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Ben Leonard: Scouts referred to police after teen unlawfully killed

7 hours ago



NORTH WALES POLICE

| Ben Leonard died while on a hiking trip in north Wales in 2018

By George Herd, Oliver Slow & Catriona Aitken

BBC News

The Scout Association could be investigated by police over whether it tried to pervert the course of justice after a teenager was killed on a hike.

Ben Leonard, 16, was among a group visiting Llandudno's Great Orme when he fell 200ft (60m) from cliffs.

An inquest jury found a leader and his assistant responsible for unlawful killing, and neglect by the Scout Association contributed.

The organisation said it denied any allegations of "any criminal action".

Ben, from Stockport, Greater Manchester, was planning to hike up Yr Wyddfa, also known as Snowdon, during the trip in August 2018.

However, due to the weather, the scout group were instead taken to Llandudno in Conwy county to walk up the Orme.

Ben and two other boys broke away from the main hike and took their own unsupervised route up the hillside - but he slipped off a narrow cliff edge and fell, suffering **fatal head injuries**.

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- **We will learn from boy's death, says scout boss**
- **Scout leader quizzed over safety on fatal trip**

During the inquest into his death, assistant coroner David Pojur referred the Scouts and an employee - who cannot be named by court order - to police to investigate for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice.

North Wales Police confirmed on Thursday it was reviewing the details of the referral and was therefore unable to comment.

But jurors were not told of the police referral and the media were ordered not to report it until the jury reached their conclusions.

Lawyers for the Scouts and several other individuals applied to extend the reporting restriction indefinitely, but this was refused following an application by several media organisations including the BBC.

The conspiracy to pervert the course of justice referral relates to the first inquest into Ben's death, which took place in 2020 but was abandoned for unrelated legal reasons.



| Ben (right) was described by his mother as a "very funny, extremely witty" boy

The Scouts said in a statement that it "emphatically" refuted any allegations made in court "about any criminal action" on its behalf.

The jury heard evidence that there had been no written risk assessment carried out for the summer camping trip to the Eryri national park.

There was also no on-the-day risk assessments carried out for the trip up the Great Orme, and no discussion about safety with the Explorer Scouts by their group leader Sean Glaister, or assistant leader Mary Carr.

The inquest was told that there was no Scout accredited first aider on the trip, after a senior leader failed to attend the event.

It led to questions in court about whether the trip should have been authorised in the first place.

Mr Glaister agreed The Scout Association never monitored his activities or ensured any training he was supposed to undergo had ever been done.

Bernard Richmond KC, representing Ben's family, asked Mr Glaister: "They have hung you out to dry, haven't they?"

"Yeah," Mr Glaister said. "This could have happened to any of the leaders on any of the trips we went on."



Ben died at the Great Orme in Llandudno in August 2018

Following the hearing, Jennie Price, from the Scout Association's board of trustees, said: "We take today's conclusion extremely seriously.

"We want to restate our wholehearted apology to Ben Leonard's family and our deepest sympathies continue to be with his family and friends."

She said that "as an organisation we are committed to learning" and that as a result of the death it has "already made changes to our risk assessments, safety rules, training and support we give our volunteers".

"We will closely review the coroner's observations and adopt all further changes we can, to do everything in our power to stop such a tragic event happening again," she added.

On the first day of this year's inquest, the Scouts apologised to Ben's family for failing in its duty of care and accepted responsibility for his death.

One police officer investigating the death told the inquest there had been "grave failings" and missed opportunities to prevent the tragedy.

'No one can touch the Scouts'

The jury heard Ben's family were told, "people who try and take on the Scouts are never successful" and that "no one can touch the Scouts".

It also heard Ben's family were lied to as the Scout Association was worried about "reputational damage".

Jackie Leonard, Ben's mother, said her "thoughtful, very funny, extremely witty" boy can now be in peace after the family had "lived in limbo for years".

"We've been unable to move forward, with the strange feeling that somehow Ben has not been allowed to die until we finally get a death certificate," she said.

She said she "never had any faith or trust" in the Scouts, and felt the organisation "relied" on the family being naïve to the process.

Mrs Leonard added the organisation had tried to portray her son as a "wild child", taking a "defensive" attitude.

"This verdict must surely now mean they have to be regulated by an external body," she said.

Additional reporting by PA Media

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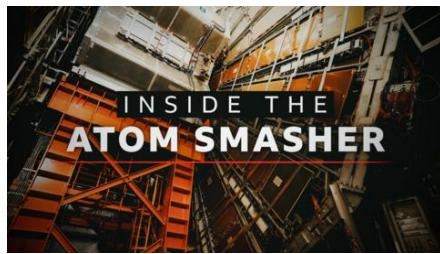
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