

**ARTICLE APPEARING IN
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BP-Centenary Camp – 15th Cheltenham (Shurdington) Scouts – 21 to 25 Feb 2007

Fourteen members of our Scout Group spent what I can only describe as an unforgettable five days in Poland last week, meeting up with over twenty Scouts from Szczecin. I was fortunate enough to be invited along and can describe at first hand the tremendous welcome we all received from people of all ages we'd never met before.

We stayed the first two days in a Youth Hostel, followed by 3 days in Tanowo, staying at a large new school, which its Directors gave us for our use for the duration. I was pleasantly surprised to see that most of the Polish Scouts were given the Thursday and Friday off school as a form of cultural exchange. This was an excellent way to get two groups from two different countries and cultures together, helping each to learn not only about the language and customs of each other, but form a great friendship, which I am sure, will last a life time. We have invited the Scouts to a return visit at some stage, and hope that our local Scouts will also been given the opportunity of a one or two days off for cultural exchange.

On Thursday we joined our friends to celebrate Founders Day in their school, as 22nd February was the 150th birthday of Robert Baden-Powell. We toured their school and classes, and joined in songs and games. We were shown tremendous kindness throughout our stay, experienced ice-skating, local food, travelled in trams almost everywhere we went, and swam in Gryfino – indoors I must add. Snow on Thursday was an answer to our prayers. All the Scouts spent as much time as they could together gelling their friendship, struggling to speak a bit of Polish, ghost hunting in the forest way past midnight, witnessing a touching investiture of their Scout Leader Ala Lawniczak, practiced archery and rifle shooting, cooked Polish sausages on an open campfire in minus six temperature, visited the Cathedral in Szczecin, and generally felt so at home it was hard to entice them back to England.

Our last day in Tanowo was dedicated to enjoying each other's company with Karaoke, games and a final Goodbye sung both in Polish and English, which brought almost everyone to tears. A translation is on our village website. In my years of Scouting I have never seen so many young children hugging each other and shedding so many tears at having to leave a bunch of such special friends behind.

Anyone interested there are lots of photos and videos of our trip to our twinned Scout Group, the 88-Uroczysko.

Thanks must go to the many people who made all this possible both here and in Poland, but especially to the two Scout Leaders, our intrepid Louise Slee, and their incredible Ala Lawniczak, who worked very hard to make it happen. This year is the Scout Movements' 100th anniversary, and a meeting of two cultures like this proves this year's motto One World One Promise.

An e-mail from Ala on the Monday after we returned summed the whole event in one sentence. It rained on Monday after we left and she said 'Even the sky is crying for you.' How wonderfully positive.

15th Cheltenham (SHURDINGTON) Scouts
Twinned with
88-Uroczysko Scout Group, Szczecin, Poland