

How relevant is this telling message even today — over 40 years later.

Scouting is strictly non-political and knows no barriers of colour, class, or creed — a remarkable thing for 1982!

Value of trees

Baden-Powell said in his early writings that trees should be cut only if they were to be used for making a shelter or for firewood. Wood should never be wasted. He also told Scouts that if they cut down a tree, they should plant one to replace it. And that was some 76 years ago, when conservation and the environment were hardly thought of. As far as I can trace, the words hardly existed.

Tracking in the forest was another valuable use in Baden-Powell's training. He said that if you were observant, you could see if anyone had passed through the bush either by broken small branches or bruised and bent foilage. And, of course, if the ground was soft or loose, you could track by the footsteps left behind.

Baden-Powell said it was important for boys to know the names of trees and be able to describe their foliage so that they could direct others to follow tracks. If they were lost in the forest, they should know what foliage could be eaten and what could be dangerous.

In his original *Scouting for Boys*, published in 1907, he listed some well-known trees and provided his own sketches of their leaves so that boys could recognise them.

They were the oak, elm, poplar, plane, sycamore, and ash, but he listed 18 varieties boys should learn about.

He went on to describe the value of plants both as a food and as medicine. He said Scouts should be able to recognise certain crops, such

as wheat, barley, and even grasses. "If you are lost in the forest or jungle, you may die of hunger, thirst, or of poisoning if you do not know what you can eat and what you cannot. Berries, nuts, roots, leaves, and even some barks can be good to eat."

Baden-Powell warned about the dangers of fire in the forest and jungle and commented: "It takes many years to grow a fine and stately tree, but only a few minutes to cut it down."

Another reference is about felling trees. He said to plan always for a tree to fall in open space if possible so that it did not damage other trees. Some foresters over the years cannot have been Scouts!

Early conservationists

Scouting was one of the earliest movements to be active in environmental matters.

In New Zealand prominent men in Scouting organised tree planting, camps in the country where boys were taught about nature and the importance of protecting natural resources. This was long before the Native Bird Society, which later became the Forest and Bird Protection Society, was founded by Captain Sander-son in 1923, when he was so incensed at the way the Government bird sanctuary on Kapiti Island was being managed.

Many Scout people over the years have been involved in Forest and Bird work and campaigns, and the resources of the movement have been used from time to time in projects such as organising and running the first Conservation Week, the opening and maintaining of national walkways in various places, and Arbor Day activities over the years.

It would be most difficult and perhaps unwise to name the very many Scout people

who over the years have been prominent in the environmental and conservation field. However, by far the greatest contribution has been made by Mr Roy Nelson, of Petone, who after many years of dedicated service became president of the Society and remained in that office for the long period of 19 years, all by voluntary service, as he refused any payments other than travelling expenses.

This remarkable man, now well into his eighties, still plays his part in the activities of the Society, and his great knowledge is still sought by many other organisations and even Government officials.

Mr Nelson started his Scouting in the Hutt Valley in 1910, and as there was no troop in that country area, he became a Lone Scout, doing his early training from notes sent from the national headquarters in Christchurch.

He became a conservationist through Scouting. His service to the movement is unparalleled. Many are the old boys of his old group, St Augustine's of Petone, who have served Scouting and Forest and Bird through his early influence. His service has never been recognised by any honours; he has stoutly refused civil or Scout honours.

For many years Mr Nelson was Scoutmaster of St Augustine's Troop, with its 32-member brass band, and this is where I started my Scouting in 1921. Over the years Mr Nelson has held almost every voluntary position possible both in administration and training and there are many thousands of boys whose lives he has touched. Quite a number can say, "Maire [as he is still known] was my grandfather's Scoutmaster". Old boys still visit him at 15 Aurora Street, Petone, where they went in the