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John accomplishes incredible feat by earning 143 merit badges

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James John stands with all 143 merit badges.

Courtesy James John



There isn't a lot of open space, to stay the least, on the sash James John wears across his chest.

That's because just about every inch of it seems to be taken up by the Eagle Scout's merit badges – 143 of them, in all.

“It's a super long sash,” John said. “We had to lengthen it because they all didn't fit.”

John earned his final merit badge last month right before he turned 18.

“There is no official BSA (Boy Scouts of America) count,” John said. “There is a site that has all the people who prove they can get them all. On that site, there are 343 badges listed. Just six percent become Eagle Scouts. It's a tiny percentage.”

The bird study merit badge was No. 143.

“When I started it, we went and talked with a Division of Wildlife Resource person,” John said. “He talked about different kinds of birds. I didn't do anything on it for three years.”

John knew it was time to complete the merit badge last month.

“That one was really hard because you had to go out and learn bird calls,” he said. “You had to identify 20 birds. It just took me awhile.”

The avid scouter had a message for the rest of the scouting world. “It's not about the merit badges, but I learned so much,” John said. “Learn as much as you can and that is in general. Go experience as much as you can.”

John comes from Troop 235 where he had a support group from his troop members and his family.

"I was in the same troop my entire life," John said. "My dad has been the scoutmaster the whole time. He would take us camping every single month. He was my whole support and that was really awesome."

"My family is super heavily involved in scouting. It has been a family legacy. My grandfather was very involved in scouting. It has kind of carried down from there."

John earned his Eagle scout just after turning 13.

"After you get your Eagle for three months, you get five more merit badges, you can get a palm," John said.

The first one is the Bronze Palm, followed by the Gold Palm and the Silver Palm

"It goes on for every three months," John said. "They add up in a strange way. Now, I have six silvers."

John said his favorite merit badge was signaling.

"It was discontinued in the early days," John said. "It was brought back in 2010 as a centennial merit badge. They brought them back for a year and you only had a certain time to get it."

In his time frame, while working on the merit badge, John had an opportunity to learn Morse Code.

John will remember his time while working on the badge.

"We talked to a person who was in the Army," John said. "He used Morse Code all the time as a form of communication. Nobody can get it anymore."

Another top merit badge was robotics. "We heard that the library had Lego robots," John said. "We jumped on board with the Lego robotics class. We were a part of that."

John joined the robotics team at Uintah High School. He now wants to be an engineer in the future.

He admitted certain merit badges are easier than others. The Eagle Scout talked about how fingerprinting is super fun, but there isn't a whole lot involved in it.

"You can do it in two hours," John said.

The 18-year-old began earning merit badges after graduating from the fifth-grade.

In his first year, he stayed at scout camp for two weeks and was able to take six classes a day.

“I got 13 merit badges in those two weeks and those were the first ones I ever got,” John said. “It all came in a big bunch.”

Some of the other early merit badges were nature, astronomy, archery, rifle, and basketry.

“Since we were up at scout camp all the time it was really fun for me,” John said.

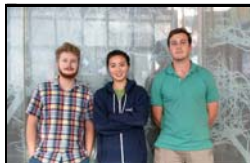
During the year, John said they do pow wows every March, and a Scout can receive up to three merit badges a time.

“We would try to do three or four merit badges as a troop every year,” he added. “If you are adding that up every year, you are getting a lot. That was just the events.”

In his personal time, John would collect more and more merit badges. His Eagle project was at McConkie Ranch where he worked on the trails.

John is the son of Sarah and Daniel John.

“I worked hard with that and I got my Eagle project,” he said. “I had a huge support system behind me. I wouldn’t have been able to do it by myself.”



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