

# The Origins of the Wood Badge



When Gilwell Park was purchased for the Scout Movement in 1919 and formal Leader Training introduced, Baden-Powell felt that 'Scout Officers' (as they were then called) who completed a training course, should receive some form of recognition. Originally he envisaged that those who passed through Gilwell should wear an ornamental tassel on their Scout hats but instead the alternative of two small beads attached to lacing on the hat or to a coat button-hole was instituted and designated the Wood Badge. Very soon the wearing of beads on the hat was discontinued and instead they were strung on a leather thong or bootlace around the neck, a tradition that continues to this day.

The first Wood Badges were made from beads taken from a necklace that had belonged to a Zulu chief named Dinizulu, which B-P had found during his time in the Zululand in 1888. On state occasions, Dinizulu would wear a necklace 12 feet long, containing, approximately 1,000 beads made from South African Acacia yellow wood. This wood has a soft central pith, which makes it easy for a rawhide lace to be threaded through from end to end and this is how the 1,000 beads were arranged. The beads themselves in size from tiny emblems to others 4 inches in length. The necklace was considered sacred, being the badge conferred on royalty and outstanding warriors.

When B-P was looking for some token to award to people who went through the Gilwell training course he remembered the Dinizulu necklace and the leather thong given to him by an elderly African at Mafeking. He took two of the smaller beads, drilled them through the centre, threaded them onto the thong and called it the Wood Badge.

The first sets of beads issued were all from the original necklace but the supply soon ran short. So one exercise on the early courses was to be given one original Acacia bead and be told to carve the other from hornbeam or beech. Eventually beech wood beads became the norm and for many years were made by Gilwell staff in their spare time. Again in the early days Wood Badge participants received one bead on taking the practical course at Gilwell and received a second bead on completing the theoretical part (answers to questions) and a certain length of in-service training.

These sketches by B-P show how the Wood Badge design evolved.



Worn in the button-hole of coat



Worn on the brim of Scout hat

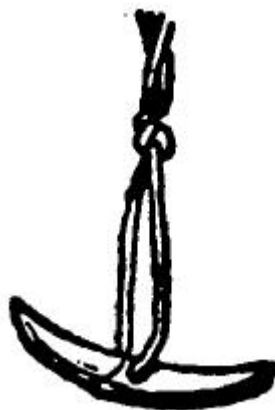


Worn around neck

B-P had got the idea for wearing beads on the hat during the First World War after seeing officers of the U.S. Expeditionary Force wearing broad-brimmed B.P. Stetson hats (not named after Baden-Powell but a Stetson trade name: 'Boss of the Plains') with acorns attached to the two ends of a thong that kept the hat from blowing off the head in a strong wind. He thought originally of having two beads attached in the same way on the Scout hat but changed his mind when it was brought to his attention that Scout Leaders only wore their hats outdoors, so instead he decided that they should be worn on the thong around the neck.

Certain variations soon came about. Two bead necklaces were worn by Scouters, three beads by Assistant Leader Trainers (formerly called Assistant Camp Chiefs) and four by Leader Trainers (formerly called Deputy Camp Chiefs). With a revision of the pattern of Trainer Training in recent years the practice of awarding three and four bead necklaces has ceased.

For a brief period of time Wolf Cub Leaders (Cub Scout Leaders) had their own system. From 1922 until 1925, Wolf Cub Leaders were awarded a Wolf's Fang or an Akela Badge, comprising a single fang on a leather thong. Wolf Cub Leader Trainers, known also as Akela Leaders, wore two fangs. These fangs were bone tooth fangs or wooden replicas and very few of them survive today.



An Akela Badge

The use of the Akela Badge was short-lived for on 13th November 1925 the Committee of the Council decided that there should only be one type of badge for Leader Training, the Wood Badge but that it should be worn '... with a distinctive mark...' to denote the section of the Movement with which the Leader was working. This mark took the form of a small coloured abacus-type bead, placed immediately above the knot on the leather bootlace. The beads were yellow for Cubs, green for Scouts and red for Rovers but this did not last long and were phased out by a decision of the Committee of the Council on 14th October 1927. Again few of these beads survive today.

