

PATROL CORNERS AND DENS

THE PATROL BOOKS... N°16

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(from a Danish Scout Magazine)

A Patrol in its Den.

CHAPTER ONE

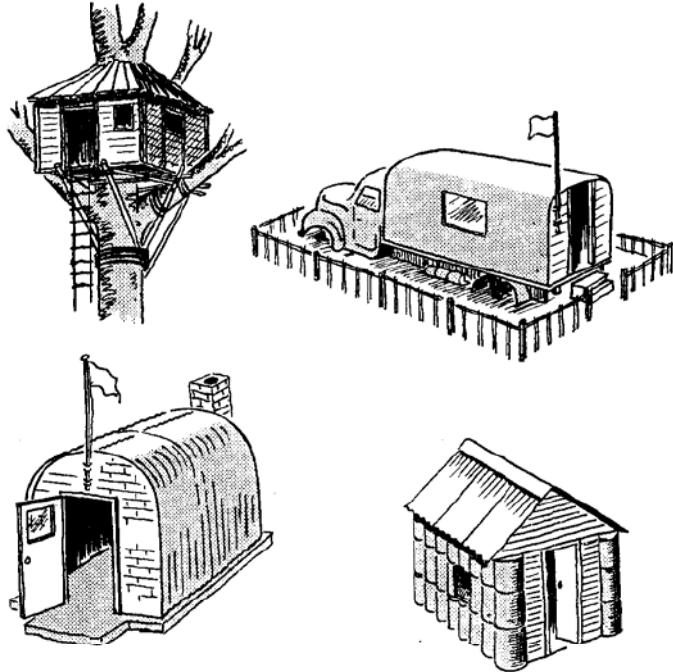
WHERE THERE'S A WILL

Many years ago when I was about fifteen years old and at a school in Ulster I had a particular pal who was a Patrol Leader in the town's one and only Scout Troop. At that time I was a proud member of a rival Youth Organisation and had only a mild interest in my friend's Scouting activities. He was a really keen type and he often amused me with some of the stunts he got up to. As each fresh idea blossomed forth from his fertile noddle he'd murmur something about having to keep his Peewits on their toes.

One day as we wended our way across the common behind the school he suggested that I went with him to a piece of waste ground on the edge of the town where he had something to show me. With my thoughts on a load of tricky prep looming up for the evening and thinking that perhaps he had merely discovered a rare species of grass (he was crazy on botany) I answered "Some other time". Guessing my thought he said it was something special, adding that the rest of his Patrol would be "on the job" down there for the rest of the evening and as he knew I was keen on carpentry I might like to wield a hammer for a half an hour. Somewhat intrigued I fell for his sales talk and off we went.

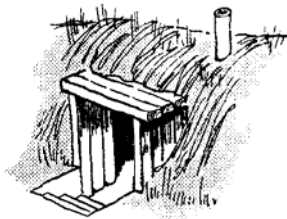
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The plot of land we headed for had once held a very old house. It had been pulled down long since and chunks of brickwork and odd scraps of timber were strewn about what had originally been a fairly large garden. The kids of the neighbourhood had got hold of the story that the house was once haunted. Although the place was now flat to the ground the cellar still existed and they were convinced that the ghost, not to be deprived of its hideout, had retired to all that remained of its old abode. It was, therefore, not surprising that the bolder fellows of the neighbourhood would visit the place round about dusk to satisfy their curiosity. Nothing was ever seen or heard and so partly to render the cellar untenable even for a spook and partly for something to do they hurled everything movable through the door at the bottom of the stone steps leading below ground until the old basement was chock-a-block with rubbish. The task completed nobody had any further interest in the place.



Except my pal Laxie.

As we swung off the lane running past the site there was nobody to be seen. Cupping his mouth with his hands Laxie let out a shrill “Pee-ee-WIT!” and a second or two later a gingery head emerged from the top of the cellar steps and an answering call came over the vacant plot.



A few Den ideas.

Crossing the open space I took particular notice of its tidy state. It no longer looked like the rubbish dump it once was. Piles of timber and old bricks that once littered the place were now stacked neatly behind the cellar and all discarded motor tyres, rusty tin cans, baths and broken crockery had been buried beneath the soil. A cinder “forecourt” had been laid out in front of the cellar steps down which we went following closely on the heels of Ginger who led the way. He threw open a door made from the wood of packing cases and exclaimed “Welcome to Peewits’ Parlour, stranger!”

I could scarcely believe this was once a brick-filled hole in the ground. The walls had been distempered a light colour with a frieze made up of peewit silhouettes around the four sides. A number of brackets made from split logs had been let into the brickwork each bearing lighted candles which filled the place with a warm, friendly glow. Over by the far wall opposite the doorway was a fireplace made of old bricks running right up to

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the ceiling, and set in a semi-circle in front of the hearth were a number of stout logs set on end. Five of them were occupied by chaps wearing the Scout badge in their coats. All were busily engaged in making a rag mat.

“It’s nowhere near finished yet,” said Laxie, “but what do you think of it so far?”

The adjective “smashing” had not up to then been introduced into the list of boyhood superlatives, but my reply left them in no doubt as to what I thought of their excellent transformation efforts.

“All our own work,” said Ginger, “except the fireplace. Laxie’s Dad did that for us.”

“Yes, Laxie takes after his Old Man, don’t you, chum? Just take a look at the table! Laxie’s handiwork,” added another of the company pointing to a solid-looking job made from parts of a discarded bedstead and lengths of old roof timbers. “A bit on the heavy side but it can be pushed around on its castors.”

