



One of the greatest adventures in Boy Scouts is having the opportunity to go on a trek at Philmont Scout Ranch. Philmont is located near Cimarron, N.M. It has 137,000 acres of mountain wilderness that ranges from flat plains to rugged peaks.

The ranch, with altitudes ranging from 6,500 to 12,441 feet, was gifted to the Boy Scouts of America in 1938 by Waite Phillips of Phillips Petroleum. The name "Philmont" was derived from Phillips and "Monte" (mountain). As of last year, more than 1,000,000 Scouts have visited Philmont with an expectation of 12,200 more this year. Here is the story of my recent visit.

Hiking Philmont consists of backpacking a preplanned sequence of trails and camps where scouts participate in events at each camp over a 10-day period.

Scouts hike from camp to camp carrying every piece of gear they will use – water, food, tents. Water is sometimes scarce, and there are few spigots of potable water on the

trail. So many times we used a stream and had to filter and purify the water with Micro-pure tablets. It took a little getting used to, but the taste was not bad, overall. Typically the scouts carry three days of food rations and restock on the third or fourth day.

Once the opportunity was presented to our troop to make a trip to Philmont, we had a year in advance to prepare. First, we had to

become physically fit enough to carry as much as 30 percent of our body weight in backpacks. The gear consists of personal gear, crew gear, food and water. Our training consisted of many hours per week of regular exercise and monthly backpacking shakedown.

At the beginning of this year, I worked my carrying weight up to 70 pounds. I hiked in my neighborhood about three miles, three times a week. Some of my neighbors thought I was a homeless person looking for shelter. I even was offered a ride one night!

We also had monthly shakedown campouts that began at 10 miles and worked up to a final 20-mile backpacking trip. Frankly, I had to drag the scouts in our crew kicking and screaming to the shakedown campouts to get them into shape. I was almost always in front pushing and pulling them to hike three miles in between rest stops. I never let up.

THIS YEAR, we had difficulty finding a state park that had enough trails that were not closed due to the torrential rains we experienced this past spring. In fact, a small group of us hiked in the pouring rain for three miles just to get some exercise. It was a good thing we did; we found that our rain gear was not waterproof. That experience gave us time to better prepare our gear.

None of our crew had been to Philmont before, and it took a lot of time and effort to gather all of the equipment we would need, based upon the list that the staff at Philmont required. Whenever possible, we tried to find lighter alternatives in the gear we would need, knowing every ounce counted. This is where we picked the brains of experienced Philmont trekkers to get their opinions on what we needed to bring and pointers on some shortcuts to trim the weight we would be forced to carry. The Boy Scout motto is "Be Prepared," and we tried hard to live to that standard.

On the day we arrived at Philmont, we were assigned "Ranger Will," who put us through a gauntlet of tasks prior to our first day in the wilderness. We had to go to the clinic for doctors to check

High adventure

My Philmont experience

• By Corey Callaway





Among the amazing highlights during the trip to Philmont was this view of the mountain known as Tooth of Time in New Mexico.

our health forms and to verify our blood pressure and weight compared to height. I am sure the staff did not want to have to haul anyone out for miles that was too heavy to carry.

The main office checked the adults for our Youth Protection Training cards, Wilderness First Aid cards, and CPR training cards that proved we were properly trained for the trek. We then picked up our crew gear with our first rations of food. Ranger Will inspected all of our packs and personal gear to make sure we were properly prepared and assigned