

SCOUTING FOR GEOLOGISTS

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Juliette Gordon Low, founder of the Girl Scout Movement, said, "Scouting is the cradle of careers. It is where careers are born."

Among women who have served in NASA's astronaut program, 43 percent were Girl Scouts, including Lt. Col. Eileen Collins, who was the first woman to command a space shuttle mission. Both women geologists who have been selected for the astronaut program were Girl Scouts. Kathryn Sullivan studied the mid-Atlantic Ridge, and in 1984 she was the first American woman to walk in space. And Dorothy Metcalf-Lindenburger was a high school earth science and astronomy teacher before being selected for the program; she is currently serving as an educator mission specialist for NASA and is eligible for a flight assignment.

The percentages are even slightly larger for men. The Boy Scouts of America reports that, of the 312 pilots and scientists who have been selected for NASA's astronaut program since 1959, 180 were involved in the Boy Scouts. Of these, 40 earned the top rank of Eagle Scout. During the Apollo missions, 12 men walked on the surface of the Moon; 11 of them had been Scouts. In a 2001 report on "How to be an astronaut," BBC News correspondent Mark Ward advised interested young people to consider becoming...a Boy Scout.

The importance of scouting in career decisions is not limited to the astronaut program. The Boy Scouts organization estimates that 18 percent of scouts follow a career that they first learned about through earning a merit badge in that subject.

Outside of the world of science and exploration, former Girl Scouts include Martha Stewart, Mary Tyler Moore, Katie Couric, Billie Jean King and Ann Landers. Former Boy Scouts include Jimmy Stewart, Jimmy Buffett, Bill Gates, Walter Cronkite and rapper LL

Cool J. Not only was actor Harrison Ford a Life Scout, but so was the fictional character Indiana Jones, whom Ford has played in three movies (and reportedly will again in 2008).

As a national average, one in seven American boys become involved in scouting. In all, nearly 100 million young men have been involved with Boy Scouts, and more than 50 million women have participated in Girl Scouts.

INTRODUCTION TO GEOLOGY

A continuing challenge to the geosciences is lack of exposure for K-12 students. In many school districts, earth science is still treated as the "science class for students who aren't smart enough to take biology yet." College freshmen who don't know anything about the geosciences — or who have a negative impression — are unlikely to enroll in an introductory course and therefore miss the opportunity to follow a standard four-year track to graduating with a major in geology. Scouting provides an important alternate way for young people to discover geology. Do you smell opportunity?

The American Association of Petroleum Geologists (AAPG) does. The organization is actively using scouting as a mechanism to interest more young people in the field. The AAPG's Youth Education Activities Committee has been involved in the last several revisions of the Boy Scout Geology merit badge. A recent gift from E.F. (Bud) Reid to the AAPG Foundation enabled a group of volunteer geologists to attend the national Boy Scouts of America Jamboree and helped more than 600 scouts complete the Geology merit badge.

The requirements for the Boy Scout Geology merit badge scream for expert involvement. A Scout who has earned the badge has learned about rocks and minerals, topographic maps, the hydrologic cycle, geologic time and earth history, energy resources, and land use planning. As with many merit badges, part of the expectation is to learn about careers in the field.

AAPG reports that 17,949 Boy

Scouts completed the requirements for the Geology merit badge in 2004, and 431,128 have earned the badge since 1911. And every one of those Scouts learned about geology outside of their regular school curriculum.

The Association for Women Geoscientists is developing partnerships that will bring similar opportunities to Girl Scouts. To date, most of the linkages have been local, but the opportunity for broader outreach is enormous.

Indeed, helping young people learn about geology through earning scouting merit badges should be a much larger outreach effort. All the geoscience professional societies can play a role, as well as college and university geology departments. This avenue for introducing a new generation to the geosciences has great potential.

BEING PREPARED

President Gerald Ford earned the rank of Eagle Scout in 1927, and he was the first Eagle Scout to become a U.S. president. He is quoted as having said, "I can say without hesitation, because of Scouting principles, I know I was a better athlete, I was a better naval officer, I was a better Congressman, and I was a better prepared President." When the motorcade took his casket to his presidential museum in January 2007, 400 young Eagle Scouts lined the streets of Grand Rapids, Mich., in his honor.

President Ford earned 26 merit badges, including Civics. Geology was not among them. If it had been...who knows? He might have chosen to follow a career in geology, rather than law and politics.

Meanwhile, we have an opportunity to inform and attract more young people to the geosciences through scouting. Ms. Gordon Low had it right. Careers are born here — or they can be.

Rossbacher, a geologist, is president of the Southern Polytechnic State University in Marietta, Ga. And yes, Rossbacher was a Girl Scout — Brownie, Junior and Cadette. She never earned a badge in geology because none was available when she was participating.