



From badges to MEDALS

A century of shooting has taken Scouts from their huts to international success. **Neil Hallam** explains how airguns have played such a big part

Scouting is not an obvious route into international shooting, but airguns have been a part of the Scout's balanced program since the movement's beginnings. Robert Baden-Powell learned to shoot while at Charterhouse School, competing in the 1874 Public Schools Rifle Competition. Amazingly, he scored the only bullseye of the competition!

Scouts who choose to shoot can participate at various levels. One of their many activity badges is the 'Master at Arms' badge. This is where all of the serious Scout shooters have started, with most moving on to the more advanced badge for the over-14 Explorer Scouts (see right).

The activity badge program is an area where shooting clubs can both help their local Scouts and attract new members. Experienced club instructors can spark the interest which brings a new star into the sport. This was Chris Lacey's route into shooting. He gained the badge at age 11, then joined Bishops Waltham shooting club. Seven years later, he came fourth at the 2006 Commonwealth Games.

As their skills grow, Scouts can go on to use marksmanship as the skill element for the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which recognises that

marksmanship combines technical knowledge with physical and mental control. With the D-of-E taking three months at Bronze level and 12 months at Gold, Scouts can see a serious improvement in their skills, with the more committed Scouts carrying on to Open competitive shooting.

The Scouts have an active internal program of events, beginning with local and postal competitions, and culminating in October with the national championship at the Surrey home of British shooting, Bisley. From this competition, selections are made for the National Scout Squad, with many then progressing to the GB Junior Squad. Currently, over half of the GB Junior Squad began their association with the sport through Scouting.

Below: Nine out of 10 of the 2009 GB Juniors had come through the Scouts – winning 51 medals at the Schools Championship in South Africa





Cost can be a prohibitive factor in any sport, but with equipment for the precision category costing up to £5,000, it is especially the case for shooting. Even Sporter categories, where simpler equipment is used, can cost over £700. To counter this, most of the events organised by the Scouts provide the air rifles and pistols for the event. This not only levels the playing field, but also greatly reduces cost. The Bisley weekend costs each Scout only around £30, and that covers both their camping and competition.

Scouting brings more than just competitors into the sport – many top coaches and officials are also Scout Leaders. For their last championships at Bisley, the Scouts produced 108 range officers from their leadership, all qualified to NSRA Youth Proficiency Scheme Tutor or higher.

Husband and wife team, Roger and Chrissy Monksummers, are North Devon Scout Leaders. In addition to their Scouting, they are both Great Britain Junior Squad Coaches and train new instructors and coaches. In 2009, the Monksummers led a team of GB Juniors to compete in the South African Schools Championship – with nine of the 10 who competed being Scouts. The squad, which included Danielle Blinco (aged 16) and Hannah

TARGET SHOOTING: SCOUTS

MASTER AT ARMS ACTIVITY BADGE

To gain this badge, Scouts (Under 14) must:

- Attend regular training sessions in a chosen activity (fencing, shooting or archery) and demonstrate an improvement in skill. Training should be for at least five sessions.
- Know the safety rules associated with the activity and demonstrate their use.
- Take part in the chosen activity at an officially supervised contest and discuss performance with the instructor.



PHYSICAL RECREATION ACTIVITY BADGE: MASTER AT ARMS

To gain this badge, Explorer Scouts (14 and over) must:

- Participate in an activity such as fencing, shooting or archery. This should involve regular participation for at least 25 hours and show improvement.
- Demonstrate skills in your chosen activity to a group of young people to encourage them to try the activity.
- Discuss any safety rules or laws of your chosen activity and how to abide by the rules or laws of the activity.
- Take part in at least two competitions or demonstrations and discuss your performance and how to improve with the examiner or instructor.



Davies-Jones (14) of Buxton Explorer Scouts, Michael Bamsey (17) from Kingston Explorers, and Roger and Chrissy's son, Ben (18), won 51 medals.

