

10 merit badge lessons from a Scout who earned them all



On a rainy Thursday at the 2017 National Jamboree, a Scout approached me and introduced himself.

Jackson Rogers, then 15 years old, wanted to tell me about his seemingly impossible goal. He said he was trying to earn every available merit badge — all 138 a Scout could earn at the time.

"I told you about this goal," Jackson remembers. "You told me that if I ever accomplished this to shoot you an email."

Well, that email arrived last month, accompanied by the picture of Jackson and me from the 2017 Jamboree seen at the top of this post.

Now, I've long believed that the goal of the BSA's iconic merit badge program isn't to earn every single one. It's a sampler platter, I say, not an all-you-can-eat buffet. Probably why the BSA doesn't keep a record of how many Scouts have earned all available merit badges.

All of that said, it's impossible to discount the phenomenal feat when it happens. For Jackson, the accomplishment delivered 138 immersive, eye-opening experiences he probably wouldn't have gotten anywhere else.

So I asked Jackson if he'd be willing to share with Bryan on Scouting readers the top takeaways from his journey. I wanted to know how earning that many merit badges might change a person.

Jackson, now an 18-year-old Eagle Scout from Florence, Ky., eagerly agreed.



10 things I learned about merit badges

By Jackson Rogers

1. How to be patient

There were several merit badges that required my patience, but one that really stood out was **Fishing**.

At summer camp at [the Dan Beard Council's] Camp Friedlander, I was working on my Fishing merit badge. I remember being only one of two kids to actually successfully catch a fish that day — a largemouth bass. As I was reeling in the bass, my rod jammed. As a result, I grabbed the fishing line with my hands and started running backward.

Next thing you know, I caught a fish!

2. Learn from your mistakes

The **Wilderness Survival** merit badge was my favorite, and I recommend that every Scout earn it. [Note from Bryan: That's my favorite, too!]

In order to earn this merit badge, I, along with lots of other Scouts, had to do an outpost night. We walked down the hill to Cub World where we would be spending the night. It was close to 100 degrees that day, but once the sun went down, it dropped to around 60 degrees.

The shelter my buddies and I made was a simple lean-to — basically a roof over us. I was cold the whole night!

The next morning, I realized that we built our shelter close to a creek, which made the night feel a lot colder. If I were to do things again, I would put more insulation in my shelter and also be aware of my surroundings.



3. Don't give up

This applies to the **Bugling** merit badge, the hardest merit badge that I earned! This is also the least frequently earned merit badge every year! [Note from Bryan: **He's right!**]

I had no experience at all playing the bugle, and it took a lot of work to learn all 15 songs required. I had to practice several times a week to accomplish this.

I had one of the best counselors in the world, and if it were not for this person I don't think I would have ever been able to earn this badge.

4. Don't be afraid to try new things

In order for me to earn my **American Business** merit badge, I had to run a small business for three months.

The business I chose was to scrap metal for money. I would go around to all my neighbors and collect various metal items. Some of these metal items included copper pipes, aluminum cans, vacuum cords, etc.

I would then take these items to a recycling center and make money to donate to charity.

5. Work smart *and* hard

Some things you do in school can get you some merit badge requirements: Art, Chemistry, Chess, Pottery, Public Speaking, Music, Reading, Scholarship, etc.

A perfect example is the **Reading** merit badge. I am required every year to read books over the summer as homework and read books during the school year.

The required amount of books you have to read for the merit badge is six.

So work smart and find a counselor who will work with you over the course of time to earn this badge. You already are being required to read — you might as well get a merit badge!

[Note from Bryan: **Here's a related post** on merit badges Scouts can earn while completing school assignments. And be sure to review **this section** in the Guide to Advancement that says that a Scout can begin merit badge work any time after joining Scouts BSA. It's the counselor's decision whether to accept work or activities completed prior to the issuing of the signed blue card.]

6. Develop a strong work ethic

I learned this in the **Personal Fitness** merit badge. The Athletics and Sports merit badges also played a bit of a role in this, as well.

I had to complete a workout schedule over the course of four months. This introduced me to the ways to create and execute a proper workout. This merit badge also gave me a broader insight into nutrition.

I have used these skills to earn varsity letters in two different sports: football and wrestling. For football, I also have made the "Strongman Team A," which is the top five strongest guys on the team.

7. Make lots of friends

I met tons of new friends along my trail to Eagle — and also along my trail to 138 merit badges. If I had to pick one example of this, it would be the **Law** merit badge.

This merit badge was overall fun, and I learned a lot about our legal system.

I earned this merit badge at a merit badge challenge as a third-year Scout. The friends that I met in this merit badge became some of my closest Scout friends outside of my troop. These friends ended up going to the National Jamboree with me, and we served in the Order of the Arrow together.

Make as many friends in Scouting as you can.



8. Think outside the box

I completed the **Inventing** merit badge during my eighth grade year.

After some time thinking of inventions, I came up with the idea of a device that lets you carry multiple bags at once. An example of when this could be used is if you lived on the top floor of a building and had to carry groceries up the stairs.

Since this time, I know similar inventions have come out!



Jackson with Sen. Mike Enzi

9. Be prepared for the unexpected

I learned this in the **Mining in Society** merit badge. Before I attended the 2017 National Jamboree, I had already earned this merit badge. However, I heard the tent that was hosting the merit badge looked super cool. So, naturally, I decided to check it out.

I am super glad that I did because outside of the tent I met [Eagle Scout] Sen. Mike Enzi. When I first saw him, I did not know he was a senator. I actually found out by overhearing him telling an adult leader about it.

I just simply walked up and asked him about it. We got to talking, and he asked if I was an Eagle Scout. I said yes. Sen. Enzi immediately reached down into his pocket and put something in his hand. He then shook my hand and gave me a coin. One side displayed an Eagle Scout symbol and the other side the Wyoming seal.

I was there because I knew how cool of a merit badge Mining in Society was. If I didn't, I would never have run into Sen. Enzi!

10. Help others at all times

For the **Dog Care** merit badge, I had to take care of a dog for a period of 60 days. There was a slight complication: I did not own a dog!

I have two cats, and there was no way my parents were going to allow me to adopt or foster a dog.

For this badge, I relied on my neighbors, and two summers ago, I helped take care of their two boxers.

Some of the jobs I had to do was feed them and give them water, walk them, give them a bath occasionally, and pick up the dog poop in their yard.

My neighbors were really happy to have my help on this one!



Beyond the badges

Let me add a little postscript about Jackson, because merit badges only tell part of his story.

He's a member of the National Honor Society, his school's senior class treasurer and a member of the Order of the Arrow, Scouting's honor society.

For his Eagle project, Jackson created a "memory lane" at the nursing home where his grandfather lived. Sadly, his grandfather died the day his project was approved.

For the "memory lane," Jackson gathered and posted pictures of places that were meaningful to the nursing home residents.

"While visiting the nursing home, residents would always seem to tell me stories about when they were young," Jackson says. "For some of the residents, I was able to go to their hometowns, take pictures and hang up those pictures outside of their rooms."

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