



By Heidi Sanders
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How Many Merit Badges Are There?: Utah Twins Earn All 137 Merit Badges

Conrad and Christian Smith (17) are Eagle Scouts and have earned every merit badge available in Scouting.

The twins are a small minority in Scouting who have earned every merit badge and continue to earn new badges as they become available.



Conrad Smith

Scouting helped the twins transition to life in Utah. They started Scouting in Wisconsin and before moving to Utah attended Camp Phillip where they earned their first merit badges. In Utah they joined the 11 year old Scouts in their LDS ward. Their Scout leader, Ken Klegg, challenged the boys in the Troop that if they earned every merit badge they would get a prize. The twins did not have any idea of what the prize would be, although it sounded big, but thought it would be fun. "I thought it was going to be a bike or something," Christian said, "but it still sounded exciting."

For the twins Scouting offered an immediate place where they belonged. "We weren't really hanging out or anything after we moved to Utah, so Scouting was a place I knew my friends would be," Christian

said. "We really loved it."

That love began with the twins first experience at Scout Camp in Wisconsin. It was at camp that they got their first taste of adventure. When they heard that there was going to be an archery contest the twins raced to the archery location to be first in line. "I had never shot a bow before, and I could barely pull back on it," Conrad remembered. He won the archery prize and was hooked on Scouting.



Christian Smith

Leaders also played an important role in the twins Scouting success. Although they did not recognize how great, "legendary," their leaders were they can definitely see it now. Leaders showed them that Scouting is about having fun. It was the "fun" that propelled the twins to accept the challenge to earn all of the merit badges.

Conrad Smith also was recognized this year as Utah's American Legion Eagle Scout of the Year with Christian the runner up. Each state recognizes two Scouts who then go on to compete nationally.

Scout leader Ken Klegg suggested to the boys that they should enter to be recognized for their achievements in Scouting. The twins went up against around 49 other competitors.

"I was so happy," Conrad said after finding out that he won. "It was a lot of working completing the application and working with school counselors. Plus, it was stressful waiting."

One of the best things about winning the award was learning about one of his ancestors who fought in the American Revolution. Conrad wrote his essay about his ancestor.

Neither brother knew who would win and the win was bittersweet. Although happy he won the award Conrad was also sad because his brother did not (Christian was runner up).

"What I learned from the experience is that if you put in hard work you will get great results," Conrad said. "You can't expect good things without striving for greatness."

Originally from Wisconsin, the twins started working on merit badges as a way to supplement their education. And as new merit badges became available, like the Chess merit badge, they continued to add to the number of badges they had completed.

The 137 merit badges represents hundreds of hours of learning and work. The robotic merit badge took the twins over 80 hours to complete. Game Design is a new badge that came out this year and the twins are planning on working with family members who are animators.

The achievement "is a constant goal. You just keep on completing it," according to Conrad. The twins completed their 132 merit badge two years ago and are now up to 137.

It is a lot of work for a mom with twins in Scouting who have earned 137 merit badges. "She earned these merit badges twice," said Conrad.

The rowing merit badge was one of the points where Conrad began to question why he was doing this. In the beginning they did really fun merit badges. Part of the challenge was flipping the canoe in muddy water. It really put their endurance to the test. As they kept going, the merit badges started taking a long time to complete. But they kept with it because of their mom. Their mom kept them motivated to keep working every week. The twins found that if they waited too long before starting the next merit badge that it was a demotivator.

They also found that the Court of Honor was a great motivator during difficult times. "We would receive like 15 merit badges at the Court of Honor. The recognition of what we were accomplishing helped during slow times," Christian recalled.

And the twins pushed one another especially when it came to paperwork. "There was a little competition," Christian said. If a merit badge had five pages to complete and they did not really want to do it, it helped to see someone else doing it.

Their favorite merit badge – scuba diving. "It was an impactful experience," according to Christian. "Most of the merit badges are things you see every day but scuba diving, especially in Utah where options are limited, is one of the most unique experiences I have ever had. It was a part of the world I had never seen before." Aviation was another fun one the twins enjoyed.

After moving to Utah from Wisconsin their mom told them that schools in Utah receive less funding and encouraged them to take the challenge to earn every merit badge as a way to supplement their education and also determine a career. Most of all it would help them learn to do hard things.

The twins finished all the merit badges they needed to get their Eagle as 12 year olds. As soon as the Eagle was completed the twins realized that there was so much more in Scouting that they could do. They could focus on earning more merit badges and enjoy the journey.

Conrad cleaned the trail by the Provo River and removed vandalism to clean and beautify the trail for his Eagle project. He had over 120 people come out and work. His goal was to beautify the trail for his siblings who ran cross-country because "it is really hard to run through ugly places."

The boys helped to inspire their fellow Scouters. Many 11 year old boys enter Scouting excited but soon tire of the program and never reach the goal of Eagle Scout. The twins tried to show that there is much more to Scouting and that if they could succeed, being new to Utah, then others who have grown up here could definitely succeed.

Scouting has been a big part of the twins lives. They attended [Timberline](#), a national youth leadership camp, when they were 12. They went after they had started their goal of earning every merit badge. Timberline reminded them of what is at the core of Scouting. It humbled them and reminded them that Scouting is not about how many merit badges you have; it is about how well you live the Scout Oath and Law. The twins were students and teachers at Timberline and more than anything else, it helped them learn to be leaders and apply the knowledge they had gained from earning the merit badges.

In the beginning the twins viewed the badges as tokens and something to put on the sash. As they began down the road of earning merit badges they learned a lot about

what they liked and did not like and learned to do things they did not like. And their mom was right – the knowledge they gained did supplement their education. They were able to explain things in science class at school like space exploration. The twins felt that they were ahead of the curriculum at school. Classes were easier and required less study.

The next part of the journey, when they turn 18, will not include merit badges. “Merit badges were a stepping stone into adult life,” according to Conrad. The twins plan on serving LDS missions and furthering their education at university. They have learned a lot about different careers and opportunities, and they have gained an appreciation for what different people do, like law enforcement and trucking.

Going through the merit badges helped them to feel more independent. They did not need someone to tell them what to do and they could pass them off on their own. This independence was the shift in their lives between planning on going on a mission and now wanting to go on a mission. They feel more prepared to adapt and deal with stress.

The twins could not see how the challenge would change their lives for the better. The challenge changed the journey of Scouting and prepared them to make ethical and moral choices over their lifetimes.

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