When foreign countries established Wood Badge training after the pattern set by Gilwell, the person in charge of originating the course was designated a Gilwell Deputy Camp Chief, representing Gilwell Park in his own country. According to a tradition supposedly established by Baden-Powell, that person could wear five beads. Most of these fifth beads were presented in the 1920s and 1930s but what happened to them and who wore them is not known.

Baden-Powell himself wore six beads. But B-P did also award a set of six beads to Sir Percy Everett. Sir Percy had been a friend of B-P since the original camp on Brownsea Island in 1907 and he became the Commissioner for Training and eventually the Deputy Chief Scout.

B-P wish to acknowledge the tremendous debt that he owed to Sir Percy and so presented him with a six bead necklace.

In 1949 Sir Percy presented his six bead necklace back to Gilwell to be worn as the badge of office of the Camp Chief, i.e. the person on the Gilwell staff responsible for Leader Training. John Thurman, then the Camp Chief, wore the necklace until his retirement in 1969 when the necklace passed to Bryan Dodgson, the Director of Leader Training. Following his retirement in 1983 and a re-organisation of staff titles and responsibilities, the six bead necklace is was worn by Derek Twine, then the Executive Commissioner (Programme and Training). Today after further changes in titles it is worn by Stephen Peck, Director of Programme and Development.

The conferring of wooden beads as a sign of recognition is an old Zulu tradition. We read of them first in the story of Charles Rawden Maclean, also known as John Ross, who was shipwrecked off the Zululand coast in 1825. He was one of the first white people to meet the great Zulu king Shaka. In his description of the Festival of the First Fruits he wrote: 'They now commence ornamenting and decorating their persons with beads and brass ornaments. The most curious part of these decorations consisted of several rows of small pieces of wood ... strung together and made into necklaces and bracelets... On inquiry we found that the Zulu warriors set great value on these apparently useless trifles, and that they were orders of merit conferred by Shaka. Each row was the distinguishing mark of some heroic deed and the wearer had received them from Shaka's own hand.' Later when Maclean met the royal party he observed that Dingane, Shaka's half brother, was 'dressed in the same manner as the king but without so large a display of beads.'

There is little doubt that the beads of Dinizulu were identical to those which Maclean saw Shaka wearing and it is quite extraordinary that B-P should have chosen these beads as an award, to be conferred by his own hand, without knowing that Shaka had used them in the same way.

Today thousands of Zulu boys are Scouts and in 1987 the Chief Minister Mangosuthu Buthelezi of KwaZulu was the guest of honour at a large Scout rally. Chief Buthelezi's mother, Princess Magogo, was a daughter of Dinizulu. At the rally the Chief Scout of South Africa took from his neck a thong on which four Wood Badge beads were strung and handed it to Chief Buthelezi in a symbolic act of returning the beads to their rightful heir.

## GILWELL'S DIPLOMA COURSE

The scheme of training used at Gilwell evolved from a series of articles by B-P published in the *Headquarters Gazette* early in 1914-1918 war. These were issued in book form in 1919 under the title *Aids to Scoutmastership*. The framework of training was set down by B-P in the following notes.

### Diploma course for the Wood Badge

Open to all warranted officers of the Boy Scouts Association

#### i. Theoretical:

Aims and methods of the Scout Training as defined in *Aids to Scoutmastership*, *Scouting for Boys* and *Rules* in such subjects as Organisation according to ages. Four lines of training: Nature lore for soul, health and sex knowledge; National need and possibilities of the Training.

A course of four studies either by correspondence in the *Headquarters Gazette* or by weekend attendances at Gilwell Park as desired by the candidate. This will form a winter course.

