

# SEA SCOUTING – AN OVERVIEW

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Scouts on Labour Weekend canoe trip down the Waikato River, rafting up for a bit of chat



The aim of Scouting NZ is to encourage the mental, physical and spiritual development of its membership (both youth and adult). This leaves a very wide scope for delivering an exciting programme.

We are fortunate enough to be blessed with a geography and lifestyle in this country that is well suited to water activities and it is in this environment that Sea Scouting thrives. The Sea Scouts are a branch of Scouting NZ and use the maritime environment to deliver a range of water based activities to provide a safe, fun, challenging and adventurous programme in which to develop important life skills.

While much of the activity is based around the maritime environment, most Sea Scout groups still do a full range of the traditional land activities based around camping and tramping and the resulting programme tends to be full and varied.

While the Sea Scout programme varies between groups and around the country depending on skills and resources available, it tends to follow a similar structure, much of which is based around a progressive badge scheme, local and national regattas and relationships with local boating clubs and associated maritime industry.

A key tool that is the Sea Scout cutter, a 17ft clinker built boat that has become a focal point of the programme for more than 60 years. This is typically supplemented by the use of canoes, the sunburst sailing dingy, small patrol boats and a variety of other craft that come to hand to aid the teaching of water based skills.

The cutter has proven to be a key tool in the success of Sea Scouting in New Zealand. While it cannot be described as a streamlined racing craft it delivers in so many ways. Used as a rowing boat it encourages physical fitness, teaches rowing skills and boat control, communication and team work. In 15 to 20 minutes it can be rigged for sailing. Typical drill includes man over board, capsize, coming alongside and anchoring, sailing rules and race tactics. Knotting, from reef knots to buntline hitches, splicing and care of ropes are taught as well as basic maintenance from touching up paintwork and minor fibreglass repairs to the re-ribbing of a whole cutter (see previous article in issue 61 of *Professional Skipper*).

It also provides a standard boat that allows the groups to test their skills against one another. Many countries, including the UK where Sea Scouting was born, do not have a standard boat and hence this makes it more difficult for the crews to push themselves to develop skills further, as they cannot measure themselves against one another as easily.

Scouting is split into five age groups starting at six years and going through to 26 years for the youth programme. Typically the Kea section (six to eight years) is about an introduction to a variety of water activities in sheltered environments. The



Keas and cubs using a cutter "waka" style



Senior cubs being shown the use of a patrol boat

primary aim is to develop an awareness of activities, water safety and create an excitement about new experiences.

Cubs (eight to 10 years) will build on this introduction and start to develop some basic skills, from tying a reef knot, holding a canoe paddle correctly and tipping out of a canoe to build the confidence in themselves that they are safe and know how to deal with such situations. Group family boating days and camps tend to provide the younger sections with a large number of role models in the form of the Scouts and Venturers, and provide them with an opportunity to play in the bigger boats.

In the Scout and Venturer sections a progressive badge scheme (that is closely aligned to the recently restructured Coastguard Day Skipper training modules) is used. At Scout level (10-14 years) a competitive element is introduced via the way of regattas and sailing series to encourage development of skills, fitness, teamwork and leadership. With these skills in place the older members (Venturers, 14 -19 years) are encouraged to load the boats with camping equipment and set off on overnight expeditions as a way of bringing all the skill sets together. While the Rovers (19-26 years) are a service based section and provide assistance in delivery of the programme.

Articles to follow will explore in more detail the typical skills that are developed in each of the youth sections. 