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From atomic energy to snow skiing, he's got them all

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By RUTH FINCH

For the past 10 days, boys gathered around the Merit Badge Midway at the National Scout Jamboree to learn about railroading, aviation, wood carving, forestry and the like.

But not Patrick McHammond. The 17-year-old Eagle Scout from Morehead City, N.C., already has every last one of the 74 merit badges represented at the midway.

He also has all 45 of the badges that weren't represented there.

Earning all 119 merit badges is a feat so special that Chief Scout Executive Ray Campbell came to Patrick's camp during the jamboree to present him with a special award.

Patrick said he didn't originally set out to get all 119 badges.

"I really didn't think it was possible, to be honest," he said.

As he found out, it is possible, but rare.

No official count of Scouts like Patrick is available because Boy Scout Councils do not keep achievement records on individual Scouts beyond rank.

But earlier this year, another boy, Jared Thatcher of Kansas City, Mo., finished up the cinematography badge to earn the full complement just days before his 18th birthday.

Patrick said his motivation came in part because of an experience he had when he first graduated from Cub Scouts, and met boys with uniforms so decorated that the drab brown cloth was barely visible.

"At my first Boy Scout meeting, all I had was the Arrow of Light badge on my uniform and I felt so naked," he said.

By the end of that summer, Patrick earned his first merit badge--for swimming--at summer camp.

The next summer he came to the 1997 Jamboree and earned a few of the hardest badges--in railroading



Patrick McHammond, 17, of Morehead City, N.C., has every one of the 119 merit badges a Boy Scout can earn. His unusual accomplishment made him something of a celebrity at the 2001 jamboree.

and aviation. That's when he was bitten by the merit-badge bug.

"I set up a schedule in a binder to figure out how many I needed to earn a week," he said. "Sometimes in a one-week period I was working on five or six. Sometimes I'd get one done."

His scoutmaster, John Borley, said Patrick earned all the merit badges while also serving as a leader of his 90-boy troop, being part of a very competitive swim team, and practicing with his school's drill team.

"Every once in a while I had to pull him aside and tell him to hold his horses so he doesn't flame out," Borley said.

Borley also happens to be the assistant headmaster at Hargrave Military Academy in Chatham, where Patrick will begin his junior year this fall.

Borley said the boarding school has 44 merit-badge counselors on site. They are people for Scouts to interview who make a living in the field of a particular merit badge.

"It didn't take him long to wipe all these out," Borley said.

Patrick also met with merit- badge counselors at home every Christmas and summer break.

In the past four years, Patrick said he practiced on his horn until his lips bled to earn the bugling merit badge.

He managed to finagle a visit to labs at the U.S. Naval Academy, where he hopes to one day be a student, to earn his atomic energy merit badge.

He lost about \$100 when the sole client for the computer hardware business he set up for the American business badge refused to pay him.

And he almost didn't get the personal management merit badge because of the requirement to plan and stick to a six-month budget, the hardest thing Patrick said he has ever had to do in his Scouting career.

Last February, during a trip to Wintergreen, W.Va., he earned his final merit badge--in snow skiing.

Now, Patrick has 10 months left before his 18th birthday, which will make him too old for Boy Scouts. He doesn't intend to waste a moment of it.

"I hear they're putting out a fly-fishing badge," he said. "I want to get that one."