

Haystack

Ernest Hemingway

Ernest Thompson Seton

SCOUTING'S FIRST SPELLBINDER



BY KEITH MONROE

The boys thought the man from Canada was comical. He bought a small abandoned farm but he wasn't a farmer. He strode around the countryside wearing a suit and vest, with a fedora hat and a big tie looped in a double bow. He even carried a cane.

So the boys scrawled on his fence. He repainted it. They defaced it further. They swiped a pie, set out to cool. Then he mystified them. He came to their one-room school and invited them all to camp on his land for a weekend. He offered food and fun.

Ernest Seton
A red paw print is visible below the signature.

They couldn't help but think it was a trap.

Safety lay in numbers. Not only the 12 boys from school but 30 others came, the roughest and strongest for miles around.

The man began by leading a hike. He walked fast and used a spike on his cane to pick up trash. The boys had to trot to keep up. When they stopped for rest, he did stunts they couldn't, such as one-handed push-ups. But they liked him. He was friendly, and full of interesting talk about animals in the woods.

At dusk he produced an Indian bow and drill, quickly made fire, and cooked a big meal for all. When the boys lay gorged in the firelight he said, "Shall I tell a story?" There was a roar of assent.

He told about Indians, so dramatically that the boys were rapt. They didn't know he was a famed lecturer. In the pause afterward, he asked, "Say, how shall we camp—just tumble around any way, or Indian fashion?"

"Oh, Injun, bet your life," the boys responded. That night in 1898 they formed the first tribe of what became known as Woodcraft Indians.

The man was Ernest Thompson Seton—noted naturalist, best-selling writer about wildlife, artist whose sketches and paintings of animals hung in Paris and London. His experiment with the boys around Cos Cob, Conn., was his first step into youth work. It led along a trail that made him a founder of the Boy Scouts of America.

When he wasn't off on lecture tours, Seton took "his" boys camping. The results excited him. One day in 1902 he burst into the office of his friend Edgar M. Robinson, executive secretary of the Boys' Work Committee of the International YMCA, and took him to lunch at the Waldorf-Astoria to tell him what Indian-style forest life was doing for delinquent boys.

Robinson, who had been a pioneer YMCA camp director, saw genius in Seton's ideas, and urged him to write a Woodcraft Indian handbook. Seton did so, calling it the *Birch Bark Roll*. Later in 1902 the *Ladies' Home Journal* published it—presumably delighting ladies and their sons, for it reappeared yearly with Seton's newest improvements. Woodcraft Indian "tribes" grew up around the country, though there was no national organization.

Robinson wrote of Seton: "One of my earliest impressions of him was his generous spirit. He sold supplies to the boys—bows, arrows, other equipment—but made it a rule to sell at less than they cost him, in order, he said, 'to be free from any suggestion that he was trying to make money out of the movement.'"

Seton's early life had been harder than an

Indian's. Born in 1860, eighth of 10 sons, he was raised on a stump farm near the screech of sawmills in Ontario's woods. When he was 14 the family moved to a poor section of Toronto. There he got into frequent fights about his eyes, which had crossed due to a bad fall. (The problem disappeared as he matured.) He wrote later, "There were several stabbings. I learned the value of a knife, and best method of handling."

He brought up a tomcat which was to be the model of his famous *Story of the Slum Cat*. He caught rats, and watched one kill four captive rattlers before their poison took effect. "My dream and urge was to study wild creatures," he wrote. Nevertheless, the family sent him, at 19, to study art in London on \$25 a month. In spare time he sketched at the zoo.

At 21 he returned, ill and broke. His father handed him an itemized bill for

A compelling figure in buckskins, Seton presided over nightly council fires, telling animal tales or whooping and prancing to demonstrate tribal dances with his shoulder-length hair flying.

\$537.50 spent on him since birth, and said, "I'll charge six percent interest till it's paid." The son took to the woods with two brothers.

Six feet tall and rail-thin, he was shabby and shy and wild. He walked long distances at five miles an hour, shorter distances at six. He saw prairie chickens dance, saw a dog outwit wolves, learned to read tracks and to distinguish hawks by flight patterns. He made a name as a naturalist, sending the first nest and eggs of the Connecticut warbler to the Smithsonian Institution, where they are still exhibited.

