

Vernal Eagle Scout, James John, Earns All 143 Merit Badges

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For many, just participating in Scouting is an amazing and impactful experience. Earning the rank of Eagle Scout is the next, somewhat rare, recognition given to those who work hard and dedicate much of their time to Scouting. An even more elite group is those who earn all of the merit badges.

This achievement goes above and beyond what is required of the youth in the Scouting program. James John is one of the newest members of that elite group.

Local Utah teen James John of Vernal, Utah, earned all 143 merit badges. A feat, according to a June NY Daily News article, only about 330 boys have accomplished. There were times when John thought it could not be done. His mother, Sarah, was convinced there were a few merit badges that were just too difficult. But, he buckled down and earned his last two badges, Insect Study and Bird Study, just three days shy of his 18th birthday.



James started as a Cub Scout and eagerly earned his Arrow of Light. As soon as he could he was at the High Uintah Scout Camp earning merit badges. Behind every Scouter, there is a parent working hard to make sure their child succeeds. For

James, his parents have been a part of the staff at camp for many years. At 14, he followed in their footsteps. He was able to fine-tune his skills. James took on the responsibility to teach the Archery and Geocaching merit badges. His parent's experience with camp also helped them be very involved with James' Scouting and the process of earning all of the merit badges. They even drove him to the American Fork Rec Center and to multiple BYU Powwows. As far as earning all of the merit badges though, that goal was completely James' idea.



His mom Sarah said, "But I do have to say this was James's goal all the way, not his parents. He's the one that set off on this journey to earn them all. He was just lucky to have a lot of support."

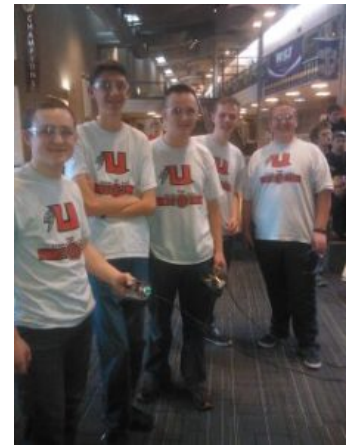
When asked about his favorite merit badge, John could not help but gush all about it:

“It is hard to choose one merit badge out of them all that is the best. One of the merit badges that I have the best memories about is Robotics.

Robots are awesome to everyone, but I particularly love them. In the search for a way to complete this merit badge we learned that our county library held programs with LEGO® MINDSTORMS® robots. We literally joined the club and began learning about prototyping, construction and programming. The club became a passion- long after I had signed off the badge. I actually aged out, since it was geared toward younger kids. The library recommended joining the high school VEX robotics team- which I did, with a few friends.



I continued with this passion for the next three years, only stopping because I graduate high school. We would come in early before school and stay for an extra 1-3 hours after just to work on our robot. We competed with other schools all over the Utah and even one in Wyoming. We even made it to state competition my senior year. This also led me down the path of engineering. I took every engineering class I could- so much so that I was awarded the Outstanding Engineering Student award from my school.



I know that is a long answer but the robotics merit badge would have to be my favorite for the places it took me, the things I learned and the amazing memories I have because of it.”

The journey was not all cool robots, though. Initially, his first goal was to be the youngest Scout to earn them all. After that time passed, his new goal was to earn them by 15. In the end, he finished just in the nick of time!

Insect Study and Bird Study are not as easy as they sound. Every Scout has a unique experience with each merit badge. Sometimes they are interesting and exciting, other times they are tedious. For James, those topics were not as interesting, which made them difficult for him to complete. So, he may not be able to tell a finch from a sparrow, but the persistence he learned was invaluable.

Another tedious task was the 2010 Centennial Signaling Merit Badge. It took the most effort for him out of all the other merit badges. He had to communicate through semaphore and Morse code, essentially learning a new language. Even with his counselor Jerry Bodily, a Morse Intercept Operator for the Army, and cheat sheets this task was confusing and time-consuming. James still has the buzzer kit for this activity.

Another merit badge that was quite a challenge was Scuba Diving. James and his parents had to drive two and half hours each way twice a week for a month. Scheduling around school and work was often difficult. Often, they did not get home until 1 a.m. But, James was scuba certified at the end of the course. This merit badge is the one that James is most proud of. It was both difficult and fun, but diving in the Homestead Crater hot springs in Midway, UT made it worth it.



“Had I not been a part of this program I would not have the knowledge I have today. There is no way I would give up anything I have learned from this program. I value it and love it. In the end, I do have 143 little circles on my sash but those circles are a momentary reward for a lifetime of knowledge.”

