

As [John Thurman](#) so succinctly states:

*“Why Pioneering? To me the overriding reason for presenting Pioneering is that Scouts like it.”*

We know with certainty that the majority of Scouts *do* like pioneering, and the better they get at it, the *more* they like it. So, if the Scouts have the desire, why aren't more Scout units providing the remarkable fun that goes hand in hand with building and enjoying a wide range of pioneering structures?

The reason or reasons are obvious. Somewhere there's an obstacle or obstacles, and a problem or problems. If there wasn't, more and more Scouts would be happily involved in unit pioneering programs, building ever-more wonderful things at camp, on outings, and during camporees. The fun, adventure, involvement and challenges are built right in—and also the success. And, nothing succeeds like success! So let's start right there:

## **STUMBLING BLOCK 1: Nothing Succeeds Like Success!**

Generally speaking, experiencing failure is not great for sparking enthusiasm and rarely results in an exclamation like, “Hey! That was fun!” In his book *Pioneering Projects*, Gilwell Camp Chief, John Thurman wrote, “if any Patrol, Troop, or Scouter tries to start pioneering before establishing a sound background of basic Scout training in regard to knotting and lashing, then pioneering will become unpopular and will go down in the history of the Patrol or Troop as a failure.” Why? Because without the prerequisite skills, the structure won't work or stay standing. That's no way to equate pioneering with something the Scouts can successfully accomplish, and that's no fun.

*An Introduction to Round Lashing for New Scouts During a Troop Meeting*

But, just teaching Scouts the ropes is not enough! Unless the training sessions on knotting and lashing are “tied” to some fun or practical application, then repeated knot-tying and lashing sessions will be a source of exasperation and boredom—an inevitable turn off. Not good! After introducing some basics, give the Scouts a real opportunity to put them into action! Not with an elaborate project, but with a challenge or game where they actually get to use what they learned.

Make sure the activity matches their skill level. That way, success is assured, and each new success is a building block to a bigger one. When these initial forays into pioneering are successfully carried out, then it's a sure bet that actually building the useful camp gadget and larger campsite improvement will result in its own success story with a tangible outcome in the form of a concrete accomplishment. "We built that!"

Now, if the youth and adults are really interested, what else will hold a troop back from implementing an effective Pioneering program?

### **STUMBLING BLOCK 2: Lack of Scouter Training.**

*(a) It's possible the Scouters themselves don't possess the necessary knowledge and skills required to introduce their Scouts to the knotting and lashing techniques required to construct even a simple camp gadget, not to mention a bridge.*

No excuse. The basic knowledge and skills required are super easy to gain. Knot and lashing diagrams, online animations and demonstrations, how-to videos, and learning sessions from fellow Scouters are available to one and all. What it takes is devoting some time to mastering each technique so it can be passed along directly to the Scouts or to those who will be doing the instructing.

*(b) Perhaps the Scouters never actually built the pioneering projects themselves, resulting in a natural hesitation to embark on ventures into unfamiliar territory.* When there's a desire to get into pioneering, but there is very little or no pioneering experience, the best training by far is from qualified individuals who have presented a well-rounded pioneering program to their units and have themselves helped provide the opportunities to successfully build the projects. In lieu of that, a great place to start is to get information that is both understandable and dependable. Successful pioneering programs have been developed from scratch by utilizing the [1993, 1998 edition of the Pioneering Merit Badge Pamphlet by Adolph Peschke](#). The pamphlet is like an A to Z primer on the modus operandi of basic pioneering. Additionally, as a source of comprehensive information, the book [Scout Pioneering](#) spoon feeds the reader with practical approaches and ideas.

## STUMBLING BLOCK 3: Lack of equipment.

Lack of equipment is easily the most understandable of all deterrents. Naturally, when there are limited or even zero materials, implementing a unit pioneering program can be daunting proposition. For smaller camp gadgets you can use sticks, Scout staves and binder twine. But, for larger projects, you need the right kind of lashing ropes and the right kinds of spars.

A favorite John Thurman quote is, “Determination remains the enduring answer to most problems.” So, coupled with the determination that Scouts will be rewarded with rich pioneering experiences, here are some avenues to pursue:

- Make an ongoing and concerted effort to get everyone on deck to help locate and gather the materials needed to build the targeted project(s). This is a whole lot easier and more practical than when one individual takes on the responsibility all by themselves.
- Check with the owners of land where there are stands of trees that are good for making spars, sharing with them what you want to do with the spars, and offering to do a little unnoticeable thinning out of some trees, which will be beneficial to the overall tree population.  
[Forest Stewardship](#)
- Start with what you need. Expand as you go. Necessity is the mother of invention.
- Team up with other Scouters in neighboring units, in the District, or in the Council, and put together a [pioneering kit](#) for communal use. (For a unit interested in putting together their own pioneering kit, a good place to start is to gather the materials necessary to undertake the specific project or projects the unit wishes to build. More supplies can be added to the unit’s kit to meet additional demands for materials, as required by the desire and wherewithal to tackle new and different projects.)
- Gather the materials you need based on where you are in the cumulative pioneering process. Start with what’s necessary for training and interpatrol activities, and then add the components required for a chosen project, starting from the more simple, e.g. a [Double A-frame Monkey Bridge](#). That way, you can start building your pioneering program around the specific project you’ve got in your sights.

## Stumbling Blocks

- If you're in an area that just ain't got no trees, check into building a pioneering kit made up of [laminated spars](#).

Nothing really worth doing is ever really easy. The keys are a willingness to learn, a desire strong enough to motivate you to persevere, and the sound conviction that: *this is going to be great!*

As John Sweet says in *Scout Pioneering*, in regards to giving Scouts the opportunity to experience the joys of Pioneering, "...greater efforts are obviously needed to open up this adventurous, creative, challenging Scouting activity to the Scouts who would undoubtedly revel in it if given the chance to do so. Everything, finally, will depend on the attitude of the Troop Scout Leader, and they are the one who must be won over. Scouters who are themselves well-versed in the simple techniques of pioneering will need no encouragement and might even have to be restrained! To the others, a vast company, we would merely say that in all fairness they should at least allow their Scouts to have a go. One thing is pretty certain. If they do they will add another dimension to their training programme."