

CAPE TOWN'S RECORD-SETTING SCOUT

He's only the third Scout in the history of South Africa to become a three-time Springbok Scout, but he's the first to also earn his Duty to God Award.

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Whatever country you live in, it takes a lot of effort to earn the top award in Scouting. So imagine the effort required to earn the award three times. Rocco du Plessis is the first Springbok Scout in the 26-year history of the First Edgemead Troop in South Africa. So becoming a three-time Springbok Scout is a huge accomplishment.

However, there's another award Rocco earned last year that is equally important to him. "Earning the Duty to God has helped me achieve even more for my personal and spiritual growth," he says. "It's about your relationship with your Father in Heaven."

"The Scouting program here is very demanding," says Rocco, who is a member of the Panorama Ward in the Cape Town South Africa Stake. It's hard to

earn the Springbok. Sure, the Scout leaders are there to help you. But it's still tough. "If you don't work very hard, if you don't pull your weight, you're not going to get it," Rocco adds. A lot of time, planning, and effort goes into every award as you advance in the Scouting program, which in South Africa is not Church sponsored.

For the Duty to God Award, Rocco says the support of his parents and his Young Men leaders has made a big difference. "They *want* you to earn your Duty to God," he says, "and so many of the requirements are things you're doing daily already." Then it's just a matter of working with your parents and leaders to record your progress in those areas. "Most of the normal Mormon aspects of your life fill Duty to God requirements—if you do them." In other words, if a young man is attending Church meetings, praying regularly, studying the scriptures, and fulfilling his priesthood responsibilities, he is on the right track.

Becoming a Springbok Scout

Only about one or two percent of all Scouts nationwide receive South Africa's top Scouting award. And then only about one or two percent of these Springbok Scouts complete more than one of the three possible Explorer challenges. Rocco completed all three challenge awards, becoming only the third Scout in South African history to accomplish the feat.

A South African Scout advances through the program from Pathfinder to Adventurer to First Class then to Explorer. The Explorer badge is split into three different sections: Land Scouts, Air Scouts, and Sea Scouts. Usually a Scout will choose one of these sections to focus on as he works toward his final advancement—Springbok. Rocco focused on all three.

Along with the other badges and requirements, there are compulsory badges specific to each type of Explorer: The Land Explorer earns his Backwoodsman and Mapping





Rocco says that earning his Duty to God Award helped his personal and spiritual growth. Opposite page: Rocco with his mother, Sally; his father, André; and his brother, Jean-Jacq. Bottom left: Rocco led a group of Scouts on a three-day hike to fulfill one of the requirements for his Springbok award. Bottom right: Rocco shooting at the Cederberg marksmanship base, run by Latter-day Saint Scouts from Cape Town.





Above right: As part of his Air Explorer requirements, Rocco flew over the Cederberg wilderness and learned about air navigation. **Right:** Rocco was coleader of 10 Scouts as they hiked through the Cedar Mountains. **Far right:** Scouts build rafts for an annual competition. **Below:** Scouts work to build a bridge Rocco designed. **Opposite page:** Rocco holds the model of his bridge and his hike log.



badges. The Air Explorer earns his Air Navigator and Air Traffic Controller badges. And the Sea Explorer earns his Helmsman and Boatsman badges for sailing and rowing.

Rocco explains that it usually takes about two weekends at a badge course to earn each award. There are the white badges—the theory behind a skill. And then there are the green badges—the practical application of the skill. For example, to earn your Backwoodsman badge, first you'll learn things like wilderness survival, navigating with the stars, and making fires without matches. Then comes the practical application. You get dropped off in the bush for 48 hours, and you're on your own.

So Rocco has been pretty busy with Scouting for several years now. From February until December last

year, for example, he was away many weekends. "It seemed I was up permanently on badge courses," he says. Plus, for the past five years, Rocco has been the troop leader. That means he's been in charge of organizing all the troop camps. He's had to plan meals, do the shopping, coordinate troop meetings, type up consent forms for the other Scouts and their parents to sign, and oversee each of the campouts.

One valuable trait Rocco has learned along the way is persistence. "At least half of my badges I didn't pass the first time on the course," he says. "Within six months you can go back and do it again or have an adult who has done the badge test you on it." For instance, one of the requirements for First Aid is bandaging. "I failed bandaging because part of the knot on one of my bandages stuck out,"

Rocco says. “So I had to redo the bandaging portion in order to earn my level-two First Aid.”

In addition to the badges, there are other projects a Scout must complete to earn his Springbok. One of these is a construction project. Rocco chose to build a bridge. He had to first design and build a scale model of the bridge. Then, with a team of six other Scouts, Rocco had to build it full size, about 20 feet tall (6 m) and 30 feet long (9 m). It took nearly nine hours to build the bridge and then disassemble it.

Then there’s community service, which is a big part of earning both the Springbok and the Duty to God Award. For his Springbok service requirement, Rocco visited more than 40 homes of seniors to help them with various chores and repairs. “The only big thing that overlapped was the



40-hour service project I was able to use for both Scouts and the Duty to God Award,” says Rocco.

Of all the requirements Rocco has fulfilled to earn his various awards, he points to one in particular as most valuable for his personal growth: “Reading the Book of Mormon,” Rocco says without hesitation. “That was the biggest and most rewarding challenge.”

Becoming a Missionary

“I had read the Book of Mormon once already, a year or so ago, but I was just reading to get it done,” Rocco explains. “When I started reading it again, I really wanted to learn and gain a testimony of it.” He approached reading the Book of Mormon in a completely different way his second time through. “Every time I read now, I pray before to ask Heavenly Father’s Spirit to be with me as I read.”

Rocco’s already begun on his next big project—to more actively share his testimony with others as he prepares to serve a full-time mission. His Scouting experiences and earning the Duty to God Award have helped him in his personal development and in becoming a missionary. “To spread the gospel, I needed to know what is in the Book of Mormon, and I needed to know that it is true,” he says. “After reading the Book of Mormon for the second time, I received a testimony of it.”

Even if there was not a Duty to God Award to earn, Rocco says he would have fulfilled most of the requirements simply because he wanted to prepare for missionary service. Attending church, reading the scriptures, praying daily, and giving service are just part of who Rocco is, of being what a Latter-day Saint is supposed to be.

Now that he has received his call to serve as a full-time missionary, the testimony Elder du Plessis has built is proving much more useful than the rope-and-log bridge he built for his Springbok construction project. However, some of the backwoodsman skills he learned as a Scout may come in handy as he serves in Zimbabwe, Zambia, and Malawi. ■



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