

## **ROEWEN DISTRICT SCOUT CAMP SITE. (Nr Rowen, Conwy).**

### **(Extracts from the Camp Log Book kept by Norman Tucker)**

"The Foxgloves, things of beauty did but conceal a veritably jungle of matted brambles, briars and nettles among which were concealed treacherous holes, huge stones and rotting stumps. The site, thus overgrown, looked small and we doubted whether we would ever be able to erect more than five or six tents at the most. The site had been an orchard and a dozen decaying fruit trees were asking to be cut down. The surrounding trees were matted with ivy and their low hanging bows cast an almost funereal gloom over the place, all but briefly shutting out the glorious views which were visible as we climbed higher up the hillside."

This is the description in the Rowen Camp Site Log Book as written in the summer of 1931 by Norman R.F. Tucker, a leader in Colwyn Bay and one of the first ever boy scouts, having been in the Colwyn Bay YMCA Baden Powell Boy Scout Troop in 1908. It had been at the suggestion of L.V. Turner of Rydal School Scout Group who had first suggested that Dr. W.H. Tattersall of Glyn Isa, Rowen might be able to help the scouts find a camp site. Dr. Tattersall was the main doctor of medicine for the town of Conwy with a surgery at Bodreinallt in Conwy. Dr. Tattersall offered the land free of charge as long as the property remained his. He declined the thanks of the scout leaders saying, "it was they, the leaders, that deserved the thanks for giving up so much of their time to help boys become good citizens." Dr. Tattersall eventually gifted the site to Conwy District Scouts and in 1980 he confirmed this gift and the site ownership was vested in Trust with the Scout Association.

Following a very quick and an initial tidying up of the site, the first scouts to use the camp were from the 1<sup>st</sup> Conway Scout Troop under the leadership of C.Driver. Improvement work continued to be carried out to the site over the next three years by the Border Scouts who did all the clearing and erected the first major building on the site together with various fire and washing shelters.

**Border Scouts. 1930 - 1939.** A semi-official body of "Commissioners, Scouters, Cubmasters and Rover Scouts" from both counties with districts that connected with the Conwy Valley. The members banded together for fellowship and advancement of scouting. Members of the Border Scouts appear to have been the core group that helped acquire and develop the Roewen camp site for use by scouts and be instrumental for the site becoming a recognised Adult Leader Training Centre (Wood Badge Courses) At the time of the first course there in 1932, the Roewen site was the only recognised training centre in North and Mid Wales

In view of its intended use as a training ground for adult leaders, the site was visited by many senior people within the scout movement at the time. On August 16<sup>th</sup> 1931 the Chief Commissioner for Wales - Lord Swansea - who expressed his satisfaction with the location, immediately offered to lend and send a stump extractor in order to make the site clearance work easier. Greetings were received from J. Wilson, (Camp Chief) and W. Reynolds (Deputy Camp Chief) of Gilwell Park. Other notables were H.A. Grey (Deputy Camp Chief for Wales, Mr. W.N. Tipping (County Commissioner for North Caernarfonshire), W.H. Yates (Assistant Commissioner for North Wales), A.J. Costain, (North Wales County Commissioner for West Denbighshire).

Between the 29<sup>th</sup> August and the 30<sup>th</sup> September the site at Rowen saw its first nationally recognised leader training course for Cub Scout Leaders, course no. 86, and the course certificate was signed by Baden Powell. In April 1932 a camp team was organised with Camp Chief, Site Supervisor, Quartermaster and Storekeeper. On April 29<sup>th</sup> 1933, the site received its official opening by J.S. Wilson, Camp Chief of Gilwell Park.

The first Cub Scout Leader's Course to be held at Rowen commenced on the 20<sup>th</sup> May 1932 with 23 candidates attending. The first Scout Leader's Course commenced on the 26<sup>th</sup> June 1933 with 7 candidates from North, Mid and South Wales. By spring 1934 the long house was finally finished with the completion of the lockers and cupboard doors.

