

# MOUNTAINS TO MOLEHILLS

**Melanie Palmer** tackles some of the issues that could hold up the advance of excellent Explorer Scouting



It's coming up to Easter, with eggs bursting from the shelves in every supermarket, so naturally I'm thinking about rabbits. [Ed: Um, rabbits don't lay eggs, but we know what you mean!] If you go for a walk at dusk, you sometimes see dozens of rabbits, sitting nervously, noses twitching while they munch the grass. You move too suddenly and all you can see are flashes of fluffy tails disappearing down numerous holes. They have been warned by their lookouts that danger is about.

You may well wonder where I'm heading with the whole rabbit story, but I'm thinking about communication and teamwork. These two buzzwords, as well

as the infamous 'F' word (now don't get the wrong idea – we're talking flexibility, of course!) are the staple ingredients of successful Explorer Scouting. No matter how good your District recipe might be, if you don't have the vital ingredients, you're in for a non-starter.

### Three little secrets

The fabulous thing is that around the UK, communication, teamwork and flexibility are in good supply, and Explorer Scout Units are taking off. There are many Districts where communication began very early on in the process. As soon as they heard about Explorer Scouts at the 14-25 workshop

in the summer of 2001, they began the communications and planning process, working together to decide the best strategy for their Districts, using flexibility to consider how it would suit their individual circumstances. These Districts are now flourishing. Explorer Scout numbers are increasing, with recruiting from outside Scouting. They are beginning to implement the Young Leaders' Scheme, running a balanced and full programme, organised by the Explorer Scout Committee. What is their secret of their success?

- Communication
- Teamwork
- Flexibility.

There are of course little hurdles to be overcome on the route to good Explorer Scouting, but the key is to look at these as challenges, to talk through the issues and to work out the optimum way forward for everybody. As Graham Haddock (National Commissioner for Explorer Scouts) says: "Every problem has a solution, it's just a case of talking through the issues". Here are some of the hurdles that seem to be getting in the way of good Explorer Scouting.

### DISTRICT PANIC

#### Problem

There are some Districts who are finding themselves just a little bit swamped by the changes that have happened within The Scout Association recently and feel that a lot of work has been dumped in their direction. Perhaps they feel they just don't have enough people, or the right person, but they haven't yet appointed a District Explorer Scout Commissioner (DESC).

#### Solutions

- List the tasks that need to be covered. How many of them could be delegated? For example, if you had a DESC how much of this work would be part of their remit?
- Talk to the people in your District, explain the role and share the job of finding the right person for the job. Someone may be waiting for the chance to be offered them.

One District Commissioner I know was feeling very pressured. He felt that he didn't have enough personnel to cover the roles he had already in his District, without adding another one. He and his wife were Assistant District Commissioners in several areas between them. When the Explorer Scout Section was launched, nothing happened to begin with.

However, after a County event, some old Venture Scouts from the District said that they would like to help out as Leaders and with that in mind, a Scout Leader said he would like take on the role of DESC, to co-ordinate Explorer Scouting in the rural District.

**Remember the three magic words of communication, teamwork and flexibility are the key to running a happy, successful Explorer Scout Unit**

### DISTRICT VERSUS GROUP

#### Problem

The structure of Explorer Scouting within the District has caused quite a bit of friction. Districts are making heavy-handed decisions, which Group Scout Leaders don't understand. Group Scout Leaders are insisting on 'having' an Explorer Scout Unit. The result is bad feelings and no decision being made.

