



Joseph Bell, played cello for the Shorecliffs Middle Orchestra. He earned a music merit badge.

Bell, holding a garden snake, studied serpents to achieve his reptile merit badge.

Bell at Camp Pendleton, where he was volunteering on Family Day for a helicopter squadron.

Bell at Havasu Falls, Ariz., earning his backpacking merit badge.

142 PASSIONS FOR ADVENTURE

Joseph Bell stands on his Eagle Scout project, a public viewing platform in San Clemente.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF BELL FAMILY



By earning every merit badge offered, San Clemente teen joins elite group of Boy Scouts.

BY FRED SWEGLES
STAFF WRITER

At 17, Joseph Bell of San Clemente has had more life experiences than most people ever will.

Growing up in Boy Scouts, he achieved the rank of Eagle Scout in 2013. Needing to earn at least 21 merit badges to qualify, he decided to go one better: He earned all 142 badges offered at the time.

"I got into a bit of a competition with one of my friends in the troop," he explained, "and soon realized that I could earn all of the merit badges if I set some long-range goals and kept up a steady effort."

The City Council presented him with a proclamation this week, saluting his accomplishment. We asked him about it.

How rare is it?

The Boy Scouts of America organization doesn't keep records of Scouts who earn all the badges. A private website called meritbadgeknob.com has begun tracking them and estimates that a fraction of a percent of Boy Scouts earn every badge available to them.

"In 2011, just over 50,000 scouts were awarded the rank of Eagle Scout (roughly 5% of the total)," the site says. "We estimate, based on our research, that on average fewer than 18 Scouts per year earn all of the merit badges (roughly 0.0018% of the total or roughly 0.036% of all Eagle Scouts)."

In the meantime

Joseph Bell has been:

- On the San Clemente High cross country/track team for three years
- Member of the San Clemente High Madrigals
- An officer with the National Eagle Scout Association
- Was selected to attend the U.S. Naval Academy Summer Seminar in Annapolis
- Will be applying for college at the U.S. Naval Academy and Brigham Young University

Source: Bell family

SCOUT

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Q. What badge was the most fun?

A. Scuba diving, because I got to dive in a geothermal vent [known as "The Crater" in Midway, Utah] that went 60 feet into the earth. The water was 93 degrees, so no wetsuit needed.

Q. What was the hardest?

A. Personal management. You have to track your schedule and chores and money for 90 days. I had to get more serious and act responsibly at a younger age to live by a schedule and to monitor my funds and activities.

Q. What's the most astonishing thing that you learned from any one badge?

A. How hard I could push my physical limits from badges like athletics, backpacking, hiking, lifesaving, personal fitness, sports, snow sports, swimming, water sports and scuba diving. I realized how important it is to be active, have a variety of sports interests, stay in shape and get outdoors.

I also learned how much adults are willing to help a teenager with a goal, if you just ask them. I am very grateful for their examples and help over these years.

Q. What talents did you pick up that most teens never experience?

A. Outdoor cooking skills, rock climbing, basket-



FRED SWEGLES, STAFF

From left, Councilman Tim Brown, Adam Bell, Barbara Bell, Mitchell Bell, Joseph Bell and Russell Bell celebrate after Mayor Chris Hamm, far right, presented a proclamation to Joseph.



COURTESY OF BELL FAMILY

Joseph Bell's sash has merit badges front and back, inside and out.

weaving, surveying, paper-making, wilderness survival skills, how to milk a cow, how to fly an airplane,

computer programming skills, how to make and edit a movie, ice skating, Morse code, how to pilot a

sailboat, [a tour of] the Orange County Register for journalism, welding, plumbing, leather work, metal work, archery and first aid.

Q. What sort of places did you visit to earn these badges?

A. I went to Mt. Vernon, Va., where I earned American heritage and started on surveying. I earned part of the cycling badge riding down the volcano on Maui, as well as the American cultures badge at the sugar plantation museum there. I went on a backpacking trek at Philmont Scout Ranch in New Mexico. I earned the climbing

merit badge in Alaska and Joshua Tree.

Q. All this must've been a challenge for your family, as well.

A. Many family vacations were based on badges I was interested in. Because there is basically a merit badge for everything, we would often find that our family activities had started or fulfilled requirements. Boy Scouts is such a great preparation for life.

Q. Most interesting merit badges?

A. Tracking - because I felt like a Scout of old, blazing new trails and observing wildlife - and

"I don't personally know anyone that has done it. However, I remember reading an article several years ago about twin brothers who earned all the merit badges and finished by learning falconry, which is not a merit badge but sounded really cool to me. I realized I could earn them all, as well."

JOSEPH BELL

wilderness survival. I was able to learn and implement survival skills, such as catching food and building a shelter.

Q. What was your Eagle project?

A. We built a west-facing sunset viewing platform [on the outer edge of a parking lot at 310 Vista Montana, San Clemente], complete with benches for the community of San Clemente. Many local residents have enjoyed a comfortable, easy-to-access location to watch the sun go down or watch the Fourth of July celebrations. The project took place over two days and was built by Troop 797 using materials such as lumber and Trex planks donated by Ganahl Lumber.

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