



**PACK  
TO  
TROOP  
ORIENTATION**

**BOY SCOUT TROOP 555  
NORTH STAR DISTRICT  
LAS VEGAS AREA COUNCIL**

BOY SCOUTS  OF AMERICA®



## **Troop Organization**

The Patrol Method – In 1888, Lord Baden Powell wrote, “The formation of the boys into Patrols of from six to eight and training them as separate units each under its own responsible leader is the key to a good Troop.”

Patrols are the building blocks of scouting. As a member of a patrol, you plan together, learn together, and all of you pitch in to turn exciting plans into action. Patrols are such an important part of scouting that a part of each troop meeting is usually set aside for each patrol to meet by itself. Every patrol has a name and every scout in the patrol wears a patch on their right sleeve with their patrol’s emblem. Each patrol has a flag they make that they carry at troop meetings and campouts. Every patrol has a yell, too. You give the yell when your patrol wins a contest or performs well at any other event.

Every six months your patrol will elect one of its members to serve as patrol leader. The patrol leader is in charge of the patrol at troop meetings and during outdoor adventures, and he represents the patrol on the patrol leaders’ council (PLC). While there is only one patrol leader, every member of a patrol shares the duties of leadership. You could be the one who finds the way on a hike, who is the chief cook in camp, or who teaches other scouts how to tie a knot.

The new-Scout patrol is a group of boys who have just become scouts. They are helped by a Troop Guide – an older, experienced scout who can show the way. Members of a new-Scout patrol choose their patrol leader, plan what they want to do, and take part in outings and troop meetings just like any patrol. They also learn the basic skills they need in order to enjoy hiking, camping, and other scout adventures. Before long, members of a new-Scout patrol will discover that they are passing many of the requirements for the ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class.

SPL – Senior Patrol Leader. This is the top boy leader of a troop and is elected by all of the scouts. With guidance from the scoutmaster, he is in charge of troop meetings and the patrol leaders council, and does all he can to see that the patrols succeed.

Patrol Leaders Council – The activities of your troop are planned by a patrol leaders’ council (PLC) made up of you patrol leaders, senior patrol leader, scoutmaster, and other troop leaders. The PLC discusses future meetings and outings for the whole troop. Your patrol leader’s responsibility is to share the ideas that have come from you and other scouts in your patrol to the PLC and to report back decisions made by the PLC back to you and the patrol.

Scoutmaster – The scoutmaster is the main adult leader of your troop. He is responsible for training the Senior Patrol Leader, meeting with each boy as they are ready for advancement, and directing the activities of the various assistant scoutmasters.

Meetings – Unlike cub scout packs, troops meet every week of the year, including summer. In addition, there are usually separate patrol meetings (1 to 2) a month and most troops will have planned a monthly outdoor activity.



## **Boy Scout Advancements**

**Joining Requirements** – All scouts when joining a troop must pass the Joining Requirements listed on page 4 of the Scout Handbook. This is much like earning the Bobcat badge when you joined your pack.

**First Year Program** – The first year program, with the ranks of Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class is designed to teach the camping, first aid, and safety skills needed to go camping to new scouts. Though called the “First Year Program” there is no time requirement on when the advancements must be completed. Some scouts can do all of the requirements in less than a year, some will take longer. Unlike cub scouts there are no age-determined advancements. All scouts go through the same advancement program no matter how old they are or when they join.

You may pass any of the requirements for Tenderfoot, Second Class, and First Class at any time. For example, if you fulfill a First Class requirement before you are a Second Class scout, you may check off the First Class requirement as completed. You may not receive a rank, however, until you have earned the one before it.

**Handbook** - This is the scout “bible”. It explains all the requirements and lists all of the information you need to know in order to reach First Class. This is also the place where your requirements get signed off. Your Troop Guide will sign off requirements that you complete. Again, unlike cub scouts, your parents cannot sign off requirements for you. We expect this book to be always with you at troop meetings and campouts.

