



- Graham Northrup

Local Eagle Scout earns all 144 merit badges

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BASALT — For Drew Bair, of Basalt, earning his Eagle Scout designation was all about doing it thoroughly rather than quickly.

Bair earned all 144 of the merit badges available rather than just the 21 he needed to become an Eagle Scout.

“Most people try to get an Eagle’s [badge] as soon as possible,” Bair said.

But since the age of 12, he set his sights on getting all the merit badges. It’s a rare accomplishment. Out of the hundreds of thousands of boys who have gone through Boy Scouts of America, only 156 in the country have earned all their merit badges, according to an online registry for the organization. Only 13 boys in Colorado have accomplished the clean sweep, the registry indicates, and Bair is the first from western Colorado.

A Boy Scout has until age 18 to earn his Eagle badge. Bair, a senior at Basalt High School and Bridges High School in Glenwood Springs, turned 18 in October. He had to scramble to earn the last 50 merit badges.

“The last year I cranked through them,” he said.

It’s not a piece of cake. Each badge requires book work and finding a qualified mentor with whom to work on a specific skill.

The number of available merit badges was a moving target, making the planning a bit difficult. Boy Scouts of America temporarily added four merit badges in 2010 to mark its 100th anniversary. Bair said he had to shift gears to earn his carpentry, pathfinding, signaling and tracking badges, the four offered for the centennial celebration. Signaling required working with Morse code. Tracking involved making molds of animal tracks to learn skills such as direction of travel and size of the beast.

As Bair’s 18th birthday neared, the Boy Scouts added a merit badge for chess. He was able to earn it fairly quickly, he said, thanks to his participation in a chess club back in middle school. He earned his final merit badge for radio about 10 days before his birthday.

Some of the badges are easy to earn, while others require months to master the skills and complete the studies. His favorites were oriented around the outdoors. He had to go to Heber City, Utah, to earn his badge for open-water scuba diving at Homestead Crater. At Boy Scout camps over the years, he worked on badges for bird study, forestry and insect study.

Bair has always had a love of the outdoors. It’s in his genes — he’s a seventh-generation Roaring Fork Valley resident. Nonetheless, working on his badges taught him a lot of skills that come in handy in the wilderness and skills he was able to pass on to friends.

The Boy Scouts and the merit badges remain just as valuable as ever now, Bair said, despite the rapidly changing, technologically oriented world.

“They teach you how to goal set,” he said.

To earn his Eagle badge, he also had to complete a major project. He worked for more than two years on planning, raising funds and building a trail at the Roaring Fork School District's outdoor education property along the Roaring Fork Valley in the midvalley. Eagle projects require a minimum of 50 hours. Bair's required 300 hours. He enlisted volunteers and in-kind contributions from various businesses to get the job done.

Bair started Cub Scouts in Basalt Troop 242 in 1999. He had such a great time he was eager to stick with it. He later joined Aspen Troop 201 because of connections with personnel there through his church. Bair now helps as an assistant Scoutmaster with the Aspen troop. He intends to help with Scouting after he graduates from high school in June. Bair said he will go on a two-year mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, to a place yet to be decided, and then plans to attend college for music composition.

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