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Boy Scout joins antarctic research teams

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During the 1978–79 research season, nineteen-year-old Mark. W. Leinmiller followed in the footsteps of Paul A. Siple, one of the world's best-known polar explorers and researchers. In 1928, the Boy Scouts of America (BSA), acting on a request from Commander Richard E. Byrd, chose Siple, then a Eagle Scout to accompany Byrd on an exploratory voyage to Antarctica. This trip marked the beginning of Siple's distinguished polar career. In commemoration of Siple's adventure and to dramatize the opportunities offered by the BSA, Leinmiller was selected in 1978 to be a participating member of a scientific research team in Antarctica.

Participating with the BSA and the National Science Foundation (NSF) in the program was the Reader's Digest Association, which picked up the costs for the selection process and its promotion. The selection committee was headed by Richard A. Chappell of Hunter College, who, during the International Geophysical Year, had been the second Eagle Scout to go to Antarctica, and it included, in addition to NSF scientists and BSA representatives, Ruth Siple, widow of the explorer and

president of the Antarctic Society. Leinmiller was chosen from some two thousand Boy Scouts and Explorers who applied.

Offered a choice among several scientific disciplines, Leinmiller chose to join glaciological and geological teams headed by George Denton, Robert Thomas, and Terence Hughes, all of the University of Maine. Their projects concern the interaction of the Ross Ice Shelf and Byrd Glacier and geological evidence related to the West Antarctic Ice Sheet's possible disintegration.

Leinmiller's activities with the teams included soil sampling, carbon dating, and study of the glaciers' effects on landscape and warm and cold cycles.

He would like to return to the Antarctic some day. "It was a fantastic experience and I was lucky to get the chance," he said, after returning late in January 1979. "I've been offered the opportunity to go back, and there's a possibility I might even make a career of it. I've been offered the chance to return, but I want to finish my education first." That education, in mechanical engineering at the Georgia Institute of Technology, resumed in September 1979. Between preparations for the trip and BSA commitments afterwards, Leinmiller, now a sophomore, missed a full year of college.

Runners-up in the selection process were given a week's stay at the BSA's operation Okpik in northern Minnesota. Ironically, the runners-up, who took their trip in January, experienced colder temperatures than Leinmiller encountered in Antarctica. According to Leinmiller, "The day we arrived on the Darwin Glacier, it was 23 degrees [F] below and the wind was blowing at 35 mph—but that was the coldest it got." The runners-up in Minnesota experienced temperatures as low as –40° F.