**Scoutmaster Conference** – One requirement that boy scouts have for rank advancement that cub scouting doesn't have is that whenever you complete the requirements for a rank, you will have a Scoutmaster Conference. At this meeting the scoutmaster will review the requirements with you to make sure that they have been learned correctly, he will help you to set up the goals for the next advancement, and he will have you share your ideas about the troop (how it's going from your viewpoint, what you would like the troop to do more of, problems you see occurring...) This is a time for you and your scoutmaster to get to know each other better, so he can help you along the scouting trail. You may have scoutmaster conferences at other times, too, at either you or your scoutmaster's discretion.

**Board of Review** – Another difference in boy scout requirements is that all rank advancements (except the Joining Requirements) require a Board of Review. The members of a Board of Review can be any adult in the troop except for the scoutmaster or any of his assistants. The main purpose of the Board of Review is not to retest the skills a scout has learned, but to see what the scout's spirit is and how the troop is doing is helping the scout along and meeting Boy Scout objectives.

**Court of Honor** – When you complete a rank advancement you will usually be given the badge the night you complete the Board of Review, and you are considered to be that rank as of that night. About four times a year, the troop will hold a special meeting called a Court of Honor. This is a formal ceremony to recognize you and your fellow scouts for rank advancement and other scouting achievements like merit badges. This event is held with an audience of family, friends, chartered organization officials, and troop leaders.

**The Path to Eagle** – Once a scout has reached First Class and learned the basic skills of scouting, he is ready for the challenge of becoming an Eagle Scout. The Path to Eagle has three ranks, Star scout, Life scout, and Eagle Scout. Here the requirements for advancement



consist of earning merit badges, doing service projects to help the community, showing that you can lead other scouts as a patrol leader or some other leadership position, and demonstrating to others that you have scout spirit.

Merit Badges – A merit badge is an invitation to explore an exciting subject. With 120+ to choose from, some merit badges encourage you to increase your skill in subjects you already like, while others challenge you to learn about new areas of knowledge. Many of the merit badges are designed to help you increase your ability to be of service to others, to take part in outdoor adventures, to better understand the environment, and to play a valuable role in your family and community. Earning a merit badge can even lead you toward a lifelong hobby or set you on the way to a rewarding career.

The requirements for each merit badge appear in the current BSA merit badge pamphlet for that award, and in the book *Boy Scout Requirements*, available at scout shops and council service centers. When you have decided on a merit badge you would like to earn, and have confirmed that a counselor is available, follow these steps:

1. Obtain from your scoutmaster a signed merit badge application (blue card) and the name of a qualified counselor for that merit badge;
2. Along with another scout, a relative, or a friend, set up and attend your first appointment with the merit badge counselor;
3. Complete the requirements, meeting with the counselor whenever necessary until you have finished working on the badge.

Some important facts to know about merit badges: Any scout, regardless of rank, can earn merit badges. Although we want first year scouts to focus on their basic scout skills, some merit badges are really helpful to earn early, such as Swimming and First Aid.

There are fifteen special merit badges (pages 188 – 189 of the Scout Handbook) that must be earned in order to become an Eagle Scout. These are referred to as the “Eagle Required Badges” and have silver instead of a green border.

Other Awards – There are two other scout awards that are usually of interest to first year scouts: the *Totin’ Chip* and the *Firem’n Chit*.

When a scout demonstrates that he knows how to handle woods tools (knife, axe, saw) he may be granted totin’ rights. Until a scout has earned his Totin’ Chip he is not allowed to carry a pocketknife. If found handling wood tools incorrectly, a corner of the Totin’ Chip card is cut off. When four corners are gone, the scout’s totin’ rights are gone, and he must take the class again. Similarly, if the scout loses his Totin’ Chip card, he must retake the class to earn it again.

The owner of a Firem’n Chit has demonstrated knowledge of safety rules in building, maintaining, and putting out camp and cooking fires. Until a scout has earned his Firem’n Chit he is not allowed to carry matches. If he is found practicing with fire unsafely, he may lose his Firem’n Chit and will have to take the class again. If the scout loses his Firem’n Chit, he must retake the class.



## **Camping and Equipment**

Overall – In general the first year of camping will be pretty tame. New scouts need time to learn camping skills and what is expected of them from the Troop and their patrol. Parents may attend campouts, but are asked to keep with the adults so as not to interfere with the patrol method. Trained adults attend every campout and are in a good position to advise youth leadership.