A second scout course commenced on the 2<sup>nd</sup> July 1934 and was attended by 12 candidates and visited by Lord Trevelin (the new Commissioner for Wales), H. Francis Clarke (Scout Headquarters Travelling Commissioner) and R. Graham Thompson (Deputy Camp Chief, Nottinghamshire). Each year, until the outbreak of war, courses continue to be run and the principal of annual reunions commenced with 23 attending the first one in September 1934. In 1935 the staff team made a portable flag-staff for use at the training camp but it was also used at the International Rover Moot in Sweden in 1935 and every subsequent Rover Moot and World Jamboree until the mid 1950's.

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The site continued to be used by many scout groups from the area and the final training course reunion before the outbreak of war gives a list of many leaders attending having travelled to Rowen for their training from all parts of Wales, all parts of England and from the north and south of Ireland. Shortly after the war it was decided to have a more central training site in Llanellian Road in Old Colwyn and the buildings at Rowen were dismantled and put into storage, ready for use at the new site. Sadly, by the time they came to be erected, many had suffered from the storage and were damaged beyond repair.

At some time in the late 1950s or early 1960s a new sectional concrete building was erected and remains in use today. In 1980 a toilet block and septic tank were installed and use of the site was extended to other youth organisations with similar objectives to those of the scout movement.

In 1991 the son of Mr. Tucker, the First Camp Chief, presented a photocopy of the Log Book. This is now in the Gwynedd Archives in Caernarfon and copies have been made for the Conwy County Scout Archive project. Mr. Tucker's letter contains some fond memories of the site from his boyhood and many past and present members of the movement interviewed for the Archive Project echo these.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the site was celebrated with improvements carried out enabling it to be available throughout the year. On the 30<sup>th</sup> July 2006 a gathering of past and present users of the site, together with supporters, acknowledged the anniversary. The two main guests were Mr. John Tucker, the son of Mr. Norman Tucker, the founder and Lord Roberts of Conwy, a near neighbour and President of the Appeal Fund. There was a tree planting ceremony and the unveiling of a commemorative plaque together with the presentation by Mr. Tucker of a letter from Lord Baden Powell and dated November 1931 complimenting the staff team on their work at the site



75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Tree Planting 31/7/06.  
Left to right...R.Castle, Lord Roberts, B.Gregson, G.Reeves, J.Tucker.



The Anniversary Cake

Outline details from part of camp website Jan 2007

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## **Conwy District Scout Camp Site - Rowen (Gwersyll Parc Mawr)**

*O.S. Sheet Outdoor Leisure 17 "Snowdonia and the Conwy Valley." Grid. Ref. 758  
735*

75 years after the site was acquired in 1931, the camp site remains a favourite choice of those who have discovered its charm and convenience. Nestled against Wales's smallest mountain – Tal-y-Fan at 2001 foot high and neighbouring an area of ancient woodland owned by the Woodland Trust which is accessible to users of the site.

Situated 4 miles from the historic town of Conwy in the beautiful Conwy Valley, the site has much to offer including a good level of privacy.

The grounds cover some two acres with camping sites for at least four patrols. There is a prefabricated concrete building that provides basic indoor facilities, a 6 x 6 metre room with tables and chairs, a kitchen area, a small single leader's / sickbay bedroom and a two unit toilet block. We are in the process of installing generated electric lighting and our own drinking water purification system (which will save a trip to our neighbour's outside tap).

Within five miles of the site there are rivers, lakes, the seashore, hills, mountains and valleys, all very good for hiking, backpacking, cycling and water-sports. Still within the five miles there are castles and other historic buildings, a Butterfly Jungle, supermarkets, multi-screen cinema and a railway station. Between eight and ten miles there is ten pin bowling, sports and leisure centres, three public swimming pools and the Welsh Mountain Zoo. Slightly further away lies the whole of Snowdonia, climbing, rafting, narrow gauge and steam railways, museums, and even access to day trips to Dublin.

Other recent users have included Guides, D of E. participants, Schools and Mountain Rescue.

The cost of booking the whole site is just £15. per group per night.

Further details can be obtained from Mr. J.Barlow – 014992 585238

Other contact numbers are Mr. R.Castle, 01492 592875, Mr. B. Gregson, 01492 660911