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He earned all 138 Boy Scout merit badges — even plumbing, bugling and dentistry

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JOSH SHAFFER

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Around age 11, Briar McLellan rose to the rank of Boy Scout and immediately aspired to earn every merit badge in the book — an ambition that would require mastery of scuba diving, basket-weaving, dog care, even dentistry.

This scouting feat is so rare that only .0038% finish every requirement: backpack 30 miles, hit 12 out of 25 targets with a shotgun, weave a camp stool, check a car's transmission fluid and replace the washer in a faucet.

Over the next seven years, McLellan would pass his spare hours 100 feet deep in the pitch-black water of a Virginia quarry, completing his scuba badge, or nursing the jellyfish wounds on his leg after a session of small-boat sailing.

'Wow and shock value'

But by the time he turned 18, the Eagle Scout from North Raleigh would collect all 138 badges, requiring a second sash to hold them all. He managed this triumph though COVID-19 shut down many of the scouting outlets, and also while juggling tennis team duties and the normal rigors of Millbrook High School.

"It's kind of cool to look back at all the memories," he said. "I don't tell a ton of people. I don't bring it up. I get the most wow and shock value from someone

available — a tally that dates to 1928. This comparison pales a bit because criteria are somewhat higher, but consider that the Medal of Honor has been bestowed on six times as many recipients — 3,525 in all.

The path to merit badge perfection gets arduous not because of any single task. It's the combined weight of learning to water ski, fly fish and play chess — not to mention completing 40 pages of paperwork about American business and discussing what role the American Welding Society plays in the welding industry.

Scouting has been around for more than a century, and some of the badges can border on antiquated. Take bugling, for example.

“He had to be the troop bugler for six months,” said McLellan’s dad, Ken.

“We definitely knew when he was practicing,” added McLellan’s mom, Kim.



Briar McLellan and his parents, Ken and Kim, celebrating his merit badge achievement. Courtesy of the McLellan family

And more of the badges, in any era, just seem weird. Take composite materials, for example.



ne said with a snrug. “Lobbyists, I guess.”

Two badges a month, average

But for a scout bent on a complete merit badge set, planning is the biggest hurdle.

From the sixth grade, McLellan guessed he’d need to average about two badges a month to get them all with time to spare. But then you’ve got to arrange for a pool to learn life-saving skills, a quarry to dive in, a whitewater park to kayak on, a tech-minded partner to finish the robotics requirement and the list goes on.

And on.

On many weekends, Ken McLellan — an Eagle Scout himself — would travel to South Carolina to drop off his son on merit badge errands and go ride his mountain bike around town.

This — the intense time commitment required not only of the scout, but of the scout’s family — killed my own scouting ambitions at the Webelo level. McLellan had knocked out a huge fraction of his badge to-do list by the time he turned 15 and distractions like tennis, girlfriends or jobs tend to kick in.

“I wouldn’t say I’m necessarily super-driven,” he said modestly. “It was a lot easier when I was younger and had fewer distractions.”

This fall, McLellan is off to Marion Military Institute in Alabama, then hopefully to The Citadel or West Point.

Wherever he goes, he’ll carry the knowledge of how to tie a double fisherman’s knot, shoot a three-pointer, identify a red star, perform a J-stroke in a canoe, paint a watercolor portrait, cook a campfire meal ...

And finish what he starts.

Quite a list of badges

Among the many varied badges you must collect if you want to get them all are:

- Animation
- Astronomy



- Crime Prevention
- Fingerprinting
- Game Design
- Genealogy
- Horsemanship
- Indian lore
- Journalism
- Metalwork
- Moviemaking
- Oceanography
- Pottery
- Railroading
- Skating
- Surveying
- Wood Carving

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