Over cups of hot Oxo the gang chatted on about the plans they had for completing the snugery. Suddenly remembering the homework ahead of me and murmuring a word of thanks I took my leave of them.

“Come again!” said Laxie as he showed me to the door. I assured him I would.

But I never had the chance. I arrived home to find my father had decided to return to England.

But that visit to the Peewits’ Den set me thinking. Two weeks later the family was installed in a new home in Surrey. I didn’t renew my acquaintance with the Boys’ Brigade.

Laxie and his pals had done the trick. I joined the Scouts.

CHAPTER TWO

PATROL CORNERS

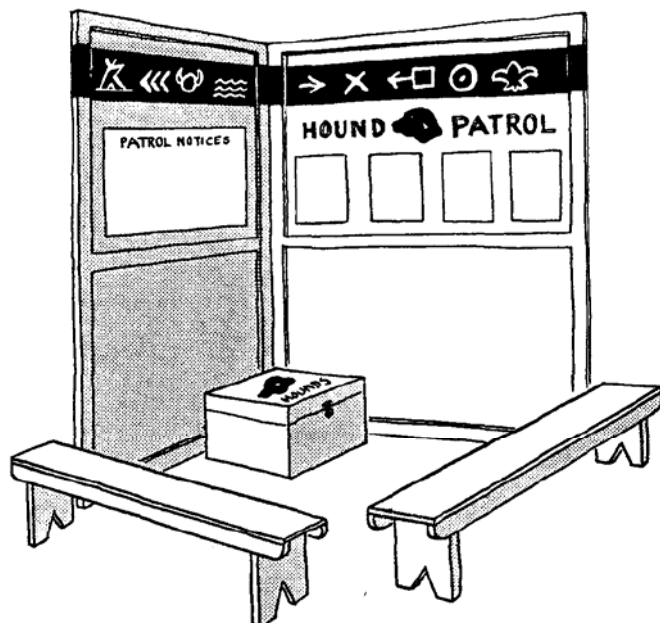
Portable Corners.

The first Troop I joined on becoming a Scout happened to be attached to a church – a Sponsored Troop as you would call it nowadays – and it held its meetings in the parish hail. As parish halls go it was considered a very good one. The only trouble was it always looked what it was – a place where every other society or club belonging to the church held its meetings. Try as we may we could never escape the feeling that the place was “ours” for but two brief hours a week – two and a half hours when the caretaker was engaged elsewhere!

It's such a long time ago now that I cannot remember why it was we never had “Corners” for each of the six Patrols. It may have been because the church authorities would not allow it or maybe it was that the Court of Honour hadn't thought enough about the subject. Being a newcomer to the Troop I didn't say anything at the time but I was certainly conscious that the “gang spirit” I had read about in Scouting for Boys and had seen at Laxie's place in Ulster was almost completely lacking at Troop meetings. I couldn't help feeling that what was needed were places either inside the parish hail or out of it that the Patrols could call their own, some small spot the Scouts could jointly maintain and take a pride in. There's no denying that the possession of a Patrol Corner, if not a Den, is a tremendous help in developing the Patrol or “gang” spirit.

It is a fact that nearly half the Troops, or rather Groups, in this country are sponsored in some way or other and that the greater majority of these have to make do with the type of occasional meeting place such as the one I have just mentioned. It may, therefore, be a good idea to kick off at this point and explore the possibilities of creating a Scouting atmosphere in even the most austere surroundings.

It is obvious that unless you are extremely lucky you will not be allowed to rig up anything of a permanent nature in a Parish Hall. Nor is it desirable that you should for you wouldn't want other people interfering with or prying into



A Patrol Corner, folding screen type.

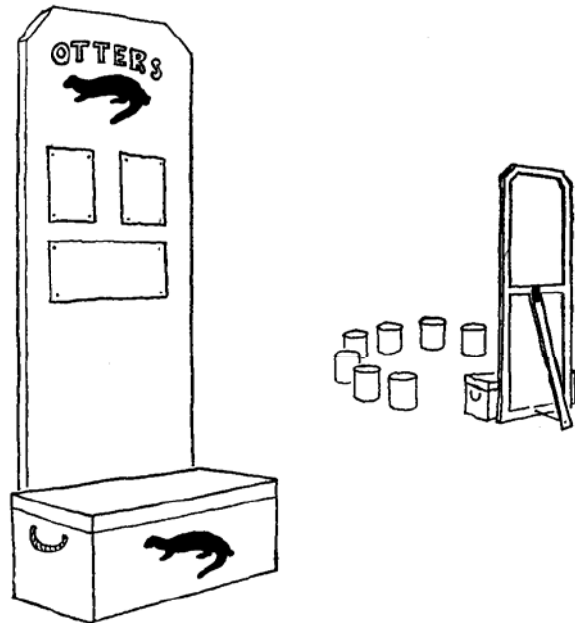
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matters strictly the concern of your Patrol. Moreover, what you and your blokes think is a thing of beauty might well offend the eyes of the uninitiated.

The answer here is to have Corners of a portable nature, either to stand on the floor or hang on the wall, which can be removed and stored away when your meetings are over. To facilitate packing into a small space it would be a good plan for each of the portable units to be of a standard size and shape. But here the uniformity should end. Each Patrol should be allowed to develop its Corner to the likes and desires of its own members.

Now these portable Corners can be as elaborate or as simple as your funds and your talents allow but two rather important points should be borne in mind: (a) they should be of sturdy construction, and (b) avoid anything in the way of projecting pieces which might easily break off when carried from place to place.