After three winters, full of his love and knowledge of the outdoors, he sought his fortune in New York. He found work as an illustrator, sold his first story, *Life of a Prairie Chicken*, and eventually divided his time between Manhattan, his homestead in Manitoba, and a job in New Mexico killing wolves. He wrote 39 books and illustrated them as only he could.

Fame made him boyish and exuberant. New York's police commissioner, Theodore Roosevelt became his friend; Rudyard Kipling credited his stories as the inspiration for his own *Jungle Books*; Mark Twain

joshed him, "You look enough like me to be my son. I wonder if you are." His fun with the boys of Cos Cob set him dreaming of a new career as youth leader.

Mindful of his English ancestry, in 1904 he lectured all over England on "The Red Indian As I Know Him." His theme was that boys should be taught Indian ways. Four schools founded camps on Seton's plan.

In 1906, to pave the way for a second tour, Seton sent his *Birch Bark Roll* to Englishmen working with boys. One copy reached General Robert S. S. Baden-Powell, who had commanded the stirring defense of Mafeking during the Boer War, and came home in 1903 to find himself England's most celebrated hero since Wellington—as well as a best-selling author. *Aids to Scouting*, a slender manual B-P has written for army officers, told of games and stunts to teach city-bred soldiers how to stalk enemies and keep themselves safe in the wilds. Unexpectedly it captivated England's boys. A juvenile magazine serialized it under the alluring title of "The Boy Scouts." This new phrase, apparently coined by an editor, struck fire. The Boys' Brigade (an organization of 50,000 Sunday school pupils) and the YMCA practiced "scouting" in fields, and begged Baden-Powell to enlarge his manual.

He was intrigued by Seton's handbook, and sent him a note:

It may interest you to know that I had been drawing up a scheme for the education of boys as Scouts—which curiously runs much on the lines of yours. So I need scarcely say your work has a very special interest for me.

Baden-Powell visited Seton at the Savoy Hotel. The two were similar in many ways: lively public speakers, skilled outdoorsmen, popular writers who illustrated their own works. Next day the general sent the naturalist a genial note: "If we can work together in the same direction, I should be very glad indeed."

The pair corresponded. In 1908 B-P wrote Seton, "We are going on with my scheme like your Woodcraft Indians." Seton interpreted this as a deep bow to him. Not unnaturally, he began to consider himself America's foremost authority on Boy Scouts.

Outdoorsiness was much in the American mind, and numerous "Scout" organizations were wooing boys. There were Leather Stocking Scouts around Cleveland; Peace Scouts in California and elsewhere; the National Scouts of America with headquarters in a military school; the Jack Crawford Scouts, led by Captain Jack himself, who had been chief of scouts in Army campaigns against (continued on page 70)



Upstream fight is what it sometimes takes at Sommers base, Minnesota (1). Lucky canoeists at Maine (2) get a boost from the wind. Inevitably, at Northern Wisconsin (3), you must portage your gear. Seasick? Get a horse at Philmont Ranch (4), New Mexico.

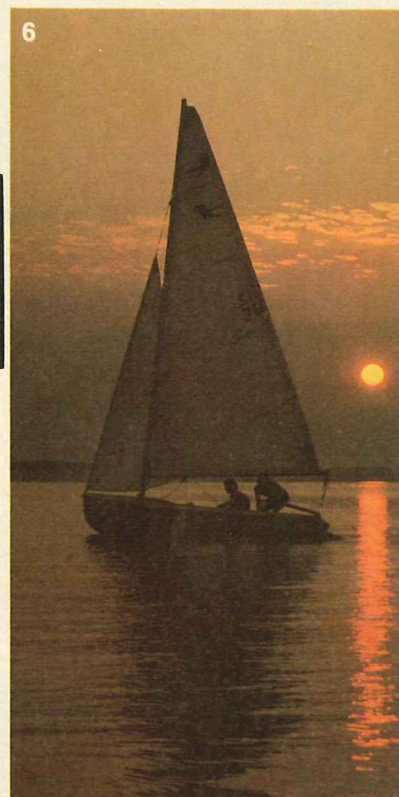
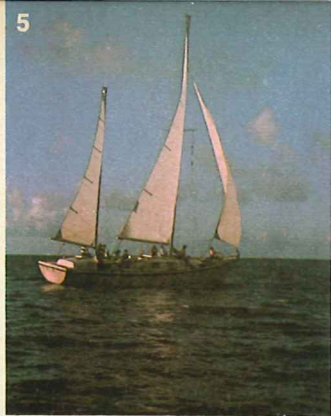
Picture stiff canvas sails whipping in Gulf Stream winds off Florida, a gang of bronzed teenagers manhandling the sailing vessel's wheel, tying down the sheets, getting drenched with salt spray. Switch to the foothills of the Rockies. Hear the booted feet of Explorers from their flatland hometowns padding along the mountain trails. At the end of a muscle-and-mind-stretching day, all the kids want to do is flop atop a sleeping bag and gaze at the multitude of distant stars, seeing them only as one can in the smog-free West.

