



FOLSOM/EL DORADO NEWS

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An Eagle Scout must earn 21 merit badges. This teen notched all 137 available.

BY JACOB SWEET

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Becoming an Eagle Scout is tough, but earning every single merit badge – 137 in all – is nearly unheard of.

Ty Bingham, an 18-year-old El Dorado Hills resident, is believed to be the first scout from the Sacramento region to obtain every official merit badge.

Out of more than 1 million scouts in the Boy Scouts of America, fewer than 18 earn every merit badge per year, according to the registry site meritbadgeknot.com. Each merit badge requires a scout to demonstrate multifaceted knowledge of a certain subject to a merit counselor, an adult experienced in the area.

In the 107-year history of Boy Scouts of America, fewer than 350 scouts have earned the distinction.

Bingham became a Boy Scout when he was 11 years old, following the path of his father and grandfather, both of whom were Eagle Scouts. However, for the first few years, he was mostly disengaged with the program.

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“When I was 15 years old, I changed my perspective completely,” he said. “I set a goal to earn all the badges – I had 20 at the time – and earned the rest in two and a half years.”

Bingham’s first badge was for radio. His last – sustainability – took months to complete.

Even among past recipients of every single merit badge, he is an anomaly. Most scouts who intend to earn every badge become serious at a young age – usually 11 or 12. Bingham earned 117 of his 137 badges in just two and a half years, finishing on May 15 – one day before his 18th birthday.

To fulfill the requirements for so many merit badges so quickly, Bingham kept a spreadsheet with the badges he had to earn, the counselor he had to contact and allotted time to earn each badge. He got in touch with each counselor months in advance, studied the subject, confirmed the appointment and demonstrated his skills.

The average badge took Bingham around eight hours of preparation and three hours with a counselor.

For bugling, his 128th merit badge, he spent over a year learning 15 different calls on his grandfather's trumpet. For snow sports, his 72nd, he learned to snowboard, traveling to South Lake Tahoe to show off his skills.

Scuba diving, the toughest one for Bingham, was one of the last he completed. To earn this badge, he had to dive four different times into Folsom Lake in full scuba gear.

"I was nervous because it was a new experience," he said. "I just took it one breath at a time."

Earning every single badge wasn't just a personal achievement, he said. He received help from his entire family, members of his church and Boy Scout Troop 528.

His father, Justin Bingham, drove him to more than half of 137 merit badge appointments, serving as his required buddy. At other points, one of his three sisters, another scout or his Scoutmaster, Kurt Finlayson, helped him out.

Finlayson said over Ty Bingham's time as a scout they've exchanged hundreds of emails, and spent countless hours in person and on the phone. While Finlayson helped Bingham complete his Eagle Scout project and all of his necessary paperwork, he says that Bingham has also helped his own son complete his Eagle Scout requirements.

Though Bingham's quest to get every merit badge is over, the Oak Ridge High School graduate said the skills he learned through Boy Scouts and commitment he demonstrated will serve him well in his future. Next year, he'll start at Brigham Young University before taking off time for a two-year mission.

When asked how he celebrated earning every merit badge, Bingham couldn't remember.

“The celebration was the relaxation,” he said.

Jacob Sweet: 916-321-1052, @_jacobsweet



Bingham’s father, Justin, sews Ty’s 137 merit badges onto his two sashes at the family’s dining room table. **Emily Zentner** - ezentner@sacbee.com

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Nice going!

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Right on Ty! The experiences are worth more than the awards...

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Mark Izatt

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I am a skeptic. Sheep farming for instance means working a sheep farm. Unlikely. Half of these kids MUST cheat.

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Jacob Sweet

7 days ago

Nope - kid's legit!

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Paul Douglas

6 days ago

And where did you see "Sheep Farming"? Each merit badge has specific requirements their MB counselor needs to sign off on before the badge is approved. My son had to wait for about 6 years on his fishing MB. One of the requirements was "Catch and release 1 fish. Catch, clean, and cook a different species". (Note for the Vegans out there. Not eat.) We caught one at summer camp when he was young. (The catch / release) He caught several other fish during the years, but they were at

Catch/Release locations. (We don't go fishing much) Finally when he was 17 3/4, he was at Santa Cruz Pier and caught a small "Garbage Fish". Cleaned, cooked, and ate it.
(He got his Eagle about 1 1/2 months later, but we weren't needing that MB for the Eagle.)

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Jon Bromenschenkel

7 days ago

Schedule with others some fun time doing not much.

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Paul Douglas

8 days ago

Congratulations! May you go far!

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David Rosco

8 days ago

Congratulations Ty. You have every reason to be very proud of yourself. That is a lot of work.

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