The illustrations on pages 7 and 8 show two forms of portable Corners that can be made quite simply and at little cost. The wooden framework in each case may be filled in with three-ply or stout cardboard, but I have found the former to be rather expensive and the latter insufficiently strong. By far the best material for the purpose is what is known as hardboard. It is really tough and will stand up to hard knocks but is easy enough to cut and has a good polished surface on one side with a textured surface on the reverse with which to obtain some interesting effects. As prices go nowadays hardboard is not expensive and it is easier than plywood to come by in large sheets. You would be ill-



A "Corner" for use in a confined space.

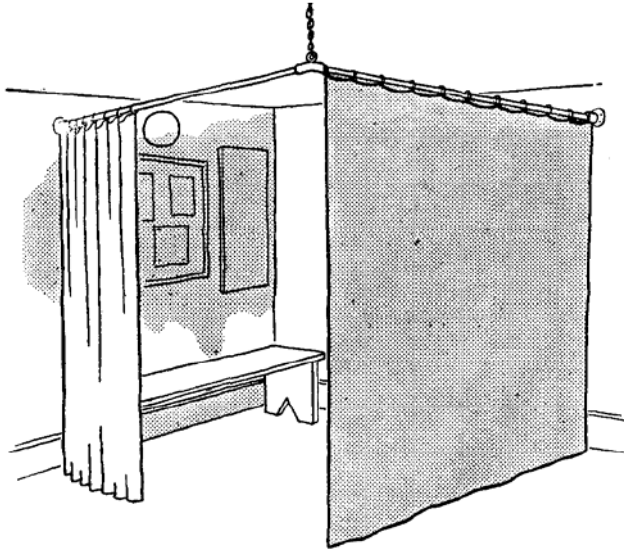
advised to go in for a softer composition board such as is used for insulation. It is much too pliable for the purpose of portable screens but it can be very useful for notice boards.

There is no reason why even the barest of church halls or school rooms cannot be transformed into interesting meeting places with the aid of well constructed portable Corners. In a matter of a couple of minutes the whole place can take on a Scouting atmosphere where even the faint traces of disinfectant left over from the afternoon's "Children's Welfare Centre" can be rendered less apparent.

Permanent Corners.

If you belong to a Troop with its own headquarters there is absolutely no reason why each Patrol should not have its own permanently established Corner. And it doesn't

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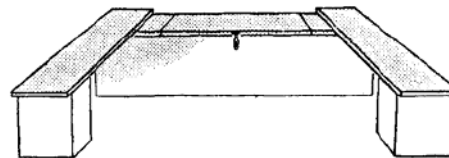
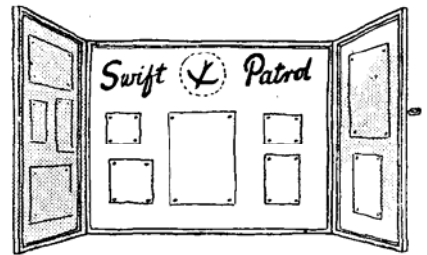
A curtained Corner.

disadvantages is that the drapery collects a deuce of a lot of dust. If the Troop is flush with funds then folding screens in place of curtains would be much better.

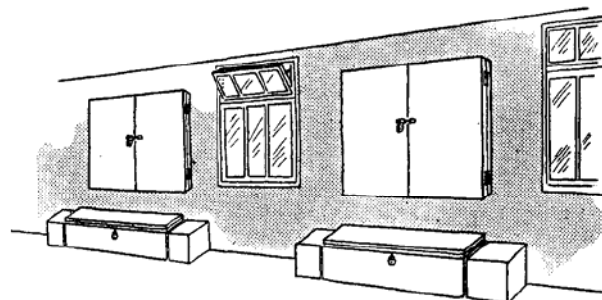
But it may be that you have six or more Patrols. What then? Two answers are given on pages 9 and 10. If the Troop Room is fairly large and can afford to give up the floor space then the shallow cubicle idea is a good one. If, on the other hand, space is limited, then the folding units are more advantageous. All the more so if the Group Committee finds it necessary to let the hall to outside bodies to help pay for the upkeep of the place. Closed up flat against the wall when not in use will prevent other people from prying into your Patrol affairs. It will also serve to keep your charts, photos and knick-knacks free from dust and from becoming dog-eared. It will only take a matter of a few seconds to transform the hail into a really grand Troop Room.

follow that a Corner must be in a corner. Of course, if there are only four Patrols to be catered for and the exits are along the sides of the hail then by all means use the four angles already provided. One of the commonest types of Patrol Corner to be found in a Troop Room with limited space is that illustrated below. The advantage of the curtained type is obvious. When not actually occupied, the curtains can be pushed to one side thus allowing the maximum floor space for games, parades, etc. One of the

Folding wall Corners for halls and Troop Rooms that are hired out for other purposes.



(1). Opened up.



(2). Closed.