When it comes to man-size excitement and the fulfillment of meeting Nature head-on, overcoming its obstacles and pushing on afresh, the BSA's six high-adventure bases can't be equalled or surpassed.

Take Philmont Scout Ranch and Explorer Base—and 15,000 boys and girls 14 years old and up do just that in a normal summer's operation. It's one of the oldest of the bases with its beginnings in the late

30's. The ranch serves up every kind of land-roving experience imaginable: archeology, conservation, backpacking in all its dimensions, open fire cooking, pioneering, nature activities, Old West history, mountain stream fishing, horseback riding, burro packing, mountain climbing. A seasoned Philmont ranger accompanies the crew for its first few days on the trail. (Matter of fact, most bases offer full- or part-time guide service.) Then the gang is on its own, ready to freewheel for up to a dozen days, their paths ranging from one to two miles above sea level.

Northern Wisconsin National Canoe Base and Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base offer similar adventures concentrating mostly on canoe touring, fishing, a fascinating, hands-on environmental awareness program, woodland cookery featuring scrumptious hotcakes dotted with fresh blueberries that the bears couldn't sniff out. Lakeland canoeists walk in the ghost shadows of the French voyageurs



REACH HIGH FOR ADVENTURE

who in the 18th century trod and paddled the same routes. Sommers adventurers range from Minnesota into Canada's Manitoban wilds. It takes not only a strong set of shoulders to heft canoes along narrow, tree-enclosed tunnels. It also demands a strong mind to conquer hurdles like how to surmount a two-foot-thick tree fallen across the trail or a fresh Canadian squall that suddenly kicks up paddle-length-high waves.

Maine National High Adventure Gateway with program bases on Grand Lake Matagamon and Seboomook Lake offers campers a terrain similar to the other bases. Yet there are enough differences to entice the most jaded of campers: rubber boat rump bumping down a frothy chute of the headwaters of the Penobscot River; canoe sailing on a broad lake; surveying the great timber industry of the region. For the bravest of the brave, there's a trip down the roaring, legendary Allagash River.

And for still more different, watery

wonderlands, taste a tour on Kentucky Lake or Lake Barkley at the western terminus of Kentucky and Tennessee, the BSA's Land Between-the-Lakes High Adventure Gateway. Here you can canoe or sail or motorboat on an outboard-powered pontoon craft for days. You can bet a whole summer's pay that after a day with rod, reel and lures, your fishing creel will creak with a load of fat bass. There's also a terrific conservation program hosted by the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) on whose land the base lies.

Junior member of the high-adventure corporation is the Florida Gateway to High Adventure where, as you might imagine, the emphasis is getting wet and keeping cool. Forty- and fifty-foot-long sailing vessels take Scout and Explorer crews on trips that sample the offerings of Florida's east coast: scuba and snorkel trips, cruises to the Bahamas, deep-sea fishing, small-boat sailing. For the landlubber, Florida Gateway

(continued on page 68)

The call of the out-of-doors is one most youngsters can't ignore. Possibly the loudest cry emanates from high-adventure bases like Florida Gateway (5) where sailing is man-size. If you'd prefer more moderate breezes, select Land-Between-the-Lakes (6), Tenn.-Ky. border.

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HIGH ADVENTURE (from page 43)

even offers a program of tropical backpacking varied enough for all comers.

For details on how to put in your bid for a place under the BSA high-adventure sun, check the information following this article. It isn't too early to reserve a spot at any one of the bases by first contacting your Scout council service center or writing directly to the address listed for each base.

