

Wee Moot Thumbsticks and Plaques

An integral part of the Rover Scout uniform is the thumbstick or hike staff. Usually about 5' in length but more dependent of the Scouts personal preference. Ideally the staff extends to a point midway on the Rovers chest. Allowing for him to comfortably rest his hand while standing at about the same elevation as his heart.

Traditionally it is a forked stick made of a sturdy wood. Usually debarked and sanded smooth and finished to be weather resistant. Most of the time the sticks were found and crafted to suit one's needs but there are also stories of finding some less than perfect sticks and steaming them in a cast iron pipe with a big fire built over them and then straightening them to perfection. No matter its origins the main purpose of the thumbstick is to assist the Rover in his treks, keeping him steady while covering uneven ground. The thumbstick helps to guide him on his way across streams, through thick cover and rocky slopes.



The origin of the thumbstick goes way back to the early days of British history. While humans have always carried sticks and clubs to protect and assist them, from as early as the pre-history days of the great historical migrations, but the thumbstick was a refinement for a more specific purpose. It was meant to be a support for the early land owners while checking their flocks in the rocky crags of the British highlands. A fall might prove to be catastrophic to a lone shepherd far from any help in the countryside. Knowing that no one was available to rescue him, the importance of self-reliance was paramount. A lightweight but strong staff would serve the purpose and allow the shepherd to scramble over unsteady ground with ease.

Later some of the same land owners learned the trick of resting the heavy gun barrels in the fork to steady their aim when hunting. It was only a natural progression for the lonely shepherd to pass time by carving and personalizing their sticks while out watching over the livestock. Some would add a leather strap to keep a grip in slick conditions. Others would add a brass or bone tip at the bottom to keep from fraying the wood. While others would take the elaborate effort to carve whistles into the handles to call dogs, livestock or even for help if necessary. The thumbsticks quickly became a source of great pride and as with most prized possessions treasured and passed down within families.

It is no wonder that Rovers came to identify with the thumbstick so readily. In fact one US Rover Crew named themselves after their thumbsticks, The Diamond Willow Crew of Oak Park Illinois. Some Rovers were so proud of their thumbsticks and what they represented that when they passed on their sticks were to be buried with them. Ted Simmons, Skipper of the DW Crew was buried with his personal thumbstick.



Baden-Powell had recognized the usefulness and simplicity of the thumbstick to assist one when hiking. He adopted the idea and added a few refinements of his own to help personalize the staff for Rovers. Very early when creating the Rover Scout program B-P knew that the older individuals were much different from the boys of Scout age.



He recognized that the system of awarding badges for every achievement was not something to appeal to Rover age fellows. That is the reason there was no advancement system in the Rover branch of Scouting, after a Squire achieves the rank of Rover. But to acknowledge that an individual had met with other Rovers at camps or Moots, as they would be soon called, the idea of the thumbstick plaques was developed.

A small usually less than 2" square plaque was developed, not to be worn on the uniform like a Scout badge, but mounted upon the hike staff. It served as a historical record of the Rover's personal journeys. Since a Rover always carried their thumbstick with him while hiking it was a constant reminder to him as to where he previously had been while on his travels to somewhere new.

The thumbstick plaques for the B-P Crew came about with the 1964 Wee Moot. They were given to participants of the Moots along with their badge when they registered. The first ones were a simple piece of thin aluminum sheet with a single color, screen-printed image of the current Wee Moot badge on it. The words around the outer edge read "Sixth Rover Wee Moot 1964".





In 1965 the screened image was simply the cross of St George with the words “VII Wee Moot 1965 Glasgow KY” on it as opposed the more elaborate design of that current year’s badge. In 1967 the plaque was also a simple silk screened image of the badge. Thereafter the thumbstick plaques were a small copy of that current year’s badge made with a thicker piece of brass. Most, all except the 77 & 79, had a white enamel background with the red cross of St George and badge image super imposed upon it. The last Wee Moot thumbstick plaque was in 1993 was for the last official moot. There were no plaques created for the 1999 Memorial.

Not only were the Wee Moot thumbstick plaques mounted on the Rovers hike staff but a few were turned into awards for winning competitions at Wee Moot. Jim Simmons would spend many hours sitting on his porch crafting trophies for the upcoming moots. The winning Crew or individual Rover would receive the handmade trophy for winning a highland game event or canoe race. The most prized of the trophies were the belt buckles with an attached plaque for winning the night ramble hike event.