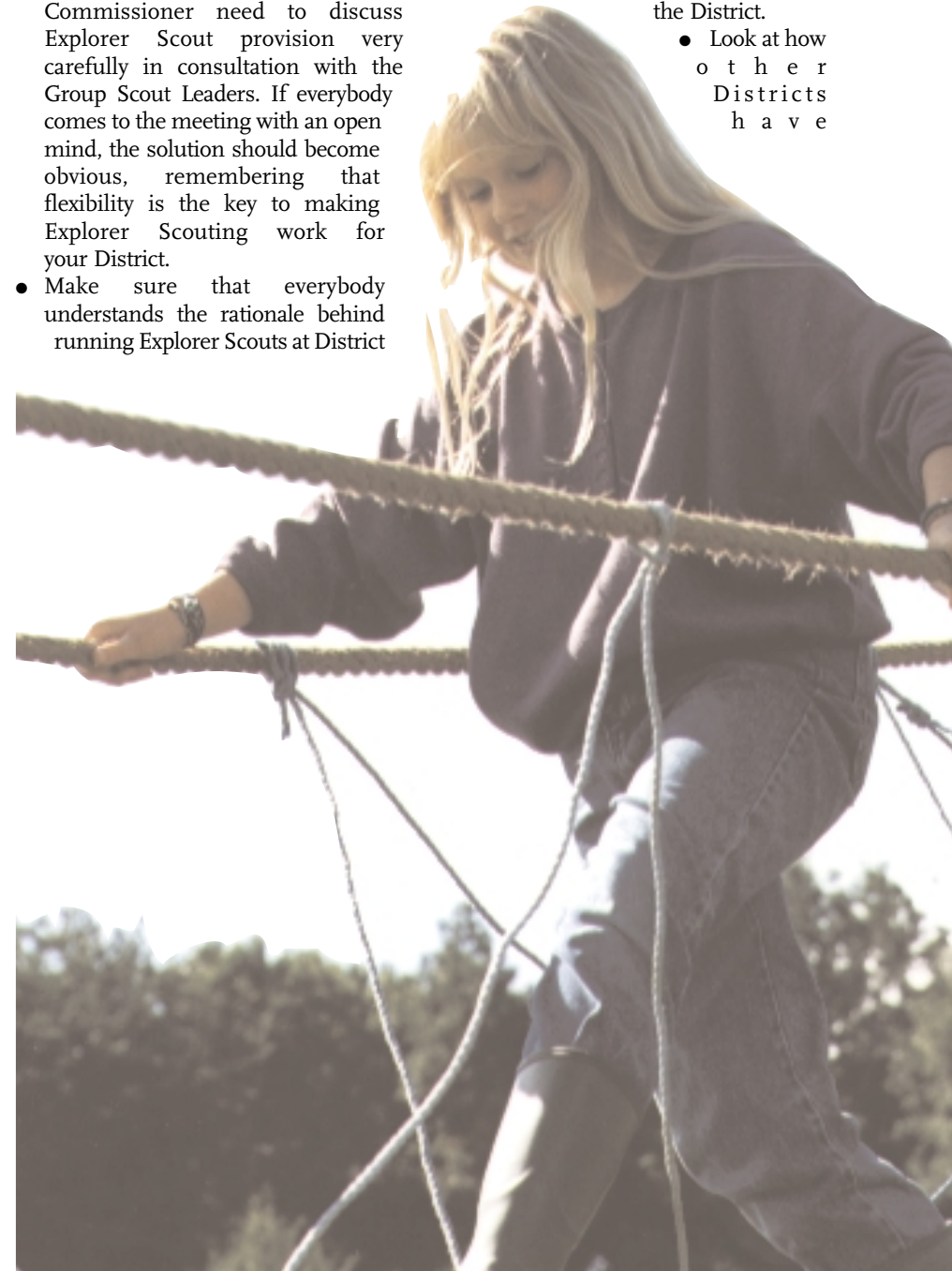
#### Solutions

- Everybody needs to understand that this decision rests with the District, who will have a clearer overall picture. The DESC and the District Commissioner need to discuss Explorer Scout provision very carefully in consultation with the Group Scout Leaders. If everybody comes to the meeting with an open mind, the solution should become obvious, remembering that flexibility is the key to making Explorer Scouting work for your District.
- Make sure that everybody understands the rationale behind running Explorer Scouts at District

level. It is all about making the most of expertise, resources and numbers throughout the District to provide an excellent and full programme of activities. In many parts of the country, Group-based Venture Scouting meant Units of three or four young people. The activities they could arrange were limited, leading to falling numbers and a situation where young people were not getting a valuable Scouting experience.

- Ensure that Group Scout Leaders understand that even if they are partnered with an Explorer Scout Unit, the responsibility for the Unit still lies with the District.