When you reach for high adventure, the chances are good that if it's on the water or on the land—we haven't offered an aviation program yet, but just wait—you'll find one of the BSA bases with an exciting venture just waiting for you. ■

Florida Gateway to High Adventure, operating out of Miami. For all Explorers and for Scouts 13 years old or older as of Jan. 1, 1978. Write to: Florida Gateway to High Adventure, 7260 S. W. 48th St., Miami, Fla. 33155.

Land-Between-the-Lakes High Adventure Gateway, on the western border of Kentucky and Tennessee. Particularly suited to Explorers of all ages and to Scouts who will be 13 years old or older by Jan. 1, 1978. For information write to: Land-Between-the-Lakes Gateway, 720 Franklin Square, Suite 200A, Michigan City, Ind. 46360.

Maine National High Adventure Gateway. Find this one in the north central part of the state at the eastern end of Lake Umbagog. For all Explorers. Also for Scouts, 13 or older as of Jan. 1, 1978. Get more info from: Maine National High Adventure Gateway, Box 150, Orrington, Maine 04474.

Northern Wisconsin National Canoe Base on White Sands Lake, Boulder Junction, Wis. For all Explorers. For Scouts age 13 or older at the time they attend. Write to: Wisconsin National Canoe Base, 720 Franklin Square, Suite 200A, Michigan City, Ind. 46360.

Philmont Scout Ranch and Explorer Base. Located in the northeastern corner of New Mexico. For Explorers of all ages. For Scouts to attend, they must be at least 14 years old by Sep. 1, 1978. Write to: Philmont Scout Ranch and Explorer Base, Cimarron, N.Mex. 87714.

Charles L. Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base, northeastern Minnesota. Ideal for Explorers, Scouts may attend if they are 13 or older by Jan. 1, 1978. To go to the Manitoba base, they must be 14 or older by Sept. 1, 1978. For further notes, write to: Sommers Wilderness Canoe Base, Box 509, Ely, Minn. 55731.

SPELLBINDER (from page 28)

the Sioux and Apaches. There were the Boy Scouts of the U.S., subsidized by the National Highway Protective Association on the theory that Scouts would stand watch along the roads, reporting speeders. There were the American Boy Scouts, in uniforms given free by Hearst newspapers. Sunday schools started "Boy Scout Clubs."

An oddity in Scouting's history is that another institution (a rival, in some views) chose to nurture it. In 1910 the YMCA was already running 400 boys' camps. Robinson, its leading expert in boys' work, put the organization squarely behind Scouting in a June 1910 bulletin to all local YMCA leaders: "The Boy Scouts will doubtless become the largest boys' organization in America. . . . This national movement is not organically related in any way to the YMCA, but all possible cooperation is being given. Organize [YMCA] troops." And when W. D. Boyce, the Chicago publisher, began to promote Scouting after a Scout guided him through a London fog, Robinson went to Chicago and persuaded him to put up money for the formation of a nationwide Boy Scout organization.

At Robinson's urging, Seton brought his Woodcraft Indians into the Boy Scouts of America, and helped persuade the heads of the National Scouts and the Boy Scouts of the U.S. to join up too. He even asked President Taft to appoint a Secretary of Scouting in the Cabinet.

Meanwhile Robinson arranged a full-scale meeting for "considering the best means of propagating the movement." Fifty men jammed into the oven-hot board room of the YMCA building on 28th Street in New York City one June afternoon in 1910. They represented some 37 benign organizations including the PTA, the Playground Association, the Red Cross, the Young Men's Hebrew Association, Dan Beard's Sons of Daniel Boone, and even the Army Medical Corps. There were Lincoln Steffens and Jacob Riis, famous reformers; George Pratt, spokesman for Rockefeller philanthropies; Ernest K. Coulter, former court clerk who had groped single-handed for ways to help boys hailed into court, and had gone on to organize the Big Brother movement.

A silver-haired bank president, Colin H. Livingstone, was temporary chairman (and would serve 15 years as the new movement's first president). He was a canny Scot who could pick prime movers in any group. He called on Seton to explain the Scouting philosophy and to answer questions.

Seton gave a rousing talk. He was forthwith elected chairman of a 10-man committee to create a national organization.

He combined his own writing and Baden-Powell's into the first *Official Handbook*, which went on sale in July at 25 cents a copy. Its aim, he said in the introduction, was "to combat the system that has turned such a large proportion of our robust, manly, self-reliant boyhood into flat-chested cigarette smokers."

