



# Peppers ESU A year in view August 2011-July 2012



## Dear Explorer Helpers, Parents & Guardians.

This year has been a year of growing and learning together as a unit and we all have great plans for the year ahead. We are all very grateful for your dedication in the form of lifts, kit provision and supporting your young people in their endeavours within Scouting.

### Beginnings

The year began with our usual opening event of attending the **Lowdham RHS gala** over the August bank holiday weekend.

For 2012 we opted to alter the tradition slightly and add in a hike from Peppers to Lowdham carrying the necessary gear for an overnight stay. This proved an excellent re-introduction to Scouting for some of the Explorers with comments about adjusting rucksacks and shifting loads accompanying us most of the way as everyone settled into familiar positions carrying their packs and walking through the rolling hills. We were accompanied as ever by Matt's two giant Malamute dogs that are now synonymous with Peppers outdoors activities and serve as an efficient means of rounding up errant Explorers who hide in long grass or lag behind.

Lowdham itself was a success marked with the usual fun spectacle of young people trying their best to 'bus' tables, wash up and direct traffic in the car park whilst not admitting that they perhaps should have tried to get at least some sleep the night before.

### Winter Term



The Winter term itself was marked with events such as the **Night Owl competition**, which Peppers ESU won back from Spartans ESU making it two wins in three years, well done everyone!

It is also fair to note that the 2011 winning team was made up of entirely different young people to the previous winning Peppers team. We hope that this is indicative of the hard work that the leaders put in training and teaching our Explorers, but only time will tell.

November saw the **County Flag competition** occur complete with a visit from Chief Scout Bear Gryls. Mr Gryls saw fit to join Peppers in bashing out a tune on the guitar of one of our number and photos of this adorn our notice board at Peppers HQ, the event was a little soured by one of the Chief Scouts entourage driving over our equipment in a scene akin to a famous Dads army moment, however the resilient and frankly hilarious response of the Explorers to the situation still makes the leaders smile now.



The winter term also saw the first of several sad farewells over the year to a strong core of dedicated Explorers who all turned eighteen this year. Please note that an eighteenth may well be a significant and happy time but is also the designated cut off for attendance at Explorers and as such we cannot permit attendance and participation in Explorer activities in a non-leader role by those who have turned eighteen.

### Spring Term

The first big activity of spring term was the **NESST challenge**. This, as ever, served to test the mettle of both the Explorers in navigating their way across Sherwood forest and Walesby in the dark for over twenty miles, and also the leaders who were faced with the tough task of sitting by the fire with a pile of food and drink for eight hours waiting for the Explorers to return (with the exception of Andy who opted to take part in the competition with a Scout network team). Whilst we did not win, as always it is the taking part that counts and the resilience shown by the participating Explorers was exceptional.

The start of the Spring term also featured the opening for entries of the **Operation Dragnet Escape and Evade** competition in Cumbria. We opted to make this the big 'target' for our group after last year we were scuppered for team numbers due to a school event taking understandable precedence and letters were all sent out accordingly giving notice.

As a result we shaped the learning structure of the Spring and Summer terms around preparing for Dragnet and honing necessary skills that even non competing Explorers would find useful and informative.

### Summer Term

Summer term has seen numbers fluctuate as our hard working young people have knuckled down to exams and revision. We have, nonetheless, had some excellent activities including making fishing spears, 'manly' skills night (not our name, but that of the Explorers) which featured amongst other things a lengthy talk from Rob on knives and a step-by-step guide on preparing a rabbit starring a hastily thawed bunny provided by Victoria Market another notable activity evening was a ready steady cook night using a variety of different types of camping stove such as Trangias (which were a whole new world to some Explorers) as well as the usual gas stoves.

Each week has featured a new regular sit down interactive skills spot aimed at sharpening up our Explorers or learning new skills that would be of use for future activities such as Dragnet. Topics covered included rucksack packing, how to travel light, bivouac and shelter building (the key factor of Dragnet is it takes place over two nights with competitors camping rough whilst trying not to be found) and the predictably raucous matter of why one should carry a small spade and some toilet paper when on an expedition.

### Other Activities

June saw the **Glastonbudget festival** in Leicestershire occur, this music festival makes up part of the Scout calendar as older Explorers (aged 16+) and Leaders serve as volunteer stewards at this event in return for the right to 'bag' free abandoned camping equipment after the event closes for sale or use by the unit.

