

# Pioneering for

by Doug Peets

**P**ioneering is building structures out of logs and rope lashings. It is part of what I call “capital R, capital S, Real Scouting”. In fact, pioneering is one of the few things we do as a group which is pretty much exclusive to Scouting. Lots of other people camp, hike, or paddle, but when was the last time you saw somebody else build a rope bridge or a camp gate?

As a leader, there are lots of things I like about pioneering. First, it is a challenge which will capture your kids' interest. It allows them to be creative in imagining a project, and then requires them to be practical to turn their design into reality. Second, it is absolutely a hands-on activity. As a bonus, it provides a great opportunity to put a lot of those other skills we teach into practice: the kids chop down the trees with an axe, trim and cut the logs with a saw and lash the whole thing together with ropes and knots. Finally, and this is one of my favorites, it is BIG: too big a project for any one Scout to do on his own. Moving the pieces in position and putting tension on the ropes requires your kids to work together. Nothing builds a sense of teamwork and camaraderie like working together towards a common goal.

## It's Not About Knots

I like knots. Actually, I love knots. However, I get the impression that

some leaders are hesitant to try pioneering because they think it requires a lot of skill with ropes and knots. In fact, all of the wooden structures we have built with our troop can be done with just two knots: a constrictor knot to hitch the rope to the first log, and a reef knot to tie the loose ends together after the lashing. We use square lashing to secure the joints, which basically involves weaving the rope around the logs in the same pattern as the seam on a tennis ball. That's it. Saying that building a pioneering project is about the knots is like saying that building a deck is about the nails. Yes, you have to know how to do it, but it's a trivial part of the overall exercise.



## Just Do It

Keep it simple. Start small. Go to the Scout Shop and get the book *Pioneering in Town and Country* by John Sweet. Build the Scout Transporter, shown above in use with our Cubs. It is the simplest project, and also one of the most fun. When you try it, you'll find out it's quite a ride.

It's how I started: you can have the kids build it in less than an hour. I recommend wrapping an old sleeping bag or a blanket through the V at the top to make it more comfortable to sit on. As well, we have lifted it by hand, rather than using the pusher.

Another book I recommend, by the same author and also available at the Scout Shop, is *Scout Pioneering*. This book gives a more detailed “how-to” description of the materials, techniques and designs for bigger projects. It has tons of drawings and construction tips that you can use to build structures from the book, or you can use it as an inspiration to come up with your own designs, like The Cavagnal Articulated Two-Way See-

Saw Gateway, shown on the opposite page. It has a hinge in the middle (moving parts!) so that it is accessible from either end at any time.

There is also an interesting section on indoor pioneering. We recently tried the string-burning challenge in the gym, and it was a big hit. (See the March issue of *The Leader* for directions.)

## Excellent Exposure

Another fringe benefit of pioneering is that the projects tend to be highly visible. We dedicate one day at our fall camp to building a pioneering project. Our first year, we built a Scout Transporter and a giant slingshot. Want to develop future membership? When the parents came to pick up the Scouts at the end of the camp, we let all the parents and sib-

lings try the transporter. Our second year, we built a 14-foot tower they could climb. Last year we built the gateway. If you want satisfaction, check out the look of accomplishment on your Scout's face when he takes his parents across a gateway he just finished building with his own hands.

Photo: Doug Peets

# Fun and Flash

## Great Publicity

This year, we decided to do something a little more frivolous: we built a pioneering sleigh for Santa to use in Hudson's Christmas parade. I provided the idea, but left it up to the kids to work out a design, then fell, measure and cut the necessary wood and build the sleigh. When it came time for the parade, it was immediately obvious to the onlookers that this was something the Scouts had built themselves, and the kids (and I) were happy to show off their work.

