

Wood Badgers: Highland Dress and the Boy Scout Uniform

By Ted Severe, Wood Badge Co-Ordinator, Mid-Atlantic Region, CMSNA

A question was recently posed to the Clan MacLaren Society of North America, Ltd.: How can one wear Highland dress AND the Boy Scout uniform?

This is an easy one to answer: The Highland dress Boy Scout uniform would be official Boy Scout uniform from the waist up and Highland Dress from the waist down with a few tweaks.

You Wood Badgers know what makes up the Boy Scout uniform after all of those uniform inspections during your Wood Badge course and the constant reminder to set the example. It's when you add Highland dress to the equation that things get different. So here goes, from top to bottom:

- Headgear – Wear either your Scout campaign hat or a Scottish bonnet. If you wear a Scottish bonnet, you have two choices: the Balmoral bonnet (looks like a beret with a big pom-pom [it's called a "toorie" in Scotland]) or the Glengarry bonnet (if you've been in Scouting long enough, this is similar to the old "overseas" cap Scout hat, long gone). If you go with either bonnet, you have two more choices: diced or non-diced. Dicing is the band around the bottom edge of the bonnet that looks like a checkerboard pattern. More often the dicing is a combination of red, white and black squares. Personally, I prefer the non-diced plain Glengarry and Balmoral (I wear both as well as a campaign hat, but only one at a time). On either variety of bonnet, there is a ribbon cockade on the left side to which you add a clan crest badge. For all members of the Clan MacLaren Society (kinsmen and Wood Badge), this would be the MacLaren clan crest badge. It is usually silver-colored and looks like a round strap-and-buckle with the Clan Chief's motto, "Creag an tuirc" (which translates to "the Boar's Rock," the traditional clan gathering place in Balquhiddy, Scotland) on the strap. In the center of the strap-and-buckle is a lion's head in profile looking to the left on a twisted rope-like device called a "wreath." The lion has a crown on his head with four points. On either side of the lion's head are laurel branches. If the clan crest were in color, the lion's head would be black, the crown would be gold and the laurel branches their normal green color and the "wreath" would be red and gold (alternating twists). One can also change the black ribbon cockade to red and gold to match the main colors in the Chief's coat of arms or one could use a small (approximately 3 inch by 3 inch square) of MacLaren tartan fabric on which one pins the clan crest badge to the bonnet. An alternative to the MacLaren clan crest badge would be a large Boy Scout First Class rank emblem pin or, if you can find one, an old metal Scout Hat Badge. You can find these old metal hat badges on Ebay and get lucky enough to win an auction for one for about \$15.00-\$25.00. Don't jump for the first one that you see because they turn up fairly often. These Scout hat badges are similar in style to the U.S. First Class badge. The most common ones seen are British and Canadian.
- Scout uniform shirt with all of the insignia in the right places as per Boy Scout regulations. Be sure to wear your Wood Badge Beads, neckerchief and woggle in the customary manner. If you are the recipient of Scouting awards (Silver Beaver, adult religious awards, etc.), these are certainly to be worn as the occasion merits.

- Kilt – MacLaren tartan is the first choice for your kilt. Here you have choices in tartan fabric: “Modern” colors; “ancient” colors, “weathered” colors or “dress” tartan. Once you’ve picked out your tartan fabric, then you get to decide how the kilt is pleated. You have two choices here: the first choice is whether, from the back, you want to see the “sett” of the tartan (the tartan pattern itself) once the kilt is pleated or the “stripe,” where a particular vertical stripe is seen at each pleat. Please refer to any Highland merchandise catalog where kilts are offered. They show you photographically what pleating to “sett” or “stripe” looks like. The kilt is not an inexpensive item, the lowest price for an 8-yard 13-oz. kilt is about \$375.00 and, depending on the vendor, the price goes up from there. Please shop around to get the best price and, believe it or not, kilts are less expensive to have made in the United States than in Scotland and they are using Scottish fabric! If you have Scottish ancestry other than MacLaren, you can wear your kilt in your family’s tartan.
- Kilt Pin – You do need one. Its main purpose is to use its weight to help “hold down” the corner of the apron of your kilt. It is only pinned through the front apron approximately two inches in from the fringe of the apron and about three inches above the bottom edge of the kilt. You can find these through the many Highland dress vendors. They start around \$20.00 and go up from there. There is also a do-it-yourself route: go to a good fabric store and check in the notions section for a package of two “skirt pins.” The manufacturer should be Dritz. The cost of the package of two pins is about \$2.00. If it looks like a great big safety pin, you’ve got the wrong package. The wire making the pin will be very heavy. It’s all one piece of wire. This pin can be worn “as is” for a very traditional kilt pin. If you are handy with silver solder, consider adding a coin to the top of the pin for decoration. If you are a Beaver, use a Canadian nickel. If you are an Eagle, you could use a pre-50 state quarter, a Susan B. Anthony dollar or a Sacajawea “golden” dollar. For those who are Buffalos, you can use an old buffalo nickel (1913-1937), the 2005 Jefferson nickel with the buffalo, the 2005 Kansas quarter or the 2006 North Dakota quarter. If you go this particular route, try to get as a coin in as “pristine” condition as possible (it may be bit dodgy on the old buffalo nickels – you should be able to get these in a coin shop – ask for ones that have the date worn off – the cost should then be minimal). If you are interested in this variety of kilt pin with the coin top, let me know. I’ve made several. I currently have two that I can wear, one with the 2005 buffalo nickel and the other with the 2006 South Dakota buffalo quarter.
- Sporrans – This is your “pocket” since kilts traditionally are not made with pockets (I have seen a couple though, so they do exist but probably add quite a bit to the price of a kilt if you can find a kiltmaker who would do that particular extra work). Start out with a sporran made from leather. Good quality sporrans can be gotten starting around \$50.00. If you are a leatherworker or have a friend who does leatherwork, you can make your own. You will also need a very narrow strap to hold your sporran around your body so that it hangs in front. The strap can be leather or even black nylon webbing with a plastic fastex-style buckle (like a very long accessory strap for your backpack available in good camping supply stores). You can even make small belt loops (they look like two keyholders with leather loops and snap hooks to hold the sporran) and suspend your sporran from your belt!

- Belt – Your Scout belt will work. You may wish to consider a leather Scout belt with the Wood Badge buckle with the axe and log. If you've been to Philmont Scout Ranch, your Philmont belt and buckle will do fine also.
- Stockings – You again you have several choices. Your Boy Scout long stockings with the red tops will do but you should add garters with flashes or tabs that stick out from under the folded over top of the stocking. Again, if you're handy you can make your own garters and flashes. You can get long wool stockings from the Highland dress vendors. You can also go to sporting goods stores in soccer season and obtain single color (no embroidered sports logos, please) soccer socks for one third to one half the cost of wool Scottish stockings. Suggested colors would be navy blue, dark green, or black. For Highland evening dress, the stockings should be white or ivory.
- Skean dhu – This is the small fixed-blade knife that one sees tucked in the top of the stocking when wearing Highland dress. It is definitely an optional item. If you are wearing Highland dress to a church or synagogue, please leave your skean dhu at home. It is considered to be a weapon and weapons have no place in a church or synagogue.
- Shoes – Be sensible on this. Wear the kinds of shoes that you would with your uniform as the occasion demands.
- One last item would be a good walking stick. There are many varieties out there from adjustable metal ones to the handmade. They are easy and fun to make.

There you have it. Hopefully, we will see many more of our Wood Badge members attending CMSNA and Highland events in their Highland Scout uniforms. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch with me by any of the means listed:

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