Some Random Thoughts on the Trip and the UK
in no particular order...

1. **Remember we will be representing the BSA, and the USA, to people who may never have met Boy Scouts or Americans before**. First impressions are important.
   a. Make up a photo album of pictures representative of your life - your family, what you do, what your troop's like, where you live. You'll find that most people (even other Americans) will assume you live in a skyscraper in mid-town Manhattan, or at least in an apartment in the suburbs. A picture of your town from the air would be interesting. I have some aerial photos of this area – Ithaca, Cortland, Dryden, Camp Barton and Tuscarora, etc.. If you're interested in a more specific photo, or are from other areas, we can meet for aerial photos. If the weather looks good on an evening or weekend, give me a call and we can meet at Ithaca or Tri-Cities Airport.
   b. Don't forget "A Scout is Courteous". The British are among the most polite people in the world. Try to live up to their standards, and not confirm their expectations about loud, pushy Americans. Watch the German and Japanese tourists, and don't act like either. Be sure to thank your home hospitality family.

   c. "A Scout is Clean" - watch your language. One of the US contingents got rather a poor reputation at a past Blair for the bad language they used. I do not want to hear anything but complimentary comments from the Scots about our group.
   d. Avoid discussing politics - whatever yours may be - with anyone. What is self-evident to you and everyone you meet here, may be entirely opposite to the world-view of those from other cultures. Our "left wing" politicians would probably be considered almost fascistically right-wing in most of Europe. Get to know the international Scouts culturally, and leave politics to the politicians.
   e. Ditto religion. "A Scout is reverent" - but this is neither encouragement nor approval of spreading your particular brand of reverence to others. Believe what you like, but realize that some of the Scouts you will meet will be from cultures in which entirely contrary (or just different) beliefs are held. Actually, this is just as true here in the USA as in Scotland.
   f. Scotland joined with England and Wales to form the United Kingdom in 1706. This union was, shall we say, not entirely voluntary. The question of whether or not Union was a Good Idea has been hotly debated north of the Border over the three hundred years since then. As we've discussed over the last year, this September the Scots will be voting in a referendum to decide whether they should remain in the United Kingdom, or become an independent nation. Since the voting age for the referendum will be 16, some of the Scouts you will meet will be voting on their country's future. This is a very emotional issue for the Scots, and opinion seems to be fairly evenly split between "Yes" (pro-independence) and "No" (unionist) voters. The vote's only a few months away, and I'm sure it will be a hot-button issue. You're free to make up your own mind on the question - in fact, please do, but please also learn some of the history first - but remember that whatever your opinion, this is a Scottish question for the Scots to decide. Don't take sides. We are just guests and interested observers.

2. **Money**:
    a. How much to bring? That's up to you and your family. The general cost of things in the UK is higher than here, especially in tourist areas. The exchange rate today was $1.70 to the pound, a bit higher than we've seen in the last few trips. Many things will be priced the same in pounds as you would see in dollars over here – which means they're really two-thirds more expensive as they seem at our current exchange rate. While we're touring, I will be paying for food, travel, admissions, all of your necessary expenses (well, actually, YOU have already paid them - that's what your fees were for - but I will be doling it out as needed). At the Jamborette, all of the necessities are provided. The only thing you will need money for is un-necessities - souvenirs, snacks, and so on. Talk it over with your folks – and don't bring too much in cash up front.
    b. Be sure to reserve some spending money for while you're with the Scottish family at the end of the trip. Use your own judgment on this.
    c. Don't plan on being able to change money regularly over there. You can change US dollars to British pounds at banks or Bureaus de Change while we're touring, but you won't get as favorable an exchange rate as you will here, and there may not be any place to change money where we happen to be at any given time.
    d. ATM cards on the NYCE or Cirrus network (most of our local banks are both) can be used in the UK, and it's one of the most convenient ways of getting cash. There are ATMs all over Scotland, and there even is one in Blair Atholl village. The exchange rate on ATM withdrawals is often much better than you can get for cash. Beware, however, that the network charge for using an ATM can be as much as $10 per withdrawal, so don't use them too often or for small amounts, and budget for the additional fee. Your family may want to set up a budget for you, which you can withdraw at an ATM each week. Before you leave check with your bank and make sure that they know you're going to be using the ATM card in the UK - some banks require separate authorization for foreign withdrawals or notification that you're leaving the country, to avoid credit card fraud. My son Joe's Tompkins Trust ATM card wasn't accepted in England in 2003, and we had one Scout in 2010 who couldn't use his card for this reason.
    e. I don't recommend using Travelers Checques. Not everyone takes them, and you will find them hard to redeem if you bring any back – the bank may well charge more to take the checques back than they are worth.
3. **While I'm on the subject of money…** I won't be policing your purchases - other than if I catch you browsing something inappropriate (you *know* what I mean – that magazine's wrapped in opaque plastic for a reason). That said, there are lots of things you *can* buy which you probably *shouldn't* buy – not that there's anything wrong with them, just that they're, well, stupid. Think twice before you buy something which (a) is too young for you, (b) has nothing to do with the trip (you can buy cheap junk cheaper here than there), or (c) is expensive, fragile, bulky or all three. Ask yourself, "when I get this home, will I wonder why I bought it?" Remember that whatever you buy you're going to have to carry and store in your tent at the Jamborette.