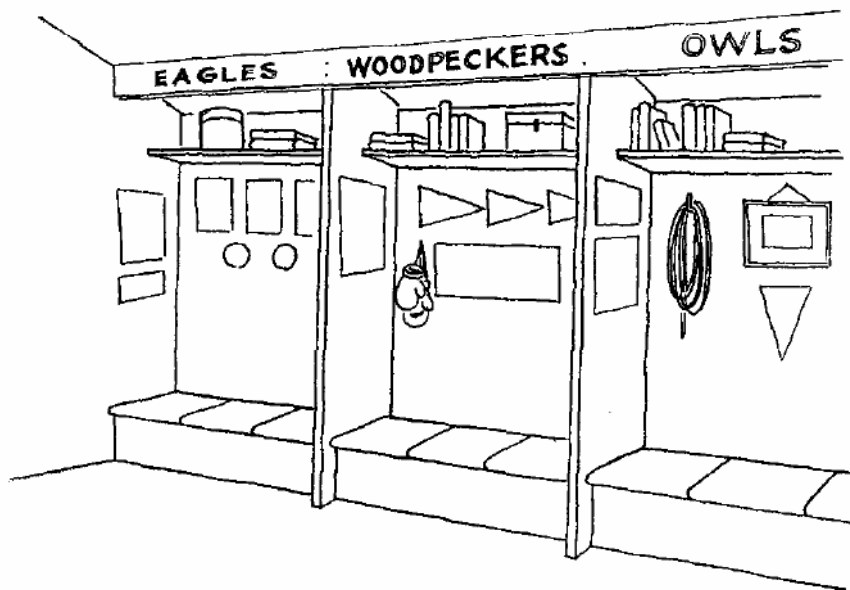
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As with portable Corners I would stress the importance of using sturdy materials in the construction of permanent Corners. If it is to be curtained type don't for goodness sake use thin fabrics. You can't do better than invest in good stout hessian (if you can get it) and it can be dyed in quite attractive shades. With the aid of home-made stencils cut from tin or cardboard you can add woodcraft and other designs either as an all-over pattern or as a frieze.

If you decide on the cubicle idea then the partitioning must be really stout to withstand the knocks and bargings they are bound to receive. So long as the framework is constructed in stout woodwork and well anchored top and bottom, the covering can be of a fairly light but strong material. Again, I would advocate hardboard for the purpose.

Folding units should also be strongly constructed although here the framework need not be made from such heavy material as that used for partitions. Strong hinges are, of course, very important. Nothing would look worse than a series of open flaps hanging drunkenly around the walls of your place.

Whatever form or Corner you adopt, it will be cheaper in the long run to spend a little more on good material at the outset than to pay out for replacements later on.



Permanent Corners of the cubicle type.

CHAPTER THREE

RIGGING THE CORNER

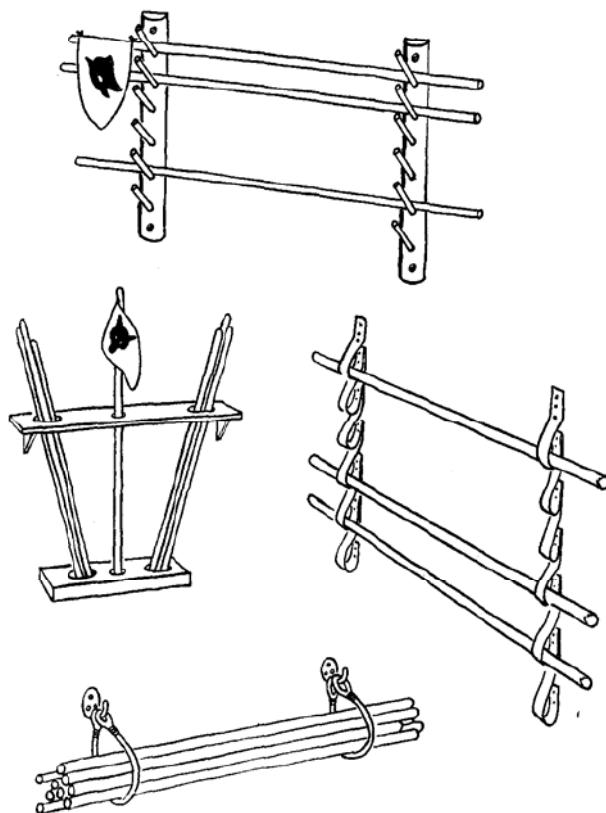
Before you commence operations on your Corner, you should, of course, get the approval of the Scoutmaster. It's very unlikely he will turn you down. He's more likely to give you every encouragement.

You may feel that the wall or walls could do with a fresh coat of paint. Your chaps may decide to decorate them in the Patrol's own colours. Now before you go haring off to buy the necessary material, just stop to visualise what the ultimate effect is going to be. If you're the Doves, Herons or Peewits, then the combination of colours can be quite pleasing and bright. But what if you belong to the Hawks, Black bird or Bears? You would soon get fed up with the appearance of the dark colours of these Patrols in such a mass.

So if your Patrol colours are unsuitable, choose a shade or shades likely to give a cheery feeling, one that you're not going to get tired of, something in lightish green, grey, cream or golden brown would be my choice. Against such a background most Patrol colours could be introduced in the form of a frieze. If it is decided to paint the walls in two shades, one darker than the other, it is better to have the lighter colour above the darker.

A Place for Everything...

Okay. Having settled that point next turn your attention to the fixtures. For instance, you ought to have a rack of some sort to hold the Scout staffs. I've seen some rather ingenious racks, a few of which are illustrated [here]. A shelf is always useful on which to keep items of equipment frequently in use such as a Morse tapper, signalling flags, boxing gloves, first-aid box, books, etc. It's also useful to hold all those trophies won by your Patrol! You will, of course, have a Patrol box. A good strong box with sturdy handles in which to keep bulky pieces of equipment like ropes, blocks, frapping-mallets, axe, etc. It can serve as a seat when shut so see that the lid is substantial.



Staff Racks.

In addition to the Patrol box you

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may care to fix a hanging cupboard in which to keep pencils, notebooks, balls, beanbags, chalks, and those odds and ends which make a place look untidy if left lying about loose. By the way, don't place the shelf or the cupboard out of reach of the smaller blokes. Hat and coat pegs in the corner are not recommended. It is unlikely there will be room for them anyway.

. . . and Everything in Place.