Whilst attendance of volunteers at Glastonbudget dwindled nearer to the event, a special thanks goes to Andy from Peppers and Tracy Box (who so many times this year has served as Peppers guardian angel) who both attended. They worked through appalling weather conditions over the weekend and then on the Monday helped by Matt (who had been working for 18 hours a day as site security all weekend) and Andy's brother Jez, managed to fill two cars with tents, camping chairs, gazebos and all manner of items that have now been sold on Ebay to raise funds or have been cleaned and retained for use by the unit.



The cleaning and checking over of tents was performed by a crew of Explorers who all came down to Peppers in their own time on a weekend and worked tirelessly scrubbing mud off tents and counting guy lines, although they did still manage to find time to cheekily tape one of their number to a tree and take pictures for the Peppers ESU Facebook Group. Whilst the weather may have convinced lots of festival goers to abandon their tents for our benefit it did also have a negative affect on Peppers with regards to Dragnet.



Unfortunately some uncertainty on the part of some Explorers on the night before resulted in a domino effect that cost us a team. We would like to take this moment to assure Parents and Guardians that all activities that we participate in are carefully risk assessed and fully staffed as per Scouting regulations and in the case of Dragnet also through close liaison with Police, Military and civilian rescue services to ensure that any risk is managed appropriately and that an event, whilst pushing participants out of their comfort zone, does not present any actual danger.

We are all available for chats and discussion after every meeting and naturally all information disclosed will be treated sensitively and confidentially, if you ever have a concern about an activity or feel you have only heard half a story from your son or daughter then please don't hesitate to contact us. We do endeavour to make full details available via letters home, Facebook and a full briefing to the Explorers, but as ever we know that sometimes letters get lost and briefings get misinterpreted as they are reiterated days later.

Likewise we also require full disclosure on health forms in order that we can be fully aware of any issues that may have a bearing on an activity. If you require a new health form, as stated we are available at the end of the meeting every week.

### Numbers

Moving on to more positive news it has been excellent to see so many new additions to our numbers over the past year and the way that different Members have contributed has been outstanding. We are all very proud of every one of our Explorers and are confident in another successful year as we move into 2012/13.

### Year Ahead

Plans for the year ahead include more camps akin to Lowdham and Glastonbudget where we intend to serve as volunteer workers in return for donations to the unit of equipment or funds, we are also planning on some bush craft based bivouac camps and inter unit competitions across the district.

Subs will remain at £35 over term for the next term, but are subject to change pending on the success of camps such as those listed above; we would therefore like you to encourage your young people to participate in volunteer working camps where possible. Unlike the other groups which meet at Pepper-pots and use the Ellis building the Explorers have to pay rent, which means that at present our income from subs and outgoings are pretty much neutral, so any purchases or activities require additional fund raising.

### Facebook

Our Facebook group remains ever active and serves as the principle point for regular contact between Leaders and Explorers regarding plans and events. Parents and Guardians are welcome as members, it is a private and hidden site so cannot be found through a web search, instead please contact the leaders and request to be added. In relation to this we would also like to reiterate that we do not accept personal 'friend' requests or private messenger type conversations from members as per Scouting social media regulations.

### Farewells

Going forward for the next year we will be losing a leader as Andy, the longest serving Peppers Leader, will be moving to West Bridgford for a brief period before moving to America with his new wife, we wish him all the best and look forward to making contact with the Boy Scouts of America that Andy intends to join with once he has moved. We are very grateful for Andy's five years of dedicated service and help without which Peppers would have ceased to be. We are therefore looking to recruit a new leader to join our team, if you are, or know someone who might be, interested please encourage them to contact us.

### Extra Thanks

As ever thanks is due in no small part to our supporting parents Tracy Box and Elaine Turton.

Tracy, as well as running 3W Beavers has been an invaluable aid to Peppers ESU helping cater for camps, driving groups to events, providing advice and support to the leader team as well as being a busy Mum to two Explorers.

Elaine Turton has saved Peppers from financial ruin by taking over the accounts and ensuring that all bills, capitation and rents have been paid throughout the year, whilst she may not be physically at the Peppers meetings it is no lie to say that without her the meetings would not be happening at all.

Overall we have had an excellent year and are looking forward to three new terms next year packed with fun, learning and activities that all can enjoy.

Yours in Scouting

Andy, Matt & Rob.