- Look at how other Districts have





# PROGRAMMES ON A PLATE

THIS MONTH'S THEME IS TRAVEL, WRITTEN BY MELANIE PALMER

TIME	ACTIVITY	ZONE	METHOD	INSTRUCTIONS
15 mins one week, then 30 mins plus at next meeting	Where in the world?	International	Presentation, Research, Working together	Using travel brochures, atlases and so on each Explorer Scout chooses somewhere they would like the Unit to go. Ignore price implications at the moment. Before the next meeting the Explorers each research their chosen country and present it to the Unit, explaining where it is, what it is like there, what the people are like, what Scouting is like there and why they should go. Award a small prize for the best presentation.
At least one evening	Trip planning	Relationships, Skills	Working together, Planning, Technology	A small group of Explorer Scouts should choose a destination for a Unit trip. This may be the most popular one following the presentations or it may be restricted by cost or time to the UK. The plans should include when it will be, where they will camp, what the aim of the trip will be, expeditions, community projects, physical activity, and should begin to consider costing and possible fundraising. Use a computer to produce a flyer to advertise the trip or related fundraising project.
One hour	Kit practice	Relationships, Skills	Working together, Outdoors, Challenge, Fun	Each member of the Unit is tied loosely to another member. In this 'chain gang', participants have to put up all the tents they will be using. This activity is very entertaining for spectators and will improve teamwork! To make it more interesting, a few of the Explorers could either wear earmuffs or a blindfold.
One evening /day	Get in shape	Physical recreation	Physical exercise, Fun	Spend an evening or a day (whichever is appropriate) getting in shape and practising for whatever physical activity is planned for the trip. If you've planned canoeing, then take a canoeing trip. If you've planned Tai Chi exercises for every morning of the trip, use a video to teach the moves in advance.
One hour	Community Project Planning	Community service	Technology	Use the internet to find out about possible community or environmental projects that the Unit can take part in while on the trip. Email the relevant people to make arrangements.
One evening	Cook international	Skills, International	Working together	Spend an evening cooking international dishes, as many different ones as possible, and use this experience to plan an international menu for the trip away.
Weekend / week	Trip	All	All	Go on the trip!

approached their Explorer Scout structures. Examine a range of approaches together and discuss the relative merits of each method for your District.

- Think creatively. The structure you use and where you situate your Units should reflect what works best for the young people in your District.

One County in the UK has more than 50 Explorer Scout Units over eight Districts and not one of those Units is partnered with only one Scout Group. Another County has a whole range of structures in its 16 Districts. One long and thin District, stretching more than 38 miles

2002 issue of *Scouting Magazine*, which is available on ScoutBase.

- Finance, like all other aspects of Explorer Scouting, is a District responsibility, and as such it is vital to talk to the District Executive and the District Treasurer to set up your financial arrangements.
- In the transition from Group to District, talk to Group Executives to ensure a smooth handover of finances. For example, ensure that young people are not paying for a year's subs in one place and then being asked to pay again at District level.

Leader and the Group Scout Leader need to get together and go through the Partnership Agreement together, discussing what is fair for both parties.

Some Districts I have seen thrash the Partnership Agreement out right at the beginning when they set up the District structure and decide where the Units will be placed. The agreements are put in place for a shorter term, say six months, to let the Units settle in and see what the next step should be then. Others leave it for a while, relying on goodwill for the first couple of months, and then working it out when they have a bit more idea of their needs and requirements and what they will be able to offer.

I also know of one District that has set up a Partnership Agreement with a Group, which the Group has insisted on, but is totally in favour of the Explorer Unit. The Group and the Unit of course are both totally happy with this situation, but I have suggested that they look at it again in a couple of months so that it is fairer to the Group, who must not lose out (whether voluntarily or not!).

### THREE MAGIC WORDS

All these solutions are based on those three magic words – communication, teamwork and flexibility. Although these particular remedies may not exactly fit your situation, the only way forward is talking together about it and seeking a creative answer. Although the rabbits I was talking about earlier may be using their teamwork to save themselves from trouble, they also use that teamwork to build and share networks of burrows. We too must work together to share our resources.

It is easy to spot problems in our path, and they can easily become bigger than they need to be – molehills into mountains. I have been known to liken the journey towards successful Explorer Scouting to a mountain range, where an Explorer Scout, representing the District, is on one side, searching for inspiration. Each stage of the process is represented by a peak to be surmounted, leading to the next, and eventually leading to the goal of successful Explorer Scouting. I will now extend the analogy by suggesting that what we are now trying to do is act creatively, with teamwork, to reduce these mountains to the molehills they really are.

Explorer Scouting is already working – let's make it better! ■



along a road from one end to the other, has four main Scout Groups. The District has decided that for them the best approach for the Explorers is to work locally, partnered with the Scout Groups, but administered by the District. Another District, which has a large city within its boundaries, has one enormous District Unit, with more than one hundred Explorer Scouts on their books. Within this Unit, different 'sub-units' offer different types of activities.

Remember, there are as many solutions as there are Districts.

### FINANCES

#### Problem

There is still a lot of confusion over the issue of finances.

#### Solutions

- Have a look at Gordon Weston's excellent article in the September

I asked a District near me how they were getting on with their finances lately, and I got a wonderful answer, because it was very short: "Oh, no problems! We have our account and we just pass a copy of everything, including receipts, to the District Treasurer at the end of every month to make sure its all okay with them. I'm on the District Executive so I just talk about it then." Sounds ideal.

### PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENTS

#### Problem

This problem seems to have become less of an issue over recent months, but there are still Districts where a standard Partnership Agreement is presented to Groups, in some cases regardless of the actual situation.

#### Solutions

- Communication is the only solution here. The DESC, the Explorer Scout