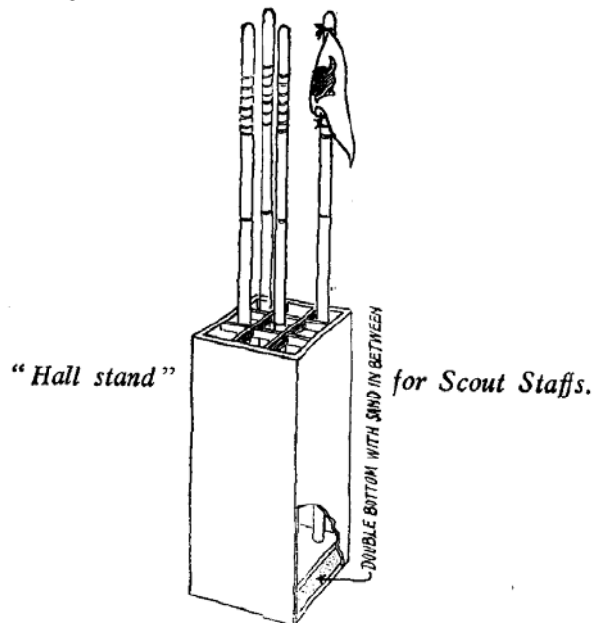
Whatever else you and the other members of the Patrol decide to put up on the walls, I do think the Patrol bird or animal should have pride of place. And I don't necessarily mean its stuffed remains. It infuriates me to see a head of a once proud stag stuck on a hook and allowed to go on collecting moth grubs until the wretched thing is finally relegated to the bonfire. Much better to have a good photograph of your bird or animal nicely mounted and framed or perhaps a cut-out in wood such as is illustrated below.



I daresay most Patrols will want a notice board and a knotting board. Let these be of a decent size or at least adequate for the job. And use rope. Don't let us have tatty bits of string plastered on to a miserable piece of card. Ugh! Instruction charts, too, will doubtless have their place. Why not glue these on to sheets of plywood or hardboard cut to the same size and the surface of the chart covered in cellophane or a coat of clean varnish?

Nothing looks worse than to see dog-eared charts with layers of dust in the curls. If you have collected pennants from I.H.Q. camp sites, don't have them scattered all over the place and at odd angles. The Patrol's progress chart, whatever form it takes, ought to be in a position where it can be easily inspected by even the shortest fellow.

A well laid-out Corner is just as easy to have as an untidy one. Give a little thought to the subject before you start and not just add items haphazardly. And don't stick things up just for the sake of filling space. The sketches on page 13 will serve to compare two Corners both containing the same items but laid out differently.

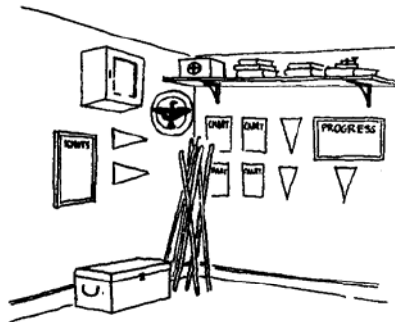


CHAPTER FOUR

WHAT MAKES A DEN?

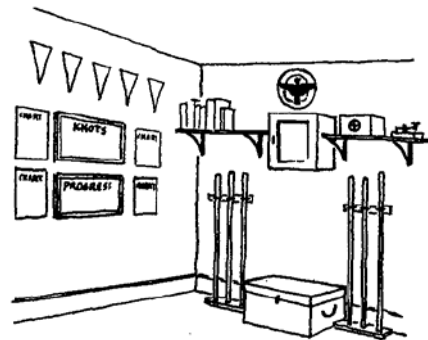
Years ago it was regarded as quite a normal thing for Patrols to have their own Dens. In fact any Patrol without a Den of its own was considered very small fry. Nowadays it seems to be an exception rather than the rule for Patrols to possess these cosy little hideouts, but where they do exist there you find Patrols really working as Patrols and not just bunches of chaps lined up in Patrol formations for the duration of the weekly Troop meeting.

Before I get down to the question of the Dens themselves let's see why we should have them at all. To lots of you, the keen types particularly, the reasons are pretty obvious. For the benefit of the uninitiated I'll just mention a few of the more important reasons. Well, firstly, it's a place where the chaps in the Patrol can meet at any time. Now I know that a lot of you already have meeting-places – Mum's back room, for instance. Nice and comfy as it is, it is rather a poor substitute for the real thing. Besides, it's only natural you can't do what you like in it. And in any case, what about Mum? Like most of them she's pretty long-suffering and will put up with all kinds of inconveniences. But is it fair on her to have a chattering mob in the next room drowning the Light Programme? Moreover, you cannot impose on her good nature too frequently. There is, of course, the Patrol Corner in the Troop room, but again that's not sufficient even if the Group is lucky enough to have its own headquarters. And even if you don't have to share it with one of the Sixes of the Cub Pack you are still not the complete owners. It is still part of the Group property and not entirely YOURS.



This is one way to rig up a Corner.

