

The Tradition of the Campfire Ashes

Known by some as “The Spirit of the Fire”, the tradition of the campfire ashes extends back to the beginning at Brownsea Island in July of 1907, the first Boy Scout camp. Legend has it that Baden-Powell would always take a small amount of ashes from a ceremonial campfire and then spread those ashes into the next campfire.

The purpose of the ashes is to share the memories of past campfires and to carry to all Scouts and Scouters the international aspect of the World Brotherhood of Scouting. The ashes spread into our Wood Badge Course No. 12-651-21 campfire have been carried around the world to over 700 Scouting campfires in many countries where Scouting fellowship has been shared.

While we have adopted this tradition in Wood Badge, it is not limited to Wood Badge. These ashes come from campfires at Cub Scout Day Camps, Order of the Arrow ceremonies, training conferences, Boy and Girl Scout camps, and high adventure bases. They include 16 U. S. National Jamborees, 6 World Jamborees, 145 Wood Badge courses, and the Scouting Centennial Celebration at Gilwell Park.

It is a tradition that after the fire has died down, the ashes are stirred, and all those present at the ceremony carry ashes away from the campfire. Seeing how special these ashes are you might be tempted to set them in a place of honor and never open them or use them again, but the richness of this tradition is not in keeping the ashes; but in the sharing of ashes. We encourage you to spread this tradition to your home units, and to the youth that you serve.

Lord Baden-Powell said:

"We carry our friendships with us in these ashes from other campfires with comrades in other lands. May the joining of the past fires with the leaping flames of this campfire symbolize once more the unbroken chain that binds Scouts and Guides of all nations together. With greetings from our brothers and sisters around the world, I add these ashes, and the fellowship therein, to our campfire.