

The Baden-Powell Scouting Mini-Guide to Rovering

What is Rovering?

Simply put, Rovering is “a brotherhood of open air and service”. In concept, Rovering was originally intended to be the final stage in Scouting for youths who came up through Wolf Cubbing and Scouts. When a Scout reached age 17, he would transition from his Scout Troop to a Rover Crew of young adults. A Rover Scout could then further his training in citizenship by learning new skills to help him focus on a meaningful career while at the same time rendering service to the community.

In a practical sense, Rovers get to do a lot of fun things, most of which happen out of doors. We get to play the same game of Scouting that kids get to do. We camp and hike. We learn any manner of outdoor skills, including pioneering, signaling, astronomy, and animal tracking, to name a few. We learn things in patrols just as the kids do. We also render service to the community at large via projects designed by the Rovers themselves. Some who join will eventually go on to be Scout leaders, and the fun and adventure will make them better leaders. Others join simply to be a Scout, and that’s fine too.

The backbone of our program is the book called “Scouting for Boys” written by the founder of the Scouting movement, Lord Robert Baden-Powell. It is a must-read for anyone who is lured by the idea of Rovering. If you were a Scout as a youth, it will give you an idea of what the movement was like when it was young. If you were never a Scout, it will give you a good idea as to what we’re about.

Getting Started as a Rover

So you say you want to be a Rover? Chances are, there probably aren’t many Rovers in your neck of the woods. While this does present some logistical issues, it’s also an open invitation for you to start your own personal journey as a Rover. Rovering by its very nature is a self-directed exploration of both yourself and the world around you. You can embark on your own adventures as a Lone Rover. Whether you have the opportunity to participate in a Crew or not, Rovering is really what you make of it.

To begin your journey, it's best to get a little background information. Read "Scouting for Boys". If you're feeling really adventurous, read "Rovering To Success". Keep in mind that these texts were written 100 years ago and reflect social views of those times. For example, we know today that proper first aid for a hysterical woman is not to put her in a room until she gets over it. All that aside, there are underlying messages you want to get from these books, for example, that some things like chivalry and honor never go out of style.

As a Lone Rover, you'll have to make your own fun, but remember, everything you do has the potential to become a Rover activity. Go on a hike, but don't just hike. Make a catalog of the different trees and plants you see. Go camping, but don't just camp. Read up on how to cook steak on a hot bed of coals, then DO IT. Listen to the birds chirping, then try to imitate their calls by whistling. You might actually get a bird to sing back at you! Become aware of the people around you that may be in need of your help, then go help them. Being a Rover is as much a lifestyle as it is a brotherhood.

There is an advancement program open to all Rovers, but there is a catch. Only invested Rovers can earn the badges. If you're really that remote from other Rover Scouts, you may need to settle for using the badge requirements as a guide for your own activities. Rovering is meant to be a lifelong activity, so if you're patient, time will work out the issues of getting you invested.

Starting a Rover Crew

If you're like most of us, you'll find that Rovering is much more fun with other people involved rather than just yourself. Unless you're lucky enough to be living near an active Crew, you'll really need to roll your sleeves up and build yourself a Crew from the ground up. While most people would shy away from a task as big as this, a Rover made of the right stuff will welcome the challenge. Here's your chance to make a difference for our movement by helping us keep the flame and spirit of Rovering alive!

First, familiarize yourself with the Rover program. If you haven't done so already, read "Scouting for Boys", then read the Rover POR (Policies, Organization and Rules). This will give you some idea of how things are intended to be put together. Start preparing for your own tenderfoot test by reading over the requirements and memorizing the Scout Oath and Law. Remember, as the first Rover in your new crew, you will need to know these things in order to teach your future Rovers (and quite possibly, future Scouts).

Next, talk to people you'd like to have in your crew. Do you have any friends who like to get outdoors? Invite them on a hike and tell them how you want to start a crew. Do you know any Scouters who might be looking for an opportunity to spend time with other adults and practice their Scouting skills? Do you know of anyone who was maybe never a Scout but would love to give it a try? Maybe you know some people who are interested in an alternative to the mainstream alternatives. You only need four people to charter a Crew but why stop there? The more people you have, the more you'll feel like a Crew. A good number to shoot for is eight, because then you can have two patrols.

When you've generated enough interest to form your Crew, set a date to have an informal meeting. Invite your people. Ask them to bring a notepad, calendar, and lots of ideas! You can make it a pot-luck dinner, or have it after dinner and have people bring desserts or even better, ask everyone to bring their favorite cheese & cracker combo or homemade cookies or brownies – make it a cracker-barrel! You'll want to be armed with some information about the program (like the POR), ideas about activities you want to do, and maybe some pictures of other live & active crews. Remember that different people have different ideas about what "camping" is, much less "scouting", so arriving at some common ground will be important. Some people form Crews to enjoy the experience of being in a Crew. Others form Crews with intents of building an entire Scout Group, which would include a Wolf Cub Pack, Scout Troop, and your Crew for them to graduate into.

You'll want to pick a name and Crew colors. A name can be anything meaningful to you. The best names have some sense of tradition or lore associated with them. Look at your area's local historical figures, geographic features, or natural landmarks. You can also name yourselves after your city or county... whatever works for you is best. Your Crew colors will provide the basis for your neckerchief colors, flag, and Crew crest. Be sure to pick colors that have not already been reserved by other Crews. The colors you pick will be unique to your Crew.