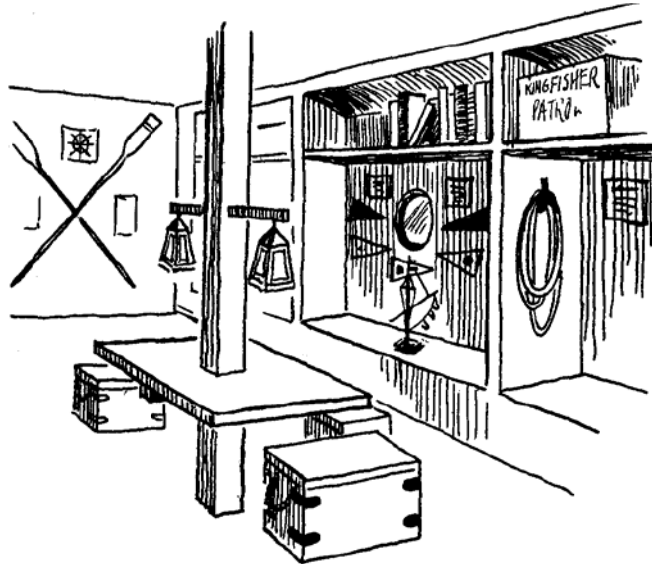
But this is a tidier way don't you think?



An exercise in layout.

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As I have already said the Den is where you can go to at any time – the whole day if you want to – where you can experiment in all kinds of Scouting without interruption and without other people looking on or interfering. It's the place where you can store your Patrol gear – tents, axes, rope, cooking pot, etc., bought out of your own Patrol funds. And if the axe edges get chipped or the billies become rusty you know it's the Patrol's own fault entirely and can't be blamed on those tykes in the Bulldogs who used them last week-end. Furthermore, your Den is where you plan your camps, hikes and expeditions, where you discuss Patrol problems, practise badge tests and the hundred and one other things that a good Patrol does automatically.

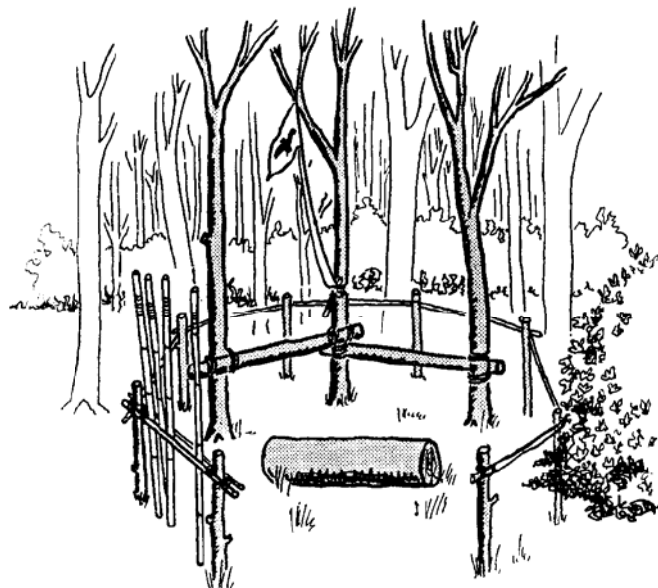


A Sea Scouts' Den.

Again, it is a place you can decorate and furnish to your own liking. Every member of the Patrol can have a hand in the job and you can go on improving as and when funds permit. No matter how cheerless it may be to start with you'll all get an endless kick out of rigging it up – the table, seats, lockers, the lighting, the fireplace and what you will. Be it ever so humble, there's no place like your own Patrol's home.

“Okay,” you say, “we must have a Den. But where can we find a suitable place?”

First of all, let's get this clear. It doesn't have to be a hut all ready and waiting for you to take possession. And, anyway, why should it be a hut? Why should it not take an unusual form such as I have illustrated on page 5? There are lots of places to be had for the asking if only you and your pals are prepared to “smell” them out. Many people have garages they don't use. Garages attached to old houses often have a room overhead. Empty store sheds belonging to factories or shops might be the answer. Potting sheds in gardens, derelict air-raid



A Den in the Woods.

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shelters, disused defence posts, stables and outhouses on farms, coal cellars, an upturned boat, workmen's shelters in old quarries, or just a hole in the ground lined with wood or corrugated iron, are just a few ideas to set you thinking. Lucky is the Air Scout Patrol which manages to get hold of an old bomber fuselage!

I once knew a bunch of fellows who obtained permission to use an empty laundry in the grounds of a large country house (they used to have such places in days gone by). And I wish you could have seen the fine way they rigged it up. It doesn't matter two hoots what sort of place it is or how scruffy it looks from the outside. Just think of the endless pleasure you'll get in turning a wreck of a place into something useful.

A Scout is an explorer. So get cracking. Comb your district and make enquiries. I guarantee you'll find something suitable before very long. Don't just be content with your immediate neighbourhood. If necessary look around the outskirts of the town. A little isolation is not a bad thing. In fact there is a great deal to be said for having a Den away from houses.

Village Patrols and those living in areas where a copse or a wood is to be found might think about rigging up an outdoor den such as the one I have illustrated below. Patrols from towns and cities, too, can have a stab at this kind of thing when at Summer Camp.

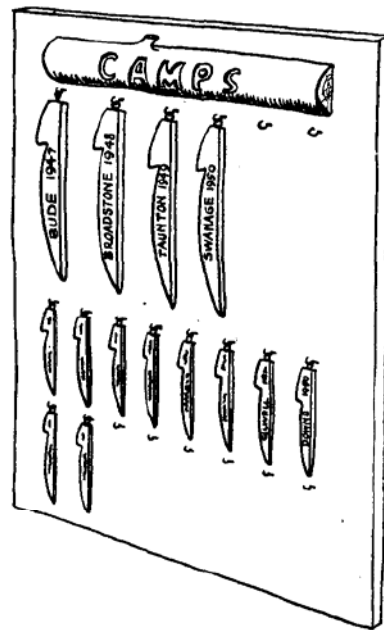
CHAPTER FIVE

FITTING OUT THE DEN

There are many ways of tackling this interesting job. Don't go rushing ahead with the first scheme that comes to mind. Study the structure as a whole and work within its limitations. It stands to reason you cannot fit out, say, the body of a derelict coach in the same manner as you can an attic over a garage.