#### ii. Practical:

In four groups of subjects:

1. Troop ceremonies and campcraft
2. Field work and pioneering
3. Woodcraft and Scout games
4. Signcraft and pathfinding

The Training will be at Gilwell Park in four weekend courses or eight days in camp as most convenient to the candidate.

iii. Administration:

The practical administration of his Troop or District as shown by the results of 18 months work.

Awards:

One bead on button hole - for passing Parts i and ii.

One bead on hat string and Diploma for passing all three satisfactorily.

Two beads on hat string and Diploma for passing with special qualifications for becoming a Camp Chief

Approved District Schools or study circles under Camp Chiefs will be eventually carried out on similar principles but the double beads will only be awarded at Gilwell Park.

### DINIZULU - THE ZULU CHIEF

At the conclusion of the first Zulu war in 1879, the control of Zululand was broken up into 13 provinces, each with a Zulu chieftain in charge. Dinizulu, son of the former Zulu Chief Cetywayo, was one of these chieftains.

The more belligerent of these chieftains were soon invading the others' territories, burning villages and raiding their cattle herds. Dinizulu requested help from local Boer (Dutch) forces, and received about 800 mounted Boer troops. With this help he quickly rose to power over the neighbouring tribes and in return for their assistance, Dinizulu promised to give the Boers land. However, now confronted with losing a major part of his country to the Boers, he then turned to Britain for help.

The British Government succeeded in contesting part of the Boer land request based on previous treaties. To prevent further Boer encroachment on Zululand, Great Britain annexed what remained of the country. Although the Boers had thus been thwarted, annexation by Britain had not been in Dinizulu's plans. Early in 1888 Dinizulu gathered about 4,000 warriors and broke into open defiance of the British authorities.

The situation soon became critical and in June 1888 an army of 2,000 British soldiers, plus a levy of loyal Zulus was despatched from Cape

Town to settle the uprising. Baden-Powell was a member of this force and when the commanding officer instructed B-P to establish an intelligence department to obtain information about Dinizulu's whereabouts, B-P organised a small group of Zulu spies and gathered complete information about Dinizulu's movements.

Dinizulu and his forces were hidden in the fastnesses of the Ceza, a mountainous spread with a jumbled mass of broken rock, boulders and caves with a number of thickly wooded ravines running up into a jungle near the summit.

B-P moved into the Ceza bush in command of a column of soldiers, mounted troops and part of the levy of friendly Zulus. When B-P and his forces reached the summit, Dinizulu and his warriors were gone, but numerous small forts and huts were found. In one of these huts, which because of its size and design appeared to be that of Dinizulu, B-P found a number of weapons and a long string of wooden beads.

Several days later Dinizulu gave himself up. He was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment and transported to the island of St Helena, about 1,100 miles off the west coast of Africa. It is reported that during his stay (more exile than real imprisonment) he took to wearing western style clothing, accepted Christianity and even sang in the Church choir.

In 1898 Dinizulu was allowed to return to Africa but was involved in another revolt and after a subsequent trial for murder, treason and other offences, was sentenced in 1908 to four years imprisonment. He was released after two years and died in the Transvaal in 1913.

There is some debate as to how B-P acquired the necklace - whether he found it, was given it or whether he stole it. A manuscript in The Scout Association's Archives gives what must be the definitive answer.

## HOW I OBTAINED THE NECKLACE OF DENIZULU

### AS TOLD BY THE CHIEF SCOUT

*Copy of notes dictated by B-P in 1925 authenticating the story of Chief Dinizulu's necklace. Original notes are in The Scout Association's Archives, typed on Baden-Powell's head notepaper and addressed Pax Hill, Bentley, Hampshire.*

'In 1879 the British under Lord Wolseley broke up the Zulu kingdom, under Cetchwayo, which had been a constant menace with its raids on both Boer and British territory, and divided the nation into eight tribes, each under a separate Chief. One of these tribes was under Dinizulu, the son of Cetchwayo.

