

History of Scouting in Russia



Item Code BP260013 Aug 08 Edition no 14

0845 300 1818

This briefing paper seeks to give a brief historical picture of how Scouting developed in the Russian Empire, how Scouting survived the communist system of the USSR and the developments in recent times.

Historical perspective

The first Scout Troops were established, in St Petersburg, in 1909 led by the Russian General O. Pantukov. Baden Powell visited the country, meeting the Tsar who was supportive of Scouting. The first national association was formed in 1914 with an eventual membership of about 100,000 drawn mainly from the aristocracy.

In 1917, the October Revolution, followed by the Russian Civil War effectively brought an end to Scouting on Russian soil. However, Krupskaya, the wife of Lenin used Scouting methods to develop the Youth Pioneers, Young Octoberists and the Young Communist League with compulsory membership based on the school system.

From 1985 onwards, the perestroika period heralded more openness and greater freedom of information and many young people began to see the deficiencies of youth provision in the USSR. Membership of the state youth organisations fell and the national leadership sought contacts with western youth organizations.

This led to a party of Venture Scouts from Durham visiting the Soviet Union in 1989, followed by contacts between the Committee for Youth of the USSR and representatives of The Scout Association. Venture Scouts and Scouts undertook exchanges in 1990 and 1991.

This greater freedom, coupled with the influence of emigre Russians who had kept Russian Scouting alive in exile through NORS (National Organisation of Russian Scouts) and ORUR (Organisation of Young Pathfinders), saw a spontaneous re-establishment of Scouting in various parts of the country and the World Scout Bureau took action to secure this development.

The rebirth of Russian Scouting 1990

In November 1990, a group of interested individuals formed AVORS, the Association for the Rebirth of Russian Scouting. The congress was attended by representatives of the European Scout Office and the exile organisations. Shortly after, the World Scout Bureau appointed Or Alexander Bondar as consultant for Russia/USSR.

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1991

Early in 1991, The Scout Association was asked, with Boy Scouts of America, to assist the Bureau to encourage the development of Russian Scouting: the UK in Western Russia and the BSA in Siberia. In 1991 an experimental camp was held in Odessa, Ukraine by UK Scouts.

The first information course for the USSR was held during May 1991 at Cartigny, near Geneva which was supported by the UK through the provision of 35,000 copies of 'Scouting Is ...' in the Russian language.

By December 1991 sufficient developments had occurred in Russia to enable AVORS to disband following the creation of the Federation of the Scouts of Russia, comprising the Moscow Scout Union (MSU), Association of Scouts of St Petersburg (ASP) and Siberian Association of Scouts (SibAS). This congress, held at Repino, north of St Petersburg, was supported by western associations including the UK.

1992

An international training course for 17 Russian leaders was held at Gilwell Park jointly funded by the BSA, European Region and The Scout Association. During the summer, three Venture Scout Units visited Russia for the first 'Scout to Scout' exchanges. A small group of Scouts from St Petersburg visited the Blair Atholl Jamborette,

The President of Rotary International in Britain and Ireland (RIBI) chose to support Scouting in Russia as his personal project in 1992/3 and many Scout Groups and Rotary Clubs provided starter boxes of equipment for Russian Scout Troops.

In September 18,000 copies of the first Russian Handbook, 'This is Scouting' were produced by Oxfordshire County Scouts.

A study visit for 20 British Scout Leaders went to Moscow and St Petersburg to establish direct links between British and Russian groups.

1993

A further training course was provided in Moscow, sponsored by The Scout Association in the spring. Upwards of 50 people attended, including representatives

of ORUR and the Orthodox Church.

A major step forward was the establishment in May of the Russian Network, based on the participants of the Russian Study Visit.

During the summer, the International Commissioner attended a joint Hertfordshire/St Petersburg camp and opened a camp site building funded by the Robert Hall Foundation and built by South London Venture Scouts with local help.

The Scout Association met with the leadership of ORUR to encourage further dialogue.

The Orthodox Church has shown an interest in Scouting. In August, the UK was represented at a meeting attended by representatives of ORUR, FSR, Orthodox Scouts and the World Scout Bureau. Detailed discussions followed with the Orthodox Scouts. The Federation of Orthodox Scouts (FOS) was officially formed in Moscow in October with a declared wish to be part of World Scouting. The second congress of FSR was held at Saratov in October.

