

Scouting in Russia



Item Code BP260013 Nov 06 Edition no 13

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 Dr Alexander Bondar as consultant for Russia/USSR.

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

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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 Organisation 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 Nishny 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 long-standing 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 Rosii – 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 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

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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.

Hertfordshire 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.

Planning meeting for visit to Tula Orphanage in 2007 held with Multi-International Aid who own the orphanage. Tula located in Tula Oblast south of Moscow. Explorer/Network Scouts and Leaders will visit in 2007 to carry out some refurbishment there.

2007

Winter expedition to Losevo planned to take place.

Visit to Tula Orphanage in Russia will involve refurbishment of several rooms plus large assembly hall. Visits to Moscow and St. Petersburg will be included in the visit.

Autumn meeting of Network Russia will be held on Brownsea Island in October.

Large contingent of Russians will be attending World Jamboree in the UK.

2008

Winter expedition to Losevo planning to take place.

2009

Winter expedition to Losevo planning to take place

100 years of Russian Scouting. It is hoped that an anniversary camp will be organised by Russian Scouts and that the UK will field a sizeable contingent to go there.