

Home

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Seattle, WA
Currently | Hourly Info
Most 5
RealFeel®: +
Winds: S at 8
Weather Forecast | W

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January 30, 2012

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Monroe Eagle Scout earns every merit badge

Polly Keary
Editor

In 101 years, only about 155 Boy Scouts have earned every single merit badge there is.

One of them lives in Monroe.

Eagle Scout David Singleton, 18, of Monroe, has earned 132 merit badges, making him one of the most accomplished boy scouts of all time.

That is because only 127 of those badges are currently offered. One more has since been discontinued, and the other four were only offered during 2010, the centennial year for the Boy Scouts.

Sitting outside Starbucks with his mother Anne Singleton Friday, David said he wasn't crazy about the idea of earning all the badges at first.

Last year in September, he'd already earned 42 badges, twice the number he needed to become an Eagle Scout.

But he'd taken five years to do it.

His mom, though, is Advancement Chair for Monroe's Troop 53, of which David is a member. She was familiar with the badges, looked through the requirements for them, and said she thought David had an opportunity to become a rare Eagle Scout indeed.

There have been more than 2 million Eagle Scouts in 100 years of scouting. There have been less than 200 who earned all the badges.

"I wasn't into it at first," said David, laughing as he described a battle between his disciplined self and his lazy self that took place as he looked in the mirror one day.

Once he decided to go for it, though, he threw himself into it.

Anne Singleton still has their battered book of all the badges, neatly organized with three colors of highlighter representing the different types of requirement for each badge.

Usually there is a study component, in which the scout interviews someone, visits a museum or other relevant resource or learns a skill. That's followed by a written component and a demonstration of learning.

The scout has to demonstrate his learning to a merit badge counselor, an adult volunteer with knowledge of the field. The counselor decides if he's met the requirements to get the badge.

Sometimes it's relatively easy. Often merit badge counselors will offer a clinic, announcing that anyone who would like to earn a merit badge can attend and meet the requirements.

That's how David earned some of his badges, like nuclear science.

But even in the metropolitan Seattle area, there weren't always enough merit badge counselors qualified to help David get all his badges. That's when he had to get creative.

For example, there weren't any counselors who could help him get his chess merit badge. But his dad was a pretty



David Singleton barely has room on his frame for every merit badge he has earned. He has earned 132 merit badges, which includes every merit badge available to earn while he was a scout.

Photo by Polly Keary

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good chess player. So his Dad applied to be a chess merit badge counselor, was approved, and then helped David get his badge.

David said he put in 30-40 hours a month in the last year or so, earning about six or seven badges a month. But some of his badges took nearly 30-40 hours by themselves.

To get his backpacking badge, he had to go on three three-day, 15-mile hikes and a five-day, 30-mile hike.

Learning Morse code and the more arcane naval semaphore flag signals took him three months.

Sometimes he had to travel a fair distance to earn a badge. Finding someone to help him get his archeology badge was tough. He had to actually visit a dig, and most archeologists aren't crazy about having young people in fragile sites.

But the Singletons found a willing team working near Vancouver, Wash. It took nearly eight hours of driving each way to get there, and then a full day of work, including helping set up a museum display in Cashmere.

The array of studies Singleton had to undertake to get all his badges is astonishing in diversity.

He had to get certified as a SCUBA diver, learn to weld, learn to cook, ride a horse, analyze fingerprints, run a ham radio, make baskets, care for dogs, play a bugle, start a business, collect coins and stamps, play golf, take news pictures and much, much more.

The paperwork alone took up three four-inch thick three-ring binders.

David said he thinks he'll wind up using about half of what he's learned. But it's not really about that, he said. Rather, it's about having a working understanding of a lot of different things.

"When I meet an archaeologist or I meet someone who says, 'I do forestry work,' I know now what that means," he said.

His Mom also hoped that David would get a better idea of what he wanted to do with his life, by exploring all those different avenues.

But instead, David discovered that he's interested in just about everything, he said.

So he plans to finish his first two years of college at a community college before deciding on a four-year college and a major.

One thing is for sure.

For David, the college application process should be a snap.

Reader Comments

Posted: Monday, November 28, 2011

Article comment by: **Dee Brown**

Great job David! I have a Girl Scout who is 7. She will be very interested in reading about you. Keep up the good work you will go far in life!

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