You will want to adopt a uniform. Your best bet is to find some kind of safari or camp shirt with epaulettes. Traditionally, Rovers wore shirts with long sleeves that they would roll up. As the old phrase goes, "Sleeves up – let's Rover!" Traditional shirt colors were tan, green, blue, or grey. Shorts were often worn instead of pants, however in wintertime, please be sensible! If you're feeling really traditional, you can wear the old-style campaign hats. Some people tend to think of the traditional uniform as dress uniforms but they're really meant to be used out-of-doors which is where Rovers do most of their activities. Some Crews may wish to design a Crew tee-shirt for supplemental wear or for when you're not on a Roving activity – hey it's free advertising! It can take several meetings to get all these logistics ironed out but be sure to have fun with it.

In order for your Crew to function, you will need to decide who's going to fulfill leadership roles. Oftentimes, the one forming the Crew gets the honor of being "the leader" but if someone else is better suited for the job, so much the better. The leaders

you will have in your crew will depend on your size and needs. Generally speaking, the Rover Scout Leader (RSL) will be appointed by BPS Headquarters. In Crews having four to seven members, the crew may elect or appoint a Rover Mate (RM) to lead the patrol. With more patrols come more Rover Mates. A Mate may appoint a Rover Second to provide assistance. A Crew will also want a Scribe to take meeting notes and a Quartermaster to assist with either gear or uniforming or both. As Crews get larger, other offices may be filled, such as Treasurer, Instructor, Chaplain, Surgeon, among others.

Once you've organized yourselves, apply for a charter with BPS Headquarters. There is no fee for chartering with BPS. Contact Headquarters for details on how to do this.

Once your Crew comes together, you will plan some events. Start simple with a day hike or a one-night camp. Make your decisions based on everyone's skill levels and interests. Some Crews might not have an issue hiking in a few miles, making camp, and hiking out the next day, but if you have beginners, this might be out of the question until they gain some more experience.

Moving Your Crew Forward

Rovering is based on a knighthood theme. Baden-Powell saw Scouts as modern day knights who lived by their honor and thought of others before themselves. Knights often had one or more squires training under him, knowing that someday they too would become knights. In BPS, a Rover is known as a Squire upon admission to the Crew. A Squire, however, must pass certain tests in order to become properly invested as a Squire. After a set period, when a Squire has demonstrated a willingness to live by the ideals of Scouting, they earn full membership in the Crew by being invested as a Rover Scout. The Rover Scout is dubbed as a Rover Knight in a ceremony before their Crew.

Once a Rover is knighted, they become qualified to hold certain offices, earn badges, and in general makes them more prepared to be of service to the movement. While knighthood is not a requirement, it is important that members be invested as a Squire soon after joining. This will provide each member with exposure to the advancement program, help them feel as if they are moving toward a goal, and at a minimum, get them to achieve the basic membership requirements in the Crew.

In order for members to become invested as Squires, it's best to plan a Brownsea Training Camp weekend. Brownsea is a Rover Squire training course, named after the very first Scout encampment held in 1907. At Brownsea, you will learn the basics of Rovering, from the history of the movement to hands-on basics. The goal of Brownsea is twofold:

1. for every Squire to earn their Tenderfoot badge
2. for everyone to learn how to train other Squires

Before attending Brownsea, it's a good idea for every Squire to have prepared by doing the following:

1. read "Rover Scouts – What They Are!", an original Boy Scouts Association publication
2. memorize the Scout Oath and Law
3. practice the required knots and be familiar with trail signs
4. become familiar with Tenderfoot requirements – so there'll be no surprises!

There are various Rover Scouts scattered throughout the country who are qualified to teach Brownsea. We will do our best to provide this training to you.

Once your Crew has been properly trained, your members will be familiar with how to train incoming Squires, which leads to the next topic...

You will want to grow your crew. Decide of course how many members you want to have. Some Crews elect to keep their membership numbers low for cohesion and team spirit. Others don't mind being larger to have a variety of members and to help keep the Crew vibrant and ever-evolving. History of course shows us that the more active the Crew, the easier it will be to attract members. Have your members talk to their friends about what you're doing. Invite them to join you on a hike or weekend camp. Hold an open house for your Crew – have photos and information about what you've been doing. Make a Crew website and keep it up to date. If you render service to organizations like churches or schools, be sure to follow up with a letter to document what you did for them. Service work is a good way to draw positive attention to your Crew and its activities.

Keep your Crew's calendar active and up to date. A Crew that does nothing loses its momentum. Always give your Crew activities to look forward to. While there is business to attend to, always strive to meet outdoors. There are numerous resources on the internet to help you plan your program. Talk with other Crew leaders to gain insight from them as to what works and what doesn't. Don't be afraid to make mistakes, but don't let fear of mistakes keep you from doing anything. Most of all: make sure you're having fun!

As your Crew develops, keep a history of what you're doing. It will provide valuable insight later on for you and for others who want reproduce what you've done. It will give you something positive for your Crew to look back on. Your stories are waiting to be told – the adventures are calling – so roll your sleeves up, get out there and go ROVER!