4. **Clothing**:

   a. Uniforms: We will wear uniforms at all times while touring. It's amazing how many people will take the time to speak with us when they see the uniform, and this is an official BSA activity. At the Jamborette, you'll need full uniform for town and castle visits, for retreat and inspection, and for special events. You'll want at least two, preferably three, uniform shirts, with correct patches (if one's a bit small, you might get lucky and trade it off at the Jamborette for a Scottish shirt). If you don't own three shirts, check with other Scouts in your troop - you might be able to borrow an extra one for the duration. Bring one pair of Scout shorts (or long uniform pants if you'd prefer). Merit badge sashes are up to you - personally, I'd leave it home. It's just one more thing to pack, and the merit badges themselves won't mean anything to most of the international Scouts.

   b. Bring at least one pair of other pants for the rest of the time at the Jamborette and home visit. You'll want a pair of long pants (Scout pants, if you have them, and/or clean blue jeans) for the inevitable cold day, and if you're more comfortable in shorts, bring them too. Bring one decent civilian shirt. While you're at home visitation you can get away with t-shirts most of the time, but there might be an occasion you would want to be presentable.

   c. T-Shirts: most of the time, other than while touring, you'll be wearing a t-shirt and shorts. Bring 8-10 t-shirts, preferably Scout-type (camp, troop, jamboree, National supply). Please *do not bring t-shirts bearing inappropriate messages or images*. If there's any question of whether a given shirt is appropriate, assume it isn't. Shirts with political messages, sexual or drinking references, are specifically forbidden. If you have a t-shirt promoting your favorite band, pretend you never heard of the band and look at it again - if it seems "iffy", leave it home.

   d. Do not bring "hoodie" sweatshirts – they're associated with gang activity in the UK.

   e. We'll send our clothes to a laundry in Pitlochry soon after we arrive at the Jamborette so bring enough underwear, etc. for at least ten days. That way, you'll have clean clothes for a few days into the Jamborette, then you'll get the wash back for the remainder of the Jamborette.

   f. Expect rain - you'll be camping outdoors in tents for the ten days of the Jamborette. Bring a poncho or raincoat or waterproof windbreaker (anorak). Extra-large ziplock bags are a good idea for keeping clothes dry in your pack.

   g. A hint for packing - start at the top of your head, and work your way down (i.e. hat, shirt(s), t-shirt(s), belt, pants, etc., down to socks and shoes. That way you won't forget anything.

5. **Luggage:** Bring one pack (internal frame is best) to check and a *small* day pack for carry-on.

6. **Friendship gifts**: It's traditional to exchange friendship gifts with other Scouts. Anything which is representative of this country or area would be appropriate. You'll also want to bring something for your host family after the Jamborette – again, something representative of NY would be good.

7. **Patches**: Patch trading isn't as big in the UK as here, but it wouldn't be out of line to bring some patches to trade or give out. The Scout Office usually has old camporee patches at a bargain price. Council strips would certainly be popular, because of the B-P name. Bear in mind that the Scout rule is one-for-one trades only, and trades always end with a handshake.