There are an increasing number of small Scout organisations developing at this stage that are not part of FSR.

1994

A round table conference on Russian Scouting was convened by the World Scout Bureau in Geneva during May. The three larger organisations (FSR, FOS and ORUR) were joined by smaller organisations such as Russian Union of Scouts, Federation of Scouts of the Urals, Federation for the Development of Scouts in Russian Military Families and organisations from Tatarstan and Bachortistan (autonomous republics within the Russian Federation). Representatives of FSR and FOS took part in a Camp Staff Programme in the UK.

A contingent of some 120 UK Scouts attended the First Russian International Jamboree at Lake Ladoga, north of St Petersburg. A service crew of 20 also attended. In total, more than 3,500 Scouts attended from a number of countries including the Boy Scouts of America.

Representatives of the various Russian Organisations took part in the Marrakech Symposium at which The Scout Association and BSA made a joint presentation with FSR on our cooperation over the past few years.

1995

The World Scout Committee invited the various Russian organisations to form a single representative contingent to the 18th World Scout Jamboree. The contingent was hosted in the UK prior to the Jamboree but was not totally representative.

A second study visit in October extended the range of contacts, with visits to the Volga Region, Moscow, St Petersburg and Kerala. The FSR held their third National

Conference in November and took initial steps towards unifying with ORUR.

1996

The Federation of the Scouts of Russia and ORUR continued their dialogue and the smaller organisations formed a coordinating committee.

New initiatives were a training course for Federation of Orthodox Scouts leaders, at Gilwell Park, sponsored by Charity Know How Fund, a training course at Youlbury Oxfordshire for FSR and ORUR and a study trip from East Sussex to the Yaroslavl/Rybinsk region.

1997

A field visit to Russia in May concentrated on building links with the members of the smaller groupings of Russian Scouts, including around Moscow and Nizhny Novgorod

In addition, the trip allowed for final information on the 2nd Russian International Jamboree (organised by FSR and ORUR) to be collected. The Jamboree subsequently took place north of Moscow for about 4000 participants, including 120 British Scouts and Leaders.

1998

Contacts continue at local level, with the majority of UK support being provided by groups with longstanding relationships in Russia.

In April, ARNSO, the All-Russia National Scout Organisation was formed in Moscow, bringing together the Federation of Orthodox Scouts, Russian Union of Scouts, National Organisation of the Scout Movement, Young Cavalrymen, Scouts of Russia and some regional groupings

In the same month, in St Petersburg, a congress of Scout Leaders, mainly from the Federation of the Scouts of Russia, Organisation of Young Russian Pathfinders and St Vladimir Union of Russian Scouts, along with some regional groupings, formed the National Organisation of Russian Scouts (NORS).

Visits between Russian and British Groups continued throughout the summer and intense lobbying began between the various Russian umbrella organisations to try to achieve membership of the World Organisation.

1999

Following an invitation to support the third Russian Jamboree, four of the Jamboree leaders were hosted in the UK to build their experience of such events. A series of training experiences were presented in event management, in Russia, separately to both ARNSO and NORS.

2000

A UK contingent was raised to attend the third Russian Jamboree, held near Saratov, including a sizeable Service Team from both the Scout and Guide Associations. The event was a considerable success with some 5,000 participants.

On the constitutional issues, the World Scout Committee ruled that the ARNSO constitution was the only acceptable way forward and urged dialogue between NORS and ARNSO. With the failure of NORS to engage in discussions, the Committee recommended that ARNSO be accepted into WOSM. Following a postal vote of the World Organisation, ARNSO was admitted into membership of WOSM on 31 October 2000. It comprises a federation of three entities - an open organisation (Soyuz Skautov Rosii - Union of Russian Scouts), confessional based Scouting with one element at present [Bratstvo Pravoslavnikh Sledopytov RosH - Fraternity of Orthodox Scouts of Russia] and the autonomous republics currently with three elements from Chuvashia, Komi and Udmurtia. The name of the new national Scout organisation is Vserossiyskaya Natsyonalnaya Skautskaya Organizatsiya - All-Russia National Scout Organisation.

