Horace Kephart - Scouting's Founding Uncle

"All Scouts know Horace Kephart," began a story in the April, 1914, Boys' Life magazine. "His book of Camping and Woodcraft is the pocket companion of pretty nearly everyone who likes to live in the open."

If anybody understood what to put into a pack - and what to do in camp - it was Horace Kephart. He might not have been one of Scouting's founding fathers, but in his day he was a supportive and influential uncle.
Born 150 years ago next year, Mr. Kephart was a librarian by profession, but his real love was camping in the rugged Appalachians of Tennessee and North Carolina.

*Camping and Woodcraft* was published in 1906, five years before the first edition of the *Boy Scout Handbook*. While the Scout book was a good introduction to life in the out-of-doors, boys who wanted to learn more found in Kephart's 477-page manual a goldmine of information.

Mr. Kephart shared his knowledge with Scouts through articles in *Boys' Life* magazine, too. Here's how a 1923 *Boys' Life* article described him:
When Mr. Kephart died in 1931, the Horace Kephart Troop from his hometown of Bryson City, North Carolina, placed a bronze plaque in his honor on a millstone.
The inscription read,

**On This Spot**

*Horace Kephart - Dean of American Campers*  
*And One of the Principal Founders of the*  
*Great Smoky Mountains National Park –*  
*Pitched His Last Permanent Camp.*

Mr. Kephart had long promoted the idea that his beloved mountains should have federal protection. Three years after his death, Congress established Great Smoky Mountains National Park. Scouts hiking today on the Appalachian Trail can look across a valley and see Mount Kephart, a fitting tribute to an outdoorsman who did much for Scouting and for the protection of wild country where Scouts can roam.
Kephart's Cup

Horace Kephart encouraged campers to carry only what they needed, but he also thought each person could take one nonessential item. For him, it was a porcelain teacup that had lost its handle.

"It cost me much trouble to find one that would fit snugly inside the metal cup in which I brew my tea," he wrote. "Hot indeed must be the sun, tangled the trail and weary the miles, before I forsake thee, O my frail, cool lipped, but ardent teacup!"

What's the one thing you always carry to camp? A special hat? A hiking stick? A leather pouch that has been on all your Scout adventures? If you'd like to follow in Horace Kephart's footsteps and start your own tradition with a good cup, check out these and many others at www.scoutstuff.org.
Fieldbook

With the 1944 *Fieldbook*, Scouts who had been using Horace Kephart's *Woodcraft and Camping* could finally read Scouting's own book of advanced outdoor skills. Listed as authors of that first edition were Chief Scout Executive James E. West and William Hillcourt, known for his columns in *Boys’ Life* magazine. More than a million copies sold in the next two decades.
New editions of the Fieldbook have been written about once every 20 years. The content has changed to keep pace with the latest information on backcountry travel, camping, and caring for the environment.

Today's *Fieldbook* is packed with terrific information about the outdoors. It's written for Scouts and
everyone else who wants to hike, camp, navigate, sail, climb, kayak, and take part in plenty of other
great outdoor adventures.

For a limited time, the *Fieldbook* is available for just $4.88 at [www.scoutstuff.org](http://www.scoutstuff.org). That's easily the most
information at the least cost of any outdoor manual anywhere, and this is one of the best. But you'll
need to act now while supplies last.


Robotics Merit Badge
When the Boy Scouts of America wants the world to know about a new merit badge, where better than illuminated in New York City's Times Square? That's one of many events surrounding the rollout of the Robotics merit badge.

The image embroidered on the badge is a NASA Mars Exploration Rover, and the skills encouraged by the requirements can lead to possibilities every bit as exciting.

Matt Myers, who oversees the badge for the BSA National Council, explains that Robotics emphasizes
STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mechanics. "Last century, camping was an essential survival skill," Mr. Myers explains. "We view STEM as an essential survival skill in the 21st century."

That's certainly true, and you definitely want to give Robotics a look. Pick up a copy of the merit badge pamphlet from your local council Scout shop or www.scoutstuff.org.

There's plenty need in the 21st century for understanding science, technology, engineering, and mechanics, and the Robotics merit badge can give you a real boost in the right direction. Scouting's future will always have room for camping, too, perhaps more than ever. For that, you can find guidance in the Boy Scout Handbook, the Fieldbook, and even the writings of old-timers including the Great Smoky Mountains' own Horace Kephart.

(This edition of the Be Prepared Newsletter was developed and written by Robert Birkby, author of the current editions of the Boy Scout Handbook and the Scout Fieldbook.)