

# Tips for Successfully Earning Merit Badges

Ben Farr and Garrett Tate

Troop 2, Ithaca, N.Y.

June 13, 2005

Okay, here are the critical steps

**Before you start planning to take any merit badge you should discuss your plans with the Scoutmaster – it may be that other scouts have talked about the badge but did not want to do it on their own, or even that the troop knows someone who can do a great job on a particular badge.**

- *Think:* Look through the list of available merit badges and find a couple that you find interesting and that you'd like to do (out of 120 badges, you're bound to find at least two). You will probably even find a few that you have almost already finished.

Here are a few you may have a head start on:

- **Scholarship:** if you go to school and try hard
  - **Music/ Bugling:** if you play an instrument, are in a band or sing in a choir
  - **Coin Collecting/Collections:** many people have collections sitting around at home
  - **Sports:** easy if you already play on a team
  - **Athletics:** another good one for those into sports.
  - **Fingerprinting:** ridiculously short
  - **Pets:** easy if you have a pet
  - **Others:** Painting, Art, Home Repairs, Plumbing, Skating, Golf, Dentistry, Medicine, Electronics... it all depends on your interests
- *Research:* At a troop meeting go to the troop library and look up the requirements for the badges you picked out to decide if this badge is right for you. You can also do this and get the list of badges at <http://www.meritbadge.com>. Talk to your friends and see if you can convince them to take the badge too.
  - *Look up:* Ask to see the encyclopedia of merit badge counselors that the troop has (trust us, it's that big). For some badges there are several counselors so pick one that is close to home, if not in the troop. There are many merit badge counselors you may know from just down the street, or they may be some of your teachers or coaches at school. Ask a scoutmaster for recommendations.
  - *Call:* The next step might be the hardest step for some of you (it was for us when we didn't already know the counselors). You must call one of the counselors from the list. BE POLITE. Tell them you're from Troop 2 and are interested in taking \_\_\_\_\_ merit badge which they are a counselor for. If they say sorry, call another counselor. Some of them may even be surprised to hear that they are counselors. However, you will be surprised at how helpful these people in the community are willing to be.
  - *Plan:* Set up a couple of meetings. For most of the non-required merit badges two to three one-hour sessions should be enough to finish the badge (this time doesn't include extra work you may have to do). The public library is always a good place

to meet if the counselor is from Ithaca. There are study rooms in the back that work perfectly.

- **Work:** If there is one thing you must do (besides being polite when calling the counselor), it is **DO THE WORK!** When you ask someone to help you out by taking time out of their schedule to work with you on the badge, do the work you need to complete the badge. Go to your meetings prepared (a scout is always prepared) with the assigned material ready. Look at future requirements if there is time, in case you have any questions.
- **Finish:** If you get a partial, as happens with many people at Camp Barton in the summer, **FINISH IT!** It is astounding how many people will not finish a badge when all they have left is a short essay, two more fish to catch or a few more targets to shoot. Talk with the counselor about what you need to do to finish, and either come back soon with the completed work or (if the original counselor is unavailable) find another counselor to finish it with. A new counselor might make you repeat some of the work, but it will be easier the second time and you will get the badge.
- **After:** Once you've completed the badge and think you are out of the woods, think again. It's a good idea to write the counselor a thank you note. It makes the counselor feel appreciated. It doesn't have to be a long one, just a little token to show that the counselor's time was well spent. It's also a good idea to invite counselors to courts of honor, especially your own Eagle Scout court of honor.
- The next step: Do it again! Hey, a full sash always feels better than an empty one, but don't think that way. These badges are to further your skills in several areas or topics. It's for your benefit. No one is asking or telling you to do this, it's for you.

### Summary

- As stated earlier, merit badges are for *you*. If you don't have the drive to do the extra work, do not call someone and end up not completing what you have started.
- If you break down merit badges, they are quite simple. The "show this, do this, explain this" sometimes are identical in different badges (meaning you can hit two birds with one stone and get several badges done at once). The point we want to get across to you is that you can learn from these badges and further your skills as a scout.
- Lastly, remember to follow the Scout Oath and Law when doing the badge, so that you can leave a favorable impression of scouts in the community and allow other scouts to take badges from these counselors in the future.

### Scoutmasters note:

These two eagle scouts demonstrated they knew how to do it. Garrett finished with 5 eagle palms (46 merit badges altogether), while Ben earned 6 palms (51 merit badges): a tremendous record. They have both served in many troop offices, camped with the troop, and got to Philmont Scout Ranch.

Here they share a secret of their success: get organized, make the call, do the work. You can do it too.

--- Jerry Stedinger, Scoutmaster, Troop 2.