It takes a lot of hard work, time, and focus to complete the feat that James did, but he did not let that take away from other extracurricular and activities in his life. In fact, he said his adventures in Scouting enhanced his experiences. He joined National Honor Society because of the leadership lessons taught at Timberline NYLT. He joined the Robotics Team because of the introduction his merit badge gave him.



He also became a member of the Order of the Arrow. He also made unforgettable memories and lifelong friends.

“I love Scouting. I continued because at its core, the Scouting program really is designed to instill values in young people and, in other ways, to prepare them to make ethical choices during their lifetime in achieving their full potential,” James said.

So, where did this idea come from to complete all of the merit badges? Well, Sarah said once he had earned 50 easily, James thought why not just earn them all! Then, they were well on their way. They had many opportunities to be exposed to different merit badges i.e., staffing summer camp, district spring and fall camps, and powwows.

His leaders and people in the Scouting community were also all very aware of his goal and willing to help. Bill Phillips organized the last two annual merit badge powwows in Vernal and he emailed Sarah to find out the merit badges John still needed. The vast support was very encouraging.

His family even created Scout Thursday. Every week on Thursday, the family would get together and work on all things Scouting. They had a notebook with all of the merit badge requirements and a chart showing which ones had been completed. They also used this time to schedule merit badge time throughout the month.

The access to fantastic teachers and counselors from the BYU Powwow was also helpful. His grandfather, Daniel John, who serves as the OA Uintah Chapter advisor, has been a wonderful mentor of kindness and example of service for James. There are several OA Lodge Scouters that have been a great support to him as he has learned the program and developed in his Scouting service.



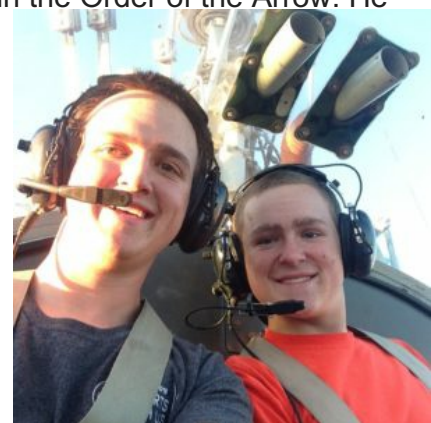
The BYU Powwow was also where James felt the impact of the duty to God aspect of Scouting. After he attended the BYU Merit Badge PowWow for the first time, he came home and mentioned how impressed

he was that the merit badge class started with a prayer. It clicked for him and linked in the “duty to God” in a way that he had not thought about before.



James, the second oldest of eight children, recently graduated with a 3.993 from Uintah High School. He earned several scholarships to help him as he heads into college. James has served on Timberline staff and as Senior Patrol Leader of the High Uintah Scout Camp.

James also has served 2 years as the Uintah Chapter Chief in the Order of the Arrow. He received the Vigil honor in the OA and has served 2 years as the Lodge Ceremony Chief in the Tu-cubin-noonie Lodge. He attended National Jamboree in West Virginia with his family in 2013 and staffed the National Order of the Arrow Conference in Michigan in 2015.



His parents agree that Scouting has prepared James to do a lot of great things in his life. "He sets a great example for his siblings. It has also prepared him to be a leader. James has become very service oriented, and he has a powerful love of learning. James has a lot of self-discipline to learn and develop his personal skills and reach his educational goals."



So, what's next for John?

"For me, I am going to dedicate myself to service. I plan to serve a full-time LDS mission. I know that service for the Lord is the next step for me.

Beyond those years, I will most definitely do my best to give back to this amazing program.

I will also continue to pursue the passions I gained as a Scout. I wish to become an engineer and do my part to improve the world."



John would like to thank everyone who helped him along the way.

Through the tenure of a Scout, there have been so many people to help me and to inspire me, so I have included a list of a few of the people I have looked to during my Scouting experience, by no means is this all of them:

Daniel John- Dad/Scoutmaster, Sarah John- Mom, Daniel L. John- Grandpa, Naomi John- Grandma

Leaders- Rob Hall, Jim Richards, Lamond Harrison, Slade Young, Brad Grammer, Mike Butler, Brian Kellogg

Friends- Dean Anderson, Aidan Johnson, Evan Peacock, Aaron Smith, Steven Semadeni, Scotty Goodrich, Bryson Laris, Mason Walk, Stockton Palmer

Role Models- John Wayne and Bob Ross

Congratulations John! We cannot wait to see your future success.

Author: Julia Thompson | Grant Writer, Utah National Parks Council, Boy Scouts of America