8. **What to call them:** Inhabitants of the United Kingdom are all "British", but people who live other than in England do not like being called "English". Citizens of Scotland are "Scots" or "Scottish", but never "Scotch" (that's a drink). At the Jamborette, there are "Scottish Scouts" and "International Scouts", but no "foreigners" - I kept getting corrected on that on my first trip.

9. **A note on the "Union Flag"** (not the "Union Jack" - a jack is a naval flag). The British national flag unites the crosses of St George (white with vertical red cross), St Andrew (blue with a white diagonal cross), and St Patrick (white with diagonal red cross), representing England, Scotland, and Northern Ireland, respectively. An important point to remember if you ever have to raise one is that it has an "upside down" - look at the diagonal crosses. The diagonal red line is off-center on the wider white stripe. The thicker part of the white line should be at the top on the side where the flag attaches to the pole.

10. **Language:** In Scotland, while a form of Gaelic is theoretically the national language, they actually speak "Scots", which is a variety of English very different from English or American English. "To" becomes "tae", "home" is "hame", and so on. Glaswegian Scots is the hardest to understand, in my experience. Gaelic speakers are most common in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland's north and west – you may hear some Gaelic and see Gaelic road signs if you make it there.

11. **Crime:** The UK is, on the whole, probably somewhat safer than comparable areas in the USA, but then most areas in the USA aren't as bad as they are made to seem, either. In my many visits to the UK, in general I felt quite safe. That said, petty street crime is common anywhere there are tourists. Don't leave anything in sight in the car when we're touring, especially cash. We did have a van broken into on our 2006 trip because someone left a wallet on the seat (only cash was taken). Be careful to keep your money in a safe place, not in a fat wallet hanging out of your back pocket. Sadly, there have been thefts of patches and the like left unattended even in Scout facilities, so be careful. At the Jamborette, there is a bank and facilities to keep valuables. Bear in mind that your US passport is a "hot item" for theives, so be very careful to keep it buttoned up in your shirt pocket and don't leave it around if you have to use it to cash a traveler's checque or the like.

12. **Rules of the Road:** in the UK they drive on the left side of the road, which takes some getting used to. Remember when crossing a street to look opposite to the way you think you should look! In tourist areas they sometimes paint arrows on the sidewalk with signs "Look this Way."

13. **Practice Situational Awareness:** Please *be sure not to wander off alone*, and keep track of where the group is all the time. Whenever we stop the Patrol Leader of each patrol will count his group – once you're counted *don't move!* We'll be moving around quickly, and it will be easy to get separated if you don't pay attention.

14. You will no doubt see people on the streets of Dublin or Edinburgh or elsewhere who you have never seen before. Remember "a Scout is Kind" and keep any comments you may have until we get back to our home for the evening.

15. **Electricity:** The UK uses 220 volt 50 Hertz electricity. We use 120 Volt 60 Hertz over here. Don't worry about what this means if you don't understand, just realize that this means *you will not be able to use anything which has to be plugged in*! On top of that, they use a strange-looking system of plugs with fat rectangular pins - two horizontal and one vertical - while, of course, over here our plugs have two flat vertical pins and sometimes a round one. There are various kinds of converters sold in Radio Shack, among other places - some just convert the plugs (leaving the

voltage sufficient to fry most things American), others are just resistors for use with electric razors or heaters (but should not be used with anything else), still others are transformers which change the voltage more smoothly but at low power. While these things can convert plugs and voltages, they can't convert frequency, which is important to most things other than shavers (which just run a little slow). Many chargers and "wall warts", though, are made for the worldwide market and can handle US and UK voltages. If there are any questions I can look at the item and tell you what sort of converter you'd need. Battery-powered stuff is OK, as AA and AAA cells in Britain are the same as here.