Summer Camp – This is a week-long campout usually focused on earning merit badges or other skills. New scouts may be enrolled in a program that is focused on learning their First Class camping skill. As soon as you join the troop find out where they are going for summer camp, how much it will cost, and what forms you need to start filling out.

Equipment – There is a lot of equipment you need to go camping, but that does not mean that you have to go out and immediately buy a lot of expensive gear. When looking for camping equipment keep in mind two things: (1) new scouts start off small and grow rapidly (a sleeping bag that fits today will be too small tomorrow) and (2) new scouts will not be doing major hiking or extreme weather camping their first year.

Troop and Patrol Gear – Our troop provides tents and patrols have “chuck” boxes, or patrol boxes, that have most of the cooking gear needed. Patrols will supplement this with purchases of their own for such things as pot holders, paper towels, etc. Parents, however, usually have to supply their own tents, meals, utensils, etc.

Backpacks – When you pack more than 25% of your body weight in a pack you’ve over-packed. Those great big packs that you see older scouts and adults use are much too big for new scouts. Look for a small, inexpensive backpack for the first year (borrow one preferably) and wait for them to reach their growth before buying a bigger, better one. Also since the distance most first year scouts have to travel is from the back of the car to the tent, a duffle bag is often sufficient. Until a scout learns how to properly pack, an external frame pack is usually best. They are cheaper, allow for more freedom in packing, and the frame helps keep the lumps in the pack away from the back.

Sleeping bags – A 30° (F) sleeping bag is more than adequate for the type of camping a new scout will do in the first two years (including winter camping). Even when the temperature goes down to zero the scouts will be sleeping inside tents with other scouts, dressed, and with a bag liner or blanket inside the bag. Sleeping bags filled with down are to be avoided. Though they are the “warmest and lightest” they lose almost all of their insulating ability when they get wet (a common occurrence for new scouts) and cannot be dried out on a camping trip. The new synthetics are almost as good as down, retain most of their insulating capability when wet, and can be dried on a camping trip. Mummy bags are good because they heat up faster, are lighter and easier, and usually come with a hood to keep the head warm. They can sometimes be uncomfortable for new scouts, however, because they feel constrictive.

Boots - Boots are an essential for camping. Sneakers do not provide any ankle support and quickly get wet with a little rain. Boots should go above the ankle and should have a gusseted tongue (the tongue has extra material to the sides that attach to the boot) so that water and dirt are kept out. Look for a minimum number of sewn seams (because they all have to be waterproofed) and a cemented or sewn sole. Get a good foot liner to help wick moisture out of the boot. See pages 200-201 of the Scout Handbook for more information about boots and socks.



Flashlights – The preferred flashlights for scouts is a headlamp-style LED or other convenient light. They are lightweight, hands-free, and relatively inexpensive.

Mess kits – Avoid military-style mess kits where everything fits inside everything else. They are made of metal which lets the food get cold quickly and easily get bent out of shape. Ideally purchase a sturdy, plastic plate and bowl that will not break when dropped or stuffed into a pack on the way home. Utensils can be any old mismatched set of knife, fork, and spoon that you won't worry about if it doesn't come home. For drinks use a good plastic mug. Don't get a collapsible cup because they are prone to breakage and leaking.

Rain gear – Almost everyone goes through what we call an “evolution” in raingear. First year scouts usually wear a poncho. It's easy to pack, quick to put on, and works for about five minutes in a downpour, unless you're hiking. For particularly rain-soaked areas a plastic or rubber-coated rain suit is best, but we don't get a lot of rain in the Southwest. Ultimately, a *Gore-Tex* jacket satisfies most needs.

10 Essentials – Page 207 of the Scout Handbook lists the “10 essentials” that a scout should always have with him when outdoors.

Who packs – Never let someone else pack for you, even your parents. You are the one going camping and in the middle of the night when your flashlight dies and you need your spare batteries, you are the one who needs to know in what pocket of the backpack they are in. Your patrol leader or Troop Guide should be inspecting your pack for the first campout or two to show you how and to make sure that you haven't forgotten anything. Also, if it has a battery in it and it is not your flashlight, leave it home. Never bring anything camping that you're not afraid of losing or breaking.