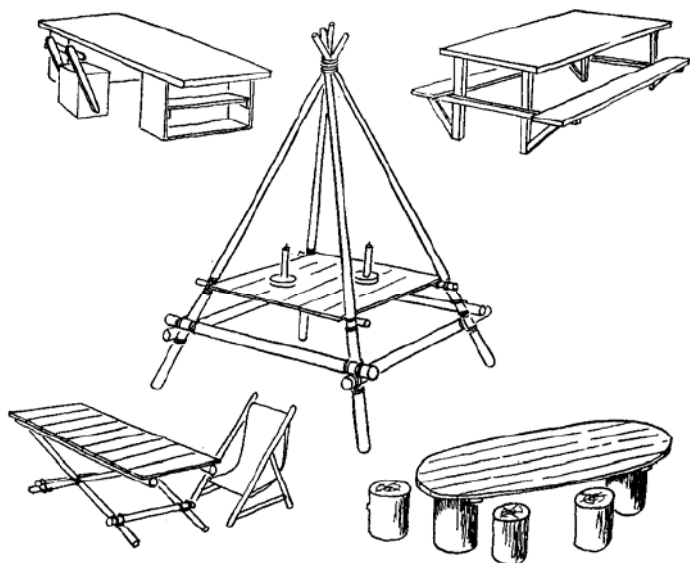
In the final chapter I have referred to the "atmosphere" of a Troop room. What I mean, of course, is the effect the place has on the people using it and on visitors. And what goes for a Troop Room also applies to a Patrol Den. If you want your place to have a real Scout atmosphere or feeling, don't, for instance, go ahead and cram it out with a motley collection of secondhand junk. It's the easiest thing in the world to acquire an old stuffed sofa with broken springs. I would far rather see a transformed orange box for a Den seat than I would all the old

*A Camp Record.
Large pegs for
Summer Camps, the
smaller ones for
Patrol Week-end
Camps.*



Victorian drawing-room chairs that jumble-sales provide. But I don't want to talk about furniture just yet.

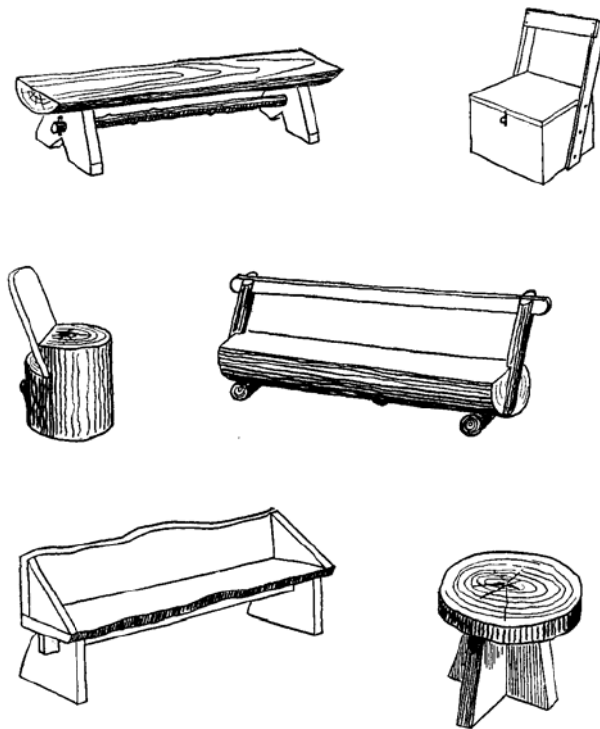
First of all, decide on a theme and see that everything you do or add to the Den conforms to your chosen theme. You might decide on creating a backwood shack – a very suitable style for a Scouts' Den. If yours is a Sea Scout Patrol what could be more fun than rigging your Den in the form of a fo'c'sle complete with lockers, hammock hooks, windows boarded up leaving a round porthole and all the rest of the paraphernalia associated with ships and the sea.



Home-made Den Tables.

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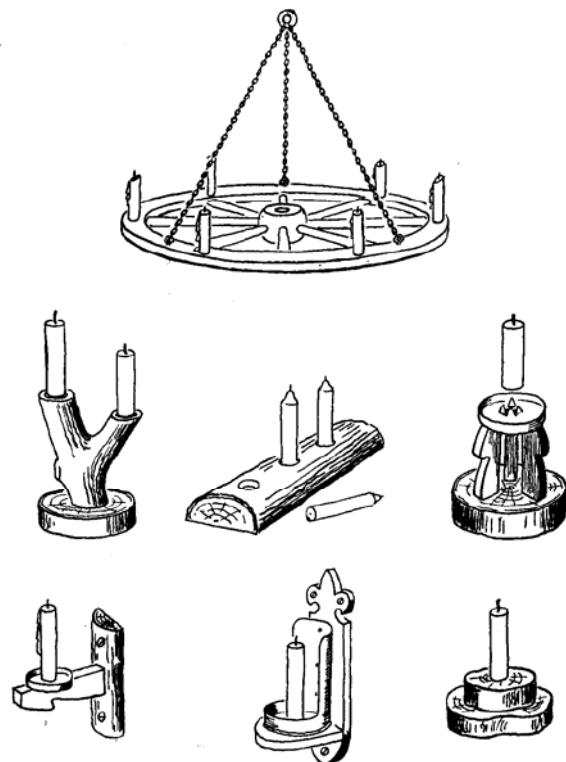
An Air Scout Patrol might try for an "Ops. Room" with plenty of charts, maps, aircraft silhouettes and a good size blackboard liberally decorating the walls. If I was aiming for a Den of this nature I think I would look around for as large a table as space would allow and paint it a dull flat colour. There are lots of stunts to be carried out on a table-top of this sort. For instance, with the aid of chalk you could work out runway systems and airfield layouts on which to place cardboard outlines of aircraft for recognition exercises or a novel form of Kim's Game. Alternatively, Air Scouts might try transforming their place to represent the crew's quarters of an airliner with the portion of the wall under the window fixed up as an "instrument panel", a corner for navigation work and another housing an oscillator set and morse key.