16. **Broadcasting:** I'm sure you'll get the chance to sample British Radio at some point – in the cars while we're touring if nothing else. You will probably get a chance to see a little British TV during your home visit. Here are a few comments:

    a. The AM and FM radio bands in the UK are the same as here, although the channel spacing is different. Many of the popular (rock) stations are on the MW band (100-500KHz) which most radios built for US frequencies would *not* cover.

    b. Most of the radio stations belong to either the four radio networks of the British Broadcasting Company (BBC), a government agency, or to a regional radio network (Radio Scotland, Radio Yorkshire, etc). BBC1 and BBC2 tend to carry popular music and some topical programs, and BBC4 is a weird variety of talk radio - dramas, soap operas, comedies, gardening shows (*lots* of gardening shows), and some stuff which defies classification. If you want to preview it, you can get live BBC radio on the web at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/ Try it out.

    c. There are fewer broadcast TV channels in the UK than here - only five when I last looked. Two are owned by the BBC (called BBC-1 and BBC-2) and tend to carry talking-heads discussion programs (programmes) and the sort of highbrow dramas we're used to seeing on PBS in this country. Most of the britcoms you see on PBS over here originated on BBC, as did some programs like *Doctor Who*. There's also original programming on Carleton, SkyTV and TV4, the independent channels, although they seemed to specialize in re-runs of US programs. Most people have cable TV now, so they'll also get a variety of specialist channels, just like here.

    d. As for the local programming, it ranges from fantastic (think Masterpiece Theater) and hysterical (many comedies) to the incomprehensible (Cricket) and the unbearable (most of the rest of the programming). There are lots of game shows; although it's often impossible to determine just what the point of the competition is or how (or if) anyone wins. "Whose Line is it Anyway?" is one of the clearest of British game shows. It goes downhill from there – if *QI* is airing while you're there, watch it. You won't be able to figure it out, but it's lots of fun. British commercials are worth watching in their own right, even though half the time you won't be able to tell what product they are advertising. Watch out for the car show *Top Gear* on Sunday evening. Programs after the 9:00PM "adult watershed" can be much more explicit than you'd be likely to see on broadcast TV here.

    e. As here, British TV has converted to digital. However, the British TV system is not compatible with the US. For historic reasons it's coded as "PAL", which is different from the "NTSC" system used in the USA and Japan and the "SECAM" system used in parts of Europe. The picture has a different scan rate (frames per second) than US TV, for one thing. Even though the DVDs they use are physically the same medium as ours, electronically they're recorded

entirely differently. Therefore, don't buy any videos in the UK unless they specifically say they are for US consumption (they may say "US Standard" or "NTSC"). Some tourist-oriented DVDs have a PAL side and an NTSC side - if they do, they'll say so on the cover. Also, we're in different copyright regions, so the region 2 disks sold in the UK might not work in region 1 DVD players over here. Some DVDs are region-free, and might work anywhere. If you find one you'd like while we're touring, I can look at it and see if I can figure it out. Audio CDs, on the other hand, are the same as here, and may be safely purchased.

f. A pet peeve on iPods, handheld video games and their equivalents: We're going a very long way, and there will be lots to see. I personally find it rather insulting to have Scouts buried in their GameBoy instead of paying attention to where we are and what we're talking about. Save the electronics for night-time or riding in the car. Also, if I can hear the thing, it's too loud.

17. **Time:** The UK is on British Summer Time (BST), which is five hours ahead of Eastern Daylight Savings Time. You'll want to reset your watch when the plane takes off, which will give you the incentive to get to sleep on the plane - it will instantly be 11 at night, rather than six in the afternoon. I strongly recommend you sleep as much as possible on the way over, as we'll land early in the morning and have a full day ahead of us. Don't say I didn't tell you so. Also, signs and timetables in Britain use the 24-hour or military time system - 8:15 PM is 20.15. To figure it out, if the hour number is greater than 12, it's PM, and subtract 12.