Another coach who started in Scouting is 20-year old Jess Eden. She began air pistol shooting at 14, gaining the Explorer Scout 'Master at Arms' badge. The following year, she competed at the Bisley championships and joined the National Scout Squad and, by 16, she



Top: Danielle Blinco shooting in precision air rifle discipline

Above: The Connaught shield was first awarded 100 years ago, and is still contested today

Left: Scouts competing in a field target-style event – giving them a taste of target shooting

TARGET SHOOTING: SCOUTS

CHRIS LACEY

Chris Lacey, 22, completed his 'Master at Arms' badge aged 12, with the help of Bishops Waltham shooting club. Watching British record holder, Chris Hector, practising in 2001, the young Lacey told his Dad: "I'm going to beat him one day." And, in 2005, he achieved his goal, beating Hector's 10-metre air rifle record (which he holds to this day). Following the European Championships the same year, Lacey was mentioned in the parliamentary committee on new airgun legislation.

His dedication to the sport took him to Melbourne in 2006, where, while still a junior, he took fourth place at the Commonwealth Games. Chris said that after spending months acclimatising at training camps in South Africa, he was the most homesick he had been in his life. But the reality of his achievement was brought home when he ate breakfast with Kelly Holmes and was interviewed on the BBC.

Chris' Olympic dreams were ended by a motorcycle accident in 2009, but he now coaches the national squad and has made a career in shooting. He is a gunsmith and sales agent for Surrey Guns. He can turn his hand to repairs on a wide range of guns and is the Suis Ascor target operative at major shooting events in the Lord Roberts Centre at Bisley.



was a part of the Olympic Development Squad, training there for two and a half years. Jess decided to concentrate on her education and is now working on her Club Coach (Pistol) qualification as part of a sports studies degree, and coaches the National Scout Squad.

The Scouts emphasises the target aspects of shooting and actively discourages any military or blood sport focus. Targets representing people or animals are banned and camouflage clothing is discouraged. A basic field target-style shoot – using spinners – features in the Scout Championships, as does a hunter field target event (known to Scouts as advanced field target). This is shot using telescopic sights and over a greater distance.

In 1911, HRH the Duke of Connaught presented a shield to the Llanvaes Scout Troop from Brecon, Wales, for winning the first annual Boy Scout Troop rifle competition. One hundred years on, the long tradition of Scouts paving a way into the sport is set to continue, with Scouts still annually competing for the Connaught Shield. Only now, as the likes of Jess Eden and Hannah Davies-Jones are demonstrating, with girls as well as boys vying for the prestigious trophy. ●

Top: Michael Bamley takes on the precision event at the Bisley 2010 championships

Above: Jess Eden coaches Scout Leader Matt Singleton.

Below: Hannah Davies-Jones shooting in the three-position sporter event



HANNAH DAVIES-JONES

Hannah Davies-Jones, 14, of Buxton Explorer Scouts, is one of Scouting's rising stars. She started shooting aged 10 and, just two years later, competed at the National Scout Championship at Bisley, performing well enough to be offered a place on the National Scout Squad.

A strong performance at the 2009 British Airgun Championship led to her selection for the GB Junior Squad. The same year, she travelled

with the squad to Johannesburg for the South African Schools Championship where she won a gold medal for three-position sporter air rifle. Her achievement was made even more impressive as airgun shooting is on the curriculum in South Africa, meaning her competitors had been shooting for much longer. Hannah told me about getting used to the different targets used for the competition, and visiting a village to watch African dancing, but stroking baby lions seemed her highlight of the trip. She hopes to make the squad for next year's competition in Durban.

At the 2010 National Scout Championship, she attained the highest score in three-position sporter over the weekend. Holding one British under-21 record would be an impressive achievement for any 14-year old, but Hannah holds two – in both three-position sporter and standing sporter.

Hannah told me her ambition is to cross over to the precision category and hopefully compete in the next Commonwealth Games.

