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Longmont Boy Scout earns all the merit badges

By Isa Jones

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Longmont's Alex Draeker poses outside a museum in Germany, where he is studying abroad. Draeker is an Eagle Scout who has earned every merit badge possible. (Courtesy Photo / Staff Photographer)

Very few boy scouts become Eagle Scouts.

It takes many years to earn the 21 required merit badges, plus an extraordinary amount of time and energy planning a service project, serving in a leadership role and other requirements.

For 18-year-old Alex Draeker from Boy Scout Troop 67 in Longmont, becoming an Eagle Scout wasn't enough. He recently decided to take his commitment to scouting even farther by earning every merit badge possible.

"I like finishing what I start," Draeker said over Skype from Huellhorst, Germany where he is currently a foreign exchange student. "Doing the bare minimum is never an option. Whenever I do a job or task, I'd like to be proud enough of it to stake my family name on it."

Few would call becoming an Eagle Scout the "bare minimum" and Draeker insisted he admires other Eagle Scouts, but for him, it wasn't enough to have 21 merit badges. He needed all 139 that you can obtain. Those included four historical ones only offered in 2010, one that has since been discontinued, and a particularly challenging signaling badge.

"I had to learn morse code and semaphore and be able to send and receive messages at crazy speeds for the time it was offered," Draeker said.

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He said he would spend hours with his older sister practicing sending and receiving morse messages with a flashlight. Despite the intense work, he called it a "fun bonding experience" with his sister. They still send each other letters in morse code.

He said his favorite badge to earn was the hiking badge, which involved a 50 mile trek over five days through the Rocky Mountains.

"It took me way outside my comfort zone," he said. "However, many other badges did that. Hiking just happened to stick with me more."

Getting that badge just shows how enthusiastic Draeker is about the goals he sets for himself. "The requirement wanted 30, but who wants to just go half way of getting an awesome 50 mile badge," he said.

For Draeker, boy scouts is about more than just learning new skills and gaining valuable experience, it's his own "path to manhood."

"That's exactly what I love most about boy scouts," he said. "Taking young boys (myself included) and turning them into independent men. I learned many things from scouting from being able to go far out of my comfort zone to pitching a tent or jump starting a car."

Since Draeker has reached this particular, and impressive, milestone, he's now enjoying his time in Germany.

"I'm loving it," he said of the small farming town he's staying in with a host family. "It's beyond pretty, the people are friendly, my German is improving, and the castles are epic."

Draeker said he isn't sure what's next for him, but he will keep being involved in the Boy Scouts, and he's heard that adulthood is a particular challenge.

"Surviving adulthood maybe?" he suggested. "I hear that's pretty tough."

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Alex Draeker of Longmont's Boy Scout Troop 67 has earned 139 merit badges. (Courtesy Photo / Staff Photographer)

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