Another great opportunity to use pioneering for publicity is at commu-

nity celebrations. On Canada Day last summer we built a rope bridge in the park. It was very visible, unmistakably Scouting, and most importantly, fun. We had literally hundreds of people, young and old, come across the bridge, and it was seen by many more than that. People appreciated that we took the time to make something nice for their kids, and that it was FREE! We have had good success attracting new members, both kids and leaders, this way. Want to "strengthen Scouting's external profile"? Show that it can be cool, and make it fun. X

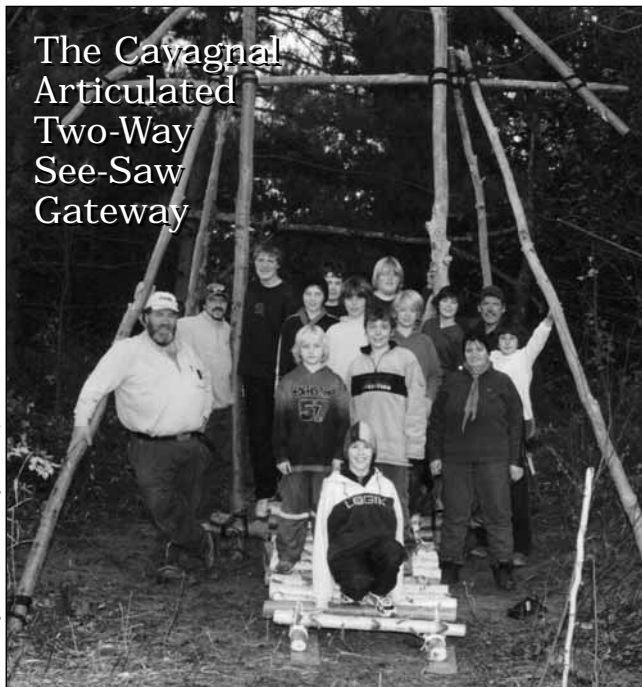
## Resources

For lots of info on pioneering: <http://www.pioneeringprojects.org/resources/index.htm>

For the BEST knot site I have found (and the constrictor knot): <http://www.animatedknots.com>

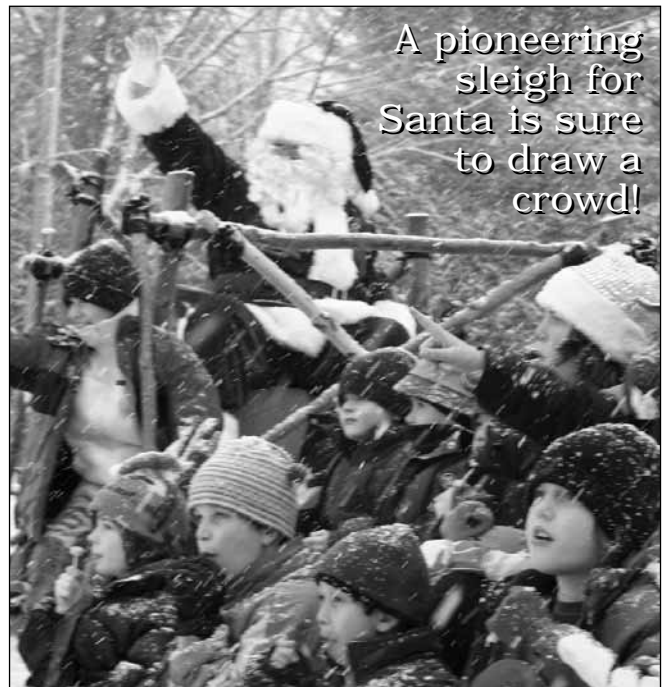
To visit the 1st Cavagnal Scouts (check out their photo gallery): [www.1stCAV.ca](http://www.1stCAV.ca)

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The Cavagnal Articulated Two-Way See-Saw Gateway

Photo: Doug Peets. Photo (far right): Monique Parnitt



A pioneering sleigh for Santa is sure to draw a crowd!



*With Thanks*

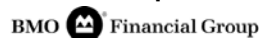
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