

BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA  
MERIT BADGE SERIES

# CANOEING



*"Enhancing our youths' competitive edge through merit badges"*



BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA®

# Note to the Counselor

Merit badge counselors are responsible for following the requirements, procedures, and techniques presented in this pamphlet and ensuring that each Scout earning the merit badge is able to demonstrate knowledge and skills at a level consistent with the requirements. In addition, counselors must ensure that all applicable BSA safety policies, including Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat, are followed during training, practice, and review.



Counselors for the Canoeing merit badge must be registered members of the Boy Scouts of America, have current training in both Safe Swim Defense and Safety Afloat, and be approved by the local council advancement committee. Councils with an aquatics committee should utilize that committee to coordinate with the advancement committee for approval of qualified counselors.

All counselors should have formal training in the knowledge and skills indicated by the requirements, experience in teaching such skills to youth, and experience in identifying and managing risks associated with the activities involved. For the Canoeing merit badge, appropriate credentials include: current or previous certification as Aquatics Instructor BSA, designation as an

instructor or successful completion of council-sponsored or council-approved training courses in canoeing such as the BSA Paddle Craft Safety course, or current or previous certification as a level 1 instructor in canoeing by the American Canoe Association. The council advancement committee may approve counselors with similar experience and training in knowledge, skill, safety, and instruction.

# Requirements

1. Do the following:
  - a. Explain to your counselor the most likely hazards you may encounter while participating in canoeing activities and what you should do to anticipate, help prevent, mitigate, and respond to these hazards.
  - b. Review prevention, symptoms, and first-aid treatment for the following injuries or illnesses that could occur while canoeing: blisters, cold-water shock and hypothermia, dehydration, heat-related illnesses, sunburn, sprains, and strains.
  - c. Discuss the BSA Safety Afloat policy. Tell how it applies to canoeing activities.
2. Before doing the following requirements, successfully complete the BSA swimmer test: Jump feetfirst into water over the head in depth. Level off and swim 75 yards in a strong manner using one or more of the following strokes: sidestroke, breaststroke, trudgen, or crawl; then swim 25 yards using an easy, resting backstroke. The 100 yards must be completed in one swim without stops and must include at least one sharp turn. After completing the swim, rest by floating.
3. Do the following:
  - a. Name and point out the major parts of a canoe.
  - b. Describe how the length and shape of a canoe affect its performance.
  - c. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the different materials used to make canoes.
4. Do the following:
  - a. Name and point out the parts of a paddle.
  - b. Demonstrate how to size correctly a paddle for a paddler in a sitting position and a kneeling position.

5. Do the following:
  - a. Discuss with your counselor the characteristics of life jackets most appropriate for canoeing and tell why a life jacket must always be worn while paddling.
  - b. Demonstrate how to select and properly fit the correct size life jacket.
  - c. Review the importance of safety and rescue equipment such as a sound signal device, extra paddle, sponge, bailer, bilge pump, rescue sling, ropes and throw bag.
6. Discuss with your counselor the general care and maintenance of canoes, paddles, and other canoeing equipment.
7. Do the following:
  - a. Discuss what personal and group equipment would be appropriate for a canoe camping trip. Describe how personal and group equipment can be packed and protected from water.
  - b. Using the containers and packs from requirement 7a, demonstrate how to load and secure the containers and other equipment in the canoe.
  - c. Using appropriate knots, including a trucker's hitch, tautline hitch, and bowline, demonstrate how to secure a canoe to a vehicle or a trailer, or if these are not available, a rack on land.
8. With a companion, use a properly equipped canoe to demonstrate the following:
  - a. Safely carry and launch the canoe from a dock or shore (both, if possible).
  - b. Safely land the canoe on a dock or shore (both, if possible) and return it to its proper storage location.
  - c. Demonstrate kneeling and sitting positions in a canoe and explain the proper use for each position.
  - d. Change places while afloat in the canoe.
9. With a companion, use a properly equipped canoe to demonstrate the following:
  - a. In deep water, exit the canoe and get back in without capsizing.
  - b. Safely perform a controlled capsize of the canoe and demonstrate how staying with a capsized canoe will support both paddlers.

