

Scouting

Dandenong was blessed with what was probably the finest Scout Hall in Australia.

Scouting in Dandenong was started by Ted Swords, and first met in the Church of Christ hall in Robinson Street. Somehow, Ted, or Eck as he was known to his scouts got to know Miss Ada E Armitage of Como fame, and the Dandenong Scouts were invited to use part of Holm Park, in Beaconsfield, as a camp site, and every Easter weekend the troop made very good use of it.

When Miss Armitage found that the Troop had no Hall of their own for regular meetings, she offered to build one for them.

The Council allowed it to be built on Hemming Park. It was built, but when the Headquarters of Scouts in Victoria heard of this, they refused to accept such a valuable gift. So the committee of Dandenong Scouts decided to raise the funds, and repay Miss Armitage. I think the President of the Committee was Mr Brooks, whose son Bill was to be one of the Troop's Scoutmasters. It was decided to call the Troop "1st Dandenong Armitage Own" and a flash was proudly worn on the shoulder of each scout's uniform from then on.

The Group Scoutmaster received his nickname "Eck" after a handicapped scout I remember as Ray (Rip) Williams had difficulty in pronouncing Ted. The rest of the troop members thought this nickname was appropriate, and it was accepted from then on.

I joined the troop in 1944, and loved every minute of my time there. John McPherson was Scoutmaster. I still remember him teaching us Semaphore and how to dig a camp latrine. I was placed in the Eagle patrol with Brian Hill as my Patrol Leader. As time progressed I became Second with Graeme Stork as Patrol Leader. Eventually I became Patrol Leader of the Kookaburras, with Barry Simon as my Second. And every Easter we went camping to Holm Park. And Lindsay Holt became our Scoutmaster.

In January 1948, the 1st Dandenong Armitage Own troop attended the World Jamboree at Wonga Park. It was the biggest assembly of Scouts I have ever seen.

When we were 14 or 15 years old we moved to the Senior Scouts and found the joys of hiking.

We walked all over the Dandenongs, the Prom and even camped in the snow on Mount Buller.

Probably the first exciting hike was at Wilsons Promontory when the Rovers led us on an overnight walk from Tidal River to Sealers Cove.

Daryl Stuart was the Senior Scout Leader, and I remember Laurie Brown and Leigh (Lou) Matthews among the Rovers.

Because we were younger, the Senior Scouts were told to get into our sleeping bags soon after dark. So we nestled into our bags on a grassy area which was about a metre above the beach. Leigh's sister Heather was an extremely good singer, who always sang at church concerts. She often sang the then popular song "Bluebird of Happiness", so it wasn't all that odd when Leigh told us he was going to sing us a lullaby which was, of course "Bluebird of Happiness".

Graeme Simon and I had bedded down away from the small one metre cliff which dropped to the sand, but Graham Wilkie had to be right on it. Leigh was not noted for his musical talents, but continued to soldier on; over and over and over. It was awful. Suddenly Graham Wilkie disappeared. Laurie Brown has dug into the cliff under Wilk until the hole had collapsed. Wilk was totally unamused. The rest of us thought it was hilarious.