2001

The Association continues to urge unity in Russia and local contacts in the UK are urging NORS members to

join ARNSO. Centrally, training of trainers is offered and accepted - two leaders from Russia attend courses at Gilwell Park - and future visits planned are aimed at encouraging partnership with ARNSO members.

The UK support network became the Network Russia Scout Fellowship (NRSF) in March 2000 and continues to support relationships with Russia. They have established a web-based point of contact and hold meetings twice a year to spread good practice, share information and encourage development in Russia. Contact can be made through their hyperlink on ScoutBaseUK or via the International Office at Gilwell Park.

Sergey Sirotkin became President for ARNSO and was invited to be the principal speaker at the NRSF meeting in October. A plan of joint activities and actions resulted from the subsequent dialogue. Hyperlinks are created between the websites of ARNSO and NRSF.

2002

Exchange visits continue between Groups/Districts/Counties in the UK and Russia Scouts from Russia attend Blair Atholl, Chamboree and Hertfordshire. Through the knowledge gained during expeditions to St. Petersburg and Arkhangelsk and the visit by Yuri Kudriashov (Historian of Russian Scouting) to the 10th anniversary of Network Russia, it appears that some Groups have moved from NORS to ARNSO and

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some have become independent. Also there is strong evidence that a Sectional training scheme have been implemented with Leadership courses being run in various parts of Russia.

A UK Study Group visits ARNSO Groups in Moscow and Nizhni Novgorod and visits the site of the ARNSO National Jamboree taking place in 2004.

2003

The Network provided a UK Study Visit to Western Siberia meeting a variety of Scout Groups in Omsk, Tomsk and Kemerova Regions as well as Scouts from Kazakhstan. During this visit the UK contingent met with Sergey Sirotkin and shared views and plans for future support by the Network.

South Yorkshire and Torbay contingents attended the ARNSO celebration camp to mark the 300th anniversary of the birth of St. Petersburg. Torbay went on to visit their partner group in Perm. The fourth NORS Jamboree took place near to St. Petersburg.

Visits to the UK were made by Omsk Scouts and St. Petersburg Scouts to Hertfordshire and North Wales.

8 Russian young leaders took part in the camp staff programme centred at 4 Camps sites in the UK

2004

A successful winter camp in February/March 2004 at Losevo, north of St Petersburg, took place for over 50 UK Explorer Scouts & Scout Network members.

Cheshire and South Yorkshire attended the 1st National Russian Jamboree in Samara in July/August.

Visits to the UK included St Petersburg Scouts to Scotland, Siberian Scouts to Kibblestone, St Petersburg Scouts to South Yorkshire.

Young leaders camp staff scheme continues with leaders from Kazakhstan and St. Petersburg working at various camp sites in the UK.

On June 2004 recognition by WOSM transferred to Russian Association of Scouts/Navigators. Links with other organisations maintained.

Study visit to Kolichev Orphanage (South of Moscow) made to identify work required and planning arrangements for the visit in 2005.

2005

Another successful winter camp in February at Losevo, north of St Petersburg, took place for UK Explorer Scouts & Scout Network members.

Resource sheets for Russian programme ideas produced and made available on Scout web sites. Also now available on CD/DVD with other resources about Network Russia.

Visit by Explorer/Network Scouts and Leaders to Kolichev Orphanage to carry out some refurbishment work at the orphanage and to spend time using various crafts with the children housed there. Craft materials taken from the UK to Russia as part of the visit.

On visits to St. Petersburg to meet and maintain contacts there.

Camp Staff program for young leaders continues with participants coming to the UK from St. Petersburg, Kazakhstan and Georgia.

2006

Winter expedition to Losevo, north of St. Petersburg, successfully run again.

UK Leaders visited St. Petersburg Scout Camp at Losevo during June producing a very detailed report available on Network Russia Scout web site.

A planning meeting for visit to Tula Orphanage was held to organise a major service project at an orphanage in Pyatnitski, south of Moscow.

2007

The annual Winter Expedition to the Losevo area, some 80 Km north of St. Petersburg, took place with Explorer Scout and Leaders from the UK joining with Russians at the site.