Later that summer, listening to Seton describe his camping methods and ideals, Robinson genially challenged him to prove that they would work with assorted teenagers whom Robinson would collect. Seton agreed. From 20 cities came groups of seven YMCA adolescents, each with a volunteer adult, bringing homemade tepees and equipment for cooking over open fires. They camped Indian-style in loose circles, somewhat to the dismay of visiting British Scouters who expected neat rows of Army-type tents in the Baden-Powell manner.

Seton included as much British Scouting as he saw fit, but gave many hours to Indian woodcraft and lore. He was a compelling figure in buckskins as he presided over nightly council fires, telling animal tales or whooping and prancing to demonstrate tribal dances with his shoulder-length hair flying. The camp, at Silver Bay in New York's Adirondacks, was later marked with a YMCA plaque commemorating "America's first Boy Scout camp."

In September Baden-Powell was to tour Canada as guest of the new Canadian Boy Scout Association. He planned to visit New York for one day. Robinson sent an urgent message inviting him to a banquet in his honor that evening. The Hearst newspapers, still promoting the American Boy Scouts, headlined a Baden-Powell parade for the same afternoon. No one knew which bid Sir Robert would accept.

Emissaries from the BSA and the ABS were at the station when his train arrived. But the general, who often preferred to travel incognito, eluded them and checked in at the Waldorf-Astoria unobserved. The rival groups sought him there, but never suspected that a small bald man in civilian clothes, breakfasting alone in the dining room, was Sir Robert; few photographers had ever caught a shot of him without a hat. Luckily for the BSA, Seton soon arrived, recognized him and whisked him off to meet—without an appointment—former-President Roosevelt. Next Seton took him to a hastily mustered meeting of Scoutmasters at the Waldorf, where he answered questions all afternoon behind guarded doors. Outside, the American Boy Scouts paraded with signs and streamers welcoming him, but he was not on the reviewing stand.

It was a strategic triumph when the BSA

brought forth Baden-Powell that evening before 300 guests. Known worldwide as the embodiment of Scouting, by appearing he put his stamp on the BSA as *the* Scout movement in America. (Soon afterward William Randolph Hearst disavowed the American Boy Scouts.) Seton, chairman for the occasion, gave a warm introduction to the honor guest as "the father of the Boy Scouts." Sir Robert's reply was gracious:

"You have made a mistake, Mr. Seton, in your remarks to the effect that I am the father of this idea of Scouting for boys. I may say that you are the father of it, or that Dan Beard is the father. There are many fathers. I am only one of the uncles, I might say."

Seton was elected Chief Scout of the BSA, and he considered this more than honorary. "He gave time without stint, traveled at his own expense, and did everything a man could do to promote the interests of the movement," Robinson wrote. "For awhile he was the BSA's greatest asset. Gradually it dawned on him that this new movement was not merely an adaptation of his unique Woodcraft Indian program but something different. . . . Jealousy crept in."

Seton publicly scorned "knot-tying in church basements," and implied that Scouting should be a highly selective movement led by great campers. Others—including James E. West, who took charge as Chief Scout Executive in 1911—wanted a mass movement. In 1915 Seton resigned and formed a smaller coast-to-coast movement, the Woodcraft Rangers. There was anger on both sides, but it subsided. He received the BSA's Silver Buffalo award for distinguished service in 1926, when it was first given.

In 1930 Seton built a 30-room house of stone and adobe near Santa Fe, N. Mex. There he welcomed artists and outdoorsmen from many countries. One Russian declared, "I have felt such a thrill only in Tolstoi's house." Seton Castle, as it is still called, became a registered historic landmark.

He died in 1946. His widow Julia gave his collections to the BSA: 3,250 of his drawings and paintings, 7,000 bird and animal skins, hundreds of Indian artifacts, 29,000 books. Visitors now see these at Philmont Scout Ranch near Cimarron, N. Mex., in a \$150,000 Ernest Thompson Seton Memorial Library and Museum.

Time magazine called Seton "a man who loved the natural earth and its creatures with rare intensity and unusual power to communicate. . . . His death was something like the falling of a forest tree."

He still stands tall in Scouting's hall of fame. ■