SCOUT CAMP MERIT BADGE CHOICES

Choosing merit badges for Scouts BSA summer camp requires balancing rank advancement with fun, hands-on outdoor activities. Camp offers a rare opportunity to complete badges that require specialized equipment, large bodies of water, or certified shooting ranges.

Top Choices by Camp Area

🏊 Aquatics

Water-based badges are highly popular because camps have dedicated waterfronts, lifeguards, and boats.

- **Swimming:** A critical Eagle-required badge and a gateway to advanced water sports.
- **Canoeing / Kayaking:** Excellent for learning paddling techniques and water safety.
- **Lifesaving:** A challenging Eagle-required option recommended for older, strong swimmers.
- **Small-Boat Sailing:** Teaches wind navigation and boat rigging on open water.

🎯 Shooting Sports

These badges require a certified range and strict safety supervision, making them ideal to finish at camp.

- **Rifle Shooting:** Teaches safety, parts of a rifle, and marksmanship.
- **Archery:** Focuses on standard range rules, safety, and shooting accuracy.
- **Shotgun Shooting:** Recommended for older, physically larger Scouts due to gun recoil.

🏕️ Scoutcraft & Outdoor Skills

These programs leverage the wilderness environment to teach survival and pioneer techniques.

- **Wilderness Survival:** Includes building a natural shelter and spending a night away from camp.
- **Pioneering:** Focuses on complex knot-tying, lashings, and building full-scale wooden structures.

- **Camping:** An Eagle-required badge that benefits greatly from camp-based instruction.
- **Orienteering:** Teaches map-and-compass navigation through a live wilderness course.

🎨 Handicraft

Craft badges are highly engaging for younger Scouts and can typically be completed entirely during camp week.

- **Leatherwork / Basketry:** Great starter options that focus on tactile, project-based learning.
- **Wood Carving:** Teaches safety knife handling and requires a Totin' Chip certification.
- **Welding / Pottery:** Rare vocational badges that utilize specific camp workshop tools.

🌲 Nature & Ecology

Camp nature centers provide real-world environments to fulfill observation and conservation requirements.

- **Environmental Science:** A core Eagle-required badge focusing on ecosystems and human impact.
- **Mammal Study / Forestry:** Shorter, activity-based badges involving tracking and plant identification.
- **Geology / Weather:** Explores local terrain, rock formations, and climate tracking.

Critical Summer Camp Tips

- **Check the Prerequisites:** Many badges (like Emergency Preparedness or Lifesaving) require completing tasks *before* arriving at camp to earn the full badge.
- **Avoid "Classroom" Badges:** Try not to take citizenship badges (e.g., Citizenship in the Nation) at camp. Save these for the winter months so you can maximize your outdoor time.
- **Pack a Backup List:** Camp sessions fill up on a first-come, first-served basis. Always map out a secondary schedule with alternative choices.

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To help narrow down options, consider:

- What **rank** is the Scout currently working toward?
- What are their **main interests** (e.g., water sports, crafts, shooting, science)?
- Do they prefer a **highly packed schedule** or a **relaxed pace** with free time?

In summary, a little planning goes a long way to help make sure your Scouts have a safe, fun, and productive summer camp experience!