

Story 11 nettles

During the summer with the long evenings, we took the cubs into Hayhead Locks along the nature trail. The programme altered in detail but, in the main the outcome was always the same, except this Tuesday

The week before we told the cubs what we planned to do. Please bring something to cook or warm up. Beans or bacon or flour for twists and dampers anything they wanted to pop in a pan. They had done this exercise before and knew what was to transpire.

I thought a paper trail would be a good lead into the area where we wanted to light fires to cook. So the route would be along the edge of the trees and the Flying Field. Find a path into the woods, pass around the end of the canal arm, down the Eastern path to the clearing where we had cooked before.

There was only one course for concern, we had a a cub who demanded extra attention. To resolve this I asked him to join me and be a hare instead of coming with the pack . He jumped the idea, we ran along the edge of the field leaving a trail of torn up rice paper from the cooking cupboard Janet had. Found a way into the Woods leaving one or two back wood signs. It had all been done before The cubs knew what to look for. Along the Eastern Path to where I anticipated we would cook and light fires.

On the low side of this path is a huge bed of nettles. I held Brents, the cub, hand firmly and told to jump with me into the centre of this bed of nettles, they were nearly five feet high, prime stingers. The nettles were thankfully less dense in the middle so we crouched down and waited for the Pack to arrive.

“Have you ever grasped a nettle?” I asked my little friend.

“Like this”, I tightly grasped a couple of nettle stalks, with one hand stripped the leaves off. Holding them above my head I said. “Like that. Do it quickly and firmly so that it doesn’t hurt”.

“No”. I lied. Goading him on a bit he too grasped a nettle stalk and stripped off the leaves into a bunch.

“ It does sting” he howled nursing a hot hand.

“Yes” I explained, “But the idea is not to show it hurts”.

We sat there stoically and waited for the others to arrive, nursing our hot hands.

When the others came into the scene, Brent and I crouched a little lower, we called names for a moment or two but our whereabouts were quickly spotted.

It was a very still warm evening, an elderly couple were walking a little way off.

“You shouldn’t be doing that in here. You’re making too much smoke and it’s dangerous”. It was plain they did not like us.

There was a lot of smoke, green sticks burning behave like that. It is all part of the experience of fire lighting

I went over to them to pacify the encounter. The cubs were under careful guidance, in a moment or two when the fires were better established the smoke would dissipate.

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They were not convinced. Walking off muttering.

The smoke did vanish the pans were coming up to temperature when police siren could be heard in Longwood Lane

Two policemen strolled heavily into our clearing.

“What’s going on here then?”

I quickly stepped over to them and explained that, part of the Cub Scout Training Scheme was to Track. Light a fire and prepare something to eat. They were not impressed. I mentioned that the leaders did this work for no pay. Just to see the boys grow up well mannered and capable.

“There’s been a formal complaint”. Was their answer.

“Oh Dear!”.” We had better pack up then. Clear the site.”

They asked me for my name in formal tones

“We will take the rest of your details in the car. The three of us sat in the car, and I talked of the idea of Scouting, and the Patrol System of training. The policemen acted as though they had never heard of scouts or were they just letting me rattle on. In the end the cubs wanted to know if Griff had been taken to prison. The policemen agreed that the Scout Leaders were doing a wonderful job. They added a touch of realism by taking me along Longwood Lane round the Road system in Sutton Road and back to Killock. To the relief of the boys.

“Just ring through to the Station in future, keep us in the know. The answer will always be YES”.

There is an alternative story

Perhaps it was a few weeks later or so, perhaps the following year, It all grows dim. A Fire Engine was returning from a call. When the driver noticed smoke coming out of Hayhead Locks. This zealous fellow came into the woods to find the cause. There he found a bunch of cubs and dads busy cooking over smoky fires. On offer was; beans; eggs; pancakes; fried bread, all manner of breakfast items. I was busy telling him about programme and training, telling him about badges to be earned. I also asked if he would like to sample. The answer was a joyful YES. He went back to his appliance, clutching a thick sandwich. A happy man.