'In 1888 Dinizulu raised a rebellion among the tribes against the British. Two of the tribes however elected to side with us. General Sir Henry Smyth took out a force against Dinizulu. I acted as Military Secretary and Intelligence Officer.

'Dinizulu after a few small engagements took refuge in a mountain stronghold called the Ceza Bush, just on the border of the Transvaal. I reconnoitred the place with a few Scouts and our forces were brought into position to take it from three sides. Just before attacking I went into position with my Scouts at early dawn and found that the enemy had just hurriedly evacuated it, leaving most of their food and kit behind, and had crossed the border into the Transvaal, where of course we could not follow them.

'In the hut which had been put up for Dinizulu to live in, I found among other things his necklace of wooden beads. I had in my possession a photograph of him taken a few months beforehand in which he was shown wearing this necklace round his neck and one shoulder.

'He was at that time a splendid type of young savage and full of resources, energy and pluck. He eventually surrendered to us, was kept a prisoner for some time and was then returned to his tribe on condition that he behaved himself.

'But later on he broke out again and involved us in a further campaign which resulted in our finally taking over Zululand and annexing it.'

## THE LEATHER THONG

The other important part of the Wood Badge, apart from the beads, is the leather thong itself. Baden-Powell was originally given one during the course of the Siege of Mafeking in 1899/1900 when things were not going too well. An elderly man met him and asked him about his unusually depressed appearance. Then the man took the leather thong that he had been wearing from around his neck and placed it in B-P's hand. 'Wear this,' he said. 'My mother gave it to me for luck. Now it will bring you luck.' So from these two souvenirs of his military career in Africa, the leather thong from an old man at Mafeking and from Dinizulu's necklace, B-P fashioned what is now known all over the world as the Wood Badge.

## THE GILWELL SCARF

William de Bois Maclaren, a Scottish businessman and the District Commissioner for Rossneath, Dunbartonshire, paid £7,000 in 1919 to buy Gilwell Park, a 55-acre estate on the edge of Epping Forest, London, as a training centre for Scouters and as a camp site for Scouts. He also paid another £3,000 to help put the White House into good repair, as the place had been abandoned for the previous 14 years and was virtually derelict. When Gilwell Park was officially opened on 26th July 1919 Mrs Maclaren cut ribbons in Scout colours (green and yellow) that were hung across the doorway to the White House to mark the opening. B-P then presented Maclaren with the Silver Wolf as a sign of the great debt that the Movement owed to him.

Not much more is known about Maclaren, apart from the fact that he wrote several books including *Climbs and Changes*, *Chuckles from a Cheery Corner*, *The Rubber Tree Book* and *Word Pictures of War* (a book of poetry based on experiences of the First World War). He died in 1921. In his honour the Gilwell staff wore a scarf made of Maclaren tartan. However to reduce the expense a scarf of dove grey cloth

(the colour of humility) with a warm red lining (to signify warmth of feeling) was substituted with a patch of Maclaren tartan on the point of the scarf and worn by those passing the Gilwell practical course. In 1924 use of the scarf became restricted to Wood Badge holders only. Today the scarf is more the earth tone colour beige than grey but the reason and the date of this development has not been found.

### **THE GILWELL WOGGLE**

For full details about the history of the woggle see the Archives Information Sheet *The origins of the woggle*. The woggle was first created in the early 1920s by Bill Shankley, a member of the Gilwell staff. He produced a two-strand Turk's head slide which was adopted as the official woggle. In 1943, John Thurman, the Camp Chief, wanted some form of recognition of the completion of each stage of the Leader Training programme and it seemed logical to present some part of the Wood Badge insignia on the completion of what was then called Basic Training. So from 1943 until 1989 the Gilwell woggle was awarded on the completion of Basic Training and the Gilwell scarf and the Wood Badge beads on the completion of Advanced Training. The Gilwell woggle can still be bought by adults today for use with either the Group or the Gilwell scarf.

**Archives Department  
The Scout Association  
July 1999**