The Camp Staff programme continued with the Network arranging for campsites in the South and North of England to host young Leaders from the Russian federation, Georgia and Kazakhstan.

A group of Explorer Scouts and Leaders from Network Russia visited an orphanage at Tula which is about 150Km south-east of Moscow. Scouts and Leaders from St. Petersburg and Tula city joined the UK group at Tula. Whilst at the orphanage many rooms and corridors were re-painted and made more pleasant for the children living at the orphanage to enjoy. A replacement main hot water boiler was installed to feed hot water to the kitchen area which greatly improved the kitchen amenities. A survey of the roof of the orphanage was also made and some efforts to help might be forthcoming. Network Russia also carried some 50 shoe boxes prepared by Kingston Scouts under the gifts for peace scheme and presented these to the orphanage director for the children of the orphanage.

The opportunity was also taken to meet the president of the newly emerging scout organisation, Russian Scout Organisation (RSO), who claim to have large

numbers of members and enjoy sponsorship support.

RAS/N took part in the World Scout Jamboree at Hylands Park in 2007 - 502 Scouts and their Leaders and 2 members of the International Service Team were there from Russia..

As part of the 2007 celebrations, the Network held their Autumn meeting on Brownsea Island and presented a kneeler to St. Mary's Church located on the island.

A large contingent of Russians from the RAS/N Scouts visited the World Jamboree in the UK, but contact was minimal and most of the Scouts came from regions far away from the supported Russian areas, e.g. Vladivostok.

2008

The Winter expedition to Losevo took place in

the February and the opportunity was taken whilst there to investigate another site which could be also used for Winter expeditions. The new site is situated in the same general area north of St. Petersburg close to the shores of Lake Ladoga.

In March, the President and Chairman of Network Russia Scout Fellowship were invited to attend and present at the Russian Scout Organisation's all Russia forum held at Sochi on the Black Sea. Whilst RSO is not affiliated to the World Organisation at present, it does enjoy large numbers and financial support.

Network Russia took the opportunity of explaining how Scouting works in the UK, and there was much interest expressed as a result of the presentation.

A magnificent copy of the history of Russian Scouting was presented to the President of Network Russia Scout Fellowship by Yuri Kudriashov, the Russian Scouting historian, and will be on display on the 2008 Gilwell reunion.

The recognised Scout Organisation, RAS/N, has suffered with sponsorship disappearing and certainly in western Russia would appear to be also most ineffective. The organisation at the back of RAS/N would also appear to be very weak following the demise of the Yukos oil consortium.

However, The RAS/N Association was represented at the 38th World Scout Conference in Korea in 2008.

During the summer of 2008 the RSO will mount an international camp in the Melekesskiy district of the Ulianovsk region, with an open invitation to scout organisations from all over the world. This jamboree is seen to be the forerunner for the major international jamboree to be held in 2009.

Former recognised organisation ARNSO will also be holding the 3rd Siberian Jamboree in the Gorkovskiy district of the Omsk region. The camp site will be some 105 Km north of Omsk. UK Scouts from Cheshire are planning a visit to this Jamboree.

The Network Russia Scout Fellowship Camp Staff programmed continues to invite young leaders to attend camps in the UK in order to gain experience which they can put to good use when they return to Russia. Scouts from as far as Omsk in the Russian Federation and from Georgia will attend in 2008.

2009

The 2009 Network Russia Winter expedition is planned to take place in February 2009 with places fully booked from the beginning of 2008.

2009 also sees the 100th anniversary of the establishment of all youth organisations in Russia including Scouting. For many years of course, Scouting was not allowed in Russia but was still maintained by Russians abroad. The RSO will be celebrating this anniversary with a major Jamboree to be held at Velikiy Novgorod, in the last three weeks of July 2009. Invitations to attend are extended to Scouting organisations all over the world and there will also be open invitations to other youth organisations.

2010

The annual Winter expedition to Losevo, north of St. Petersburg will bring together Russian and British youth in February. This is an ideal opportunity to gain experience in terrain which is now difficult to find in the UK. All applications are made through Network Russia Scout Fellowship

Plans are in hand for a Russian contingent to visit the UK, specifically to camp in North Wales and the London area.