

Boy Scouts and Railroading?

by Gordon Wollesen

What do Boy Scouts and railroading have in common? Not much, really. But, at the Portola Railroad Museum several Boy Scouts did have a chance to find out what real railroading is all about.

Those of you familiar with the Boy Scout merit badge program know that there are 119 merit badges available to Boy Scouts, 14 are on the Eagle Scout required list and 105 on the optional list. For a boy to make Eagle Scout, he must earn at least 11 from the required list and 10 from the optional list. One of the optional merit badges is Railroading.

From the chart below, you can see that there is not much real railroading in the Railroading merit badge requirements. But, during the week of July 22-26, 1991, fourteen Boy Scouts came, and during the week of July 29 - August 1, 1991, six Boy Scouts came to the Portola Railroad Museum and learned what real railroading is all about. These Boy Scouts were from the Placerville/Sacramento area and were attending summer camp near Gold Lake.

A mutual decision between the Program Director and myself set up short, but intensive (2 hours a day) classes in actual railroading. The actual merit badge requirements were to be completed at their home troop meeting places after summer camp was over.

On days one and two, the Scouts were shown the various types of museum freight cars, passenger cars, maintenance-of-way equipment and locomotives. A thorough explanation of each was given.

On day three, the Scouts were shown how to and then actually did lay ties and rail, install angle bars and beat spikes. They also took part in track maintenance by reset-

ting spikes and tightening angle bar bolts.

On day four, the museum had some switching chores to take care of, so our Scouts were given a crash course in hand signals, coupling and uncoupling cars, making the air and throwing switches. Then the work began. Each Scout was given a turn at pumping switches, coupling and uncoupling cars. This was done under direct and very close supervision.

On day five was the pay-off. An incentive to participate in the program was, on the last day (Friday), each Scout would get to run a locomotive. This they did. Norm took each Scout and gave him a turn at the throttle. I would say, the boys had a good time (their faces were glowing like the locomotive headlight). After operating time, I asked the boys, "Now what do you think of real railroading?" Their answers were mixed. Some said, "Fun," but most said, "Real hard."

I feel that the Scouts did have a good learning experience. I know that I had a good time and am looking forward to doing it again. The Program Director told me that several Scouts heard about the program and want to take part next year.

Other museums were approached by the Scouts and asked if they would teach the Scouts railroading, but only the Portola Railroad Museum agreed, and agreed with a warm welcome.

The Scouts attending were: Oak Bastian, John Myer, Jeremy Salfin, Bob Sharp, John Naugle, Michael Duisenberg, Danny Buckingham, Steven and Shawn White, Nathan Stubbs, Josh Cramer, Jamie Duisenberg, Chris Lindsey, Tim Peterson, Scott Murdock, Brian Herman, Chris Presgrave, John Daly and Damon Prouty.

Requirements for the Boy Scout Railroading merit badge:

1. Do two of the following:
 - a. Know the name, scale and track gauge of four model railroad gauges. Show the right way to clean and oil model train equipment.
 - b. Draw to scale the layout of your own model railroad or one that could be built in your home. Have a point to point or loop road with different routings. Include a turnaround, a terminal, a yard and a siding.
 - c. Alone or with others, build a model railroad layout. Lay track with ties, ballast and scenery. Make connections from a power supply to track and accessories.
 - d. Make a scale model of a locomotive (with or without power) or make two cars. (Kits may be used.)
 - e. Draw scale plans and build two accessories.
2. Do the following:
 - a. Explain how real electric and diesel locomotives develop power.
 - b. Identify by model or picture six different kinds of railroad cars used to carry people or products.
 - c. Show arm or lantern signals used by trainmen. Pick one kind of semaphore or light signal system. Tell what its different signals mean. Explain the meaning of five whistle signals. Describe an emergency way to signal a train to stop.
3. Do one of the following:
 - a. Name four departments of a railroad company. Describe what each does.
 - b. Name and explain 10 jobs in railroading. Tell which job interests you most. Tell why.
4. Explain six rules of safety to use aboard trains; on platforms; at crossings; and around bridges, yards and tunnels.
5. Do the following:
 - a. Make a written plan for a trip by rail to a city 500 miles from your home. Get a train schedule. List time you leave and arrive, the number of the train and the service you want.
 - b. Name the railroads that serve your town. Explain how to arrange for a shipment of a carload of freight to a city 500 miles from your home.
6. Do one of the following:
 - a. Plan and take a trip of at least 25 miles. Buy your own ticket. Read the timetable and footnotes correctly.
 - b. Identify 10 different railroads by the symbols on freight cars.
7. Outline the major steps in the growth of railroads in the United States. Discuss the importance of the railroads to daily life.