- c. Swim, tow, or push a swamped canoe 50 feet to shallow water. In the shallow water, empty the swamped canoe and reenter it.
  - d. In deep water, rescue a swamped canoe and its paddlers by emptying the swamped canoe and helping the paddlers safely reenter their boat without capsizing.
10. With a companion, use a properly equipped canoe to demonstrate the following paddling strokes as both a bow and stern paddler:
- a. Forward stroke
  - b. Backstroke
  - c. Draw
- For stern paddling only:
- d. J-stroke
  - e. Pushaway
  - f. Forward sweep
  - g. Reverse sweep
  - h. Rudder stroke
  - i. Stern pry
11. Using the strokes in requirement 10, and in an order determined by your counselor, use a properly equipped canoe to demonstrate the following tandem maneuvers while paddling on opposite sides and without changing sides. Each paddler must demonstrate these maneuvers in both the bow and stern and on opposite paddling sides:
- a. Pivot or spin the canoe in either direction.
  - b. Move the canoe sideways or abeam in either direction.
  - c. Stop the canoe.
  - d. Move the canoe in a straight line for 50 yards.
12. Use a properly equipped canoe to demonstrate solo canoe handling:
- a. Launch from shore or a pier (both, if possible).
  - b. Using a single-blade paddle and paddling only on one side, demonstrate proper form and use of the forward stroke, backstroke, draw stroke, pushaway stroke, forward sweep, reverse sweep, J-stroke, and rudder stroke. Repeat while paddling on the other side.
  - c. Using a single-blade paddle and paddling only on one side, demonstrate proper form and use of a combination of a forward stroke, rudder stroke, and stern pry by canoeing to a target 50 yards away. Repeat while paddling on the other side.
  - d. Make a proper landing at a dock or shore (both, if possible). Store canoe properly (with assistance, if needed).

# Canoeing Resources

## Scouting Literature

*Basic Illustrated Canoe Paddling; Basic Illustrated Canoeing; Deck of First Aid; Emergency First Aid* pocket guide; Scouts BSA handbooks and *Fieldbook; First Aid, Kayaking, Rowing, Small-Boat Sailing*, and *Whitewater* merit badge pamphlets

With your parent's permission, visit the Boy Scouts of America's official retail website, [www.scoutshop.org](http://www.scoutshop.org), for a complete listing of all merit badge pamphlets and other helpful Scouting materials and supplies.

## Books

- American Canoe Association.  
*Introduction to Paddling*.  
Menasha Ridge Press, 1996.
- Davidson, James West, and John Rugge.  
*The Complete Wilderness Paddler*.  
Vintage Books, 1983.
- Gordon, I. Herbert. *The Complete Book of Canoeing*, 3rd ed. Globe Pequot Press, 2001.
- Jacobson, Cliff. *Basic Essentials: Solo Canoeing*, 2nd ed.  
FalconGuides, 1999.
- Jennings, John, ed. *The Canoe: A Living Tradition*. Firefly Books, 2002.

Poling Sr., Jim. *The Canoe: An Illustrated History*. Countryman Press, 2001.

Rock, Harry. *The Basic Essentials of Canoe Poling*. ICS Books, 1992.

Rounds, Jon, ed. *Basic Canoeing: All the Skills and Tools You Need to Get Started*. Stackpole Books, 2003.

Warren, Graham, and David Gidmark. *Canoe Paddles: A Complete Guide to Making Your Own*. Firefly Books, 2001.

## Organizations and Websites

### American Canoe Association

503 Sophia St., Suite 100  
Fredericksburg, VA 22401  
Telephone: 540-907-4460  
Website: [www.americancanoe.org](http://www.americancanoe.org)

### American Whitewater

P.O. Box 1540  
Cullowhee, NC 28723  
Telephone: 866-262-8429  
Website:  
[www.americanwhitewater.org](http://www.americanwhitewater.org)

**United States Canoe Association**Website: [www.uscanoe.com](http://www.uscanoe.com)

## Scouting Canoe Adventures

The Northern Tier National High Adventure Base offers wilderness treks through Minnesota and Canada. Information is available at [www.ntier.org](http://www.ntier.org). Several BSA local councils offer high-adventure canoe treks and whitewater experiences.

### Acknowledgments

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The Boy Scouts of America has a long and proud canoeing tradition. Many of the early pioneers in safety and canoeing instruction were BSA staff members and volunteer Scouters. The Boy Scouts of America gratefully acknowledges the contribution of these pioneers to canoeing and to this pamphlet: Fred C. Mills, W. Van B. Claussen, Dr. John B. May, and Ernest F. Schmidt. Recognition also is given to the previous author of this pamphlet, K. Gregory Tucker.

The Boy Scouts of America recognizes the significant contributions made to canoeing by the American Canoe Association in terms of safety, paddling technique, and teaching. The information contained in this pamphlet is consistent with American Canoe Association curriculum and safety training.

The Boy Scouts of America is grateful to the men and women serving on the National Merit Badge Subcommittee for the improvements made in updating this pamphlet.