18. **Camera:** You'll want a camera on the trip. You're going to want to have lots of pictures to show around when you get back and help you remember the trip. I'll be distributing CDROMs of my pictures when we have a reunion, sometime in October, probably, but you'll want your own pictures, too.

a. **Film or Digital?** Digital. Next question?

b. **Storage:** be sure to bring plenty of picture storage (i.e. film or memory). Any common type of memory card would be available in Scotland, if you needed to buy one, but at *very* high prices. Get them here - it's much cheaper than in Britain. 4GB or 8GB memory cards are available for less than $10 (I just bought two 16GB cards on sale for $5 each), and can hold thousands of pictures – but be sure to try the card out before you leave. Unless you're planning on making really huge prints (11"x14" or larger) you probably don't need the highest resolution your camera is capable of - set your camera to a pixel count of 3MP or less, and you'll fit lots more pictures on each card.

c. **Batteries:** If your camera uses rechargeable batteries, Pete and I will have a converter and outlet strip to plug a charger into while we're touring. We won't be able to charge 10 different batteries at a time, so let us know if you're hoping to share our electricity. There may not be any official charging facilities at the Jamborette (sometimes they'll charge things at Reception for a small payment), but you're less likely to take lots of pictures there anyway.

19. **Eating:** When we stop to eat, I will scan the menu and give you a budget. It is your responsibility to stay within the budget. Sometimes, I'll say, "get a meal", which means all of the meals are within our budget – but "a meal" means an entrée and a drink. This does *not* include appetizers ("starters") or dessert ("pudding") unless I specifically say so (don't hold your breath). *Drinks almost never come with refills in the UK*, so don't ask for them unless you confirm they're free. Don't over-order – "a Scout is thrifty" and I hate to see food wasted.

20. **Food variations:**

a. **Drinks**: *Lemonade* is carbonated; it's a little like Sprite. Root beer is unknown. *Ginger Beer* might be offered as a substitute for root beer, but it's nothing at all similar. Many things come in "*Black Currant*" flavor – a currant is a berry, and tastes a bit like a raspberry / blueberry mix. *Irn-Bru* (pronounced "Iron Brew") is "the other Scottish National Drink" (you're all too young to drink the first one) – it's international emergency orange, tastes like bubble gum mixed with Gatorade and Scope, and is instantly addicting to all under 18. *Lucozade* is basically sugar water, and is made by Glaxo SmithKline, those wonderful folks who brought you Tums, Zantac and Polident, for what that's worth. If you ask for "water" in a restaurant, you get bottled water (expensive) – ask for "tap water" instead, it's free.

b. A **British Breakfast** traditionally includes fried tomatoes, fried mushrooms, fried toast, fried eggs, baked beans, and sausage, and sometimes Black Pudding. If you don't like this sort of stuff, consider ordering something else rather than leaving perfectly good food behind. While I'm at it, Black Pudding is tasty - if you get some, try it… and don't ask what it is.

c. **Starches:** Fries are "chips", chips are "crisps" – and both are traditionally eaten with malt vinegar and salt. The British love mixing their starches – be prepared for spaghetti on toast, "chip butties" (French Fries on a bun), etc.

d. **Keep an open mind:** For certain, you will have the opportunity to eat things this trip you've never seen before. In the words of my grandmother, "try it, you'll like it". If you don't like it, don't ask for it again, but leave your food prejudices at home. Mom may make a special dinner for you so you don't need to eat the broccoli. I won't - and neither will your patrol at the Jamborette. And broccoli is good. Just ask my rabbit.

21. **e-Mail:** There will be a portaCabin at the Jamborette with a number of computers. Scouts and staff can use the computers for e-mail at scheduled times. If you want to use this, you will need some kind of web access to your internet account. Check with your internet service provider for instructions, or you might want to sign up for a special gmail or hotmail account for use during the trip. Do not expect the computers to have any AOL or other specialized software, or to be able to install any software yourself. It is unlikely that these computers will have any readers for digital media, and they will not have software for your camera, so you probably won't be able to send digital pictures back.

22. **Cell phones:** Only triple- or quad-band GSM phones will work in the UK. AT&T and T-mobile are the only US providers who use GSM, as far as I know. Verizon or Sprint phones won't work. Even if the phone will work, though, the cost for international roaming can be frightening - $1 a minute or more. Each text you send or receive could cost as much as 50 cents. International data is exorbitant - leave an e-mail program on, and you could get an $800 phone bill when you get home - therefore, turn data OFF. That said, I really recommend leaving your phone at home. You're going to a new country - cut the electronic apron strings and enjoy it.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to call me. You're more likely to catch me at work (256-2000) or by e-mail (wb2jwd@htva.net) than by calling me at home (844-8584).