Ideas for Den seats.

As for furniture, try making your own from natural materials or odd boxes and second-hand timber. The sketches above and on page 16 are just a few ideas to set you thinking. If you feel you must make do with ready-made chairs, tables, etc., don't just leave them as they are but try transforming them in some manner, even if it's only painting them in your Patrol colours.

Whatever sort of place you succeed in getting hold of, no matter how humble, with a little ingenuity and lots of fun your newly acquired Den can be made to reflect the personality and spirit of your happy band of brother Scouts.



Den Candle Brackets and Stands.

CHAPTER SIX

LAST WORDS

In the foregoing pages I have tried to show you that the task of setting up a Corner or Den is nothing like so difficult as some of you may have imagined. Whether I have succeeded in any way remains to be seen and I shall keep my eyes open in future to see if some of the denless or cornerless Patrols of my acquaintance have made any attempt at "setting up home".

In a book of this size it is possible only to touch upon the fringe of the subject and to supply just a few ideas. And no one person can have all the answers. There is no end to the variety of places that could be transformed into jolly fine Patrol hideouts or to the ways and means of rigging up an ordinary looking hail or hut to look as though it is used by Scouts and not just a bunch of chaps who have ganged together for a bit of fun to while away an evening or two a week.

Whether we are conscious of it or not, the surroundings in which we find ourselves at any particular moment influence what we do and how we do it. Half the enjoyment of going to the "flicks" is the warm and cheery, if sometimes flashy, atmosphere of the cinema's interior. If the place is a gloomy, cobweb-infested dump with the paint peeling off the walls you probably wouldn't go there a second time even though the films themselves might be good.

Yes, the atmosphere of a Scouts' meeting-place is important and if its surroundings are Scout-like then it is almost a certainty that the Scouting which goes on within its four walls will be the better for it. And remember, the task of making it so is the task of everyone and not just one or two enthusiasts.

Before I come to the final page, there is just one more subject I want to touch upon. And because it is my last word it does not mean it is unimportant. On the contrary. To my mind it is one of the most important things we must always bear in mind. It is the question of cleanliness.

Take the last of the ten Scout Laws. Being clean in thought and word is understood by most chaps. It is the part about being clean in deed that so many fail to fully understand. It is not just a question of keeping your knees clean and brushing your teeth morning and night. It is more than taking a pride in your personal appearance and having a clean shirt and a straight brim to your hat.

In camp the greater majority of us know what is expected of Scouts and behave accordingly. When we go about the streets we all do our best to remember to put litter in the receptacles provided. But all too often many of us forget this question of tidiness and cleanliness when it comes to the place where we hold our meetings especially if the place is our own property.

Patrol Corners And Dens

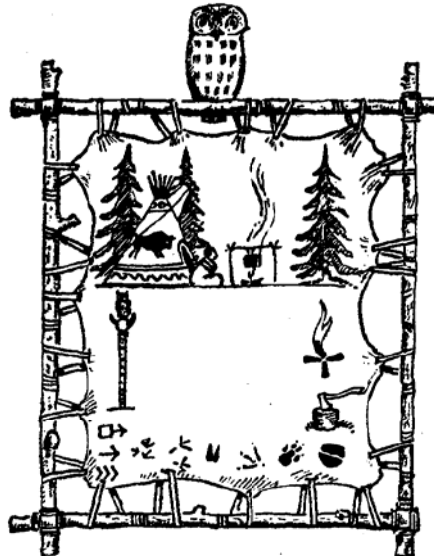
I am sorry to say that many headquarters I have visited are just – well, dumps. Troop and Patrol gear piled up here and there. Bits of rope, broken tent peas and staffs, strewn all over the place. Dust and scraps of paper half hidden in corners and behind the forms. Patrol Corners (where they have surprisingly existed in such scruffy places) have been travesties of the real thing. You've seen them. A Scout Shop instruction chart hanging drunkenly from one drawing pin; a progress chart hopefully started months and months ago but never kept up-to-date; a few tatty-looking knots tied with odd bits of string on an apology for a knotting-board and the whole pathetic collection wearing a frowzy, neglected look. Whenever I have had the misfortune of finding myself in such surroundings I have always half expected to see the motto "WE COULDN'T CARE LESS!" written in large letters across the entrance.

Am I exaggerating? Not a bit of it. I only wish I were!

It is not a scrap of good our putting on a tip-top Group Gang Show or a rip-snorthing display or a smartly turned-out unit at the St. George's Day Parade for the benefit of the general public if our "home base" is something which does not bear inspection. It is just downright dishonesty to say the least.

So look to it, you fellows. If and when you finally furnish your Patrols with Corners and Dens do take a thorough pride in them. If you are not prepared to keep them up to one-hundred-per-cent scratch then it's better to forget the whole thing and join a street-corner gang.

Your aim should always be such that if the Chief Scout himself should drop in on your Troop or Patrol one day without warning (and this is not so unlikely as you think) he will be able to say "THESE fellows are not louts. They are SCOUTS"



A notice-board made of hide or canvas and decorated with designs drawn in Indian ink.