gladstone	-	Oak (1974)	-	Gathering Ground
W. Garth Morrison	-	Lime (1990)	-	Gathering Ground

The Whitebeam planted in association with the visit of Major-General Maurice Walsh to West Lothian in 1983 was not planted on The Craigs, but in the grounds of Low Port School, where West Lothian Scouts gathered to meet him. As a Craigs reminder of his West Lothian visit, a small grove of Larch was planted later in the year to the north of the entrance road.

C In addition to the above, of course, single trees or small plots have been planted to commemorate various events throughout the years. For example, Opening Day was commemorated by planting an Oak on the Gathering Ground, and Cub Jubilees have been marked by mixed conifers, and by a Chilean Pine.

All of these trees continue to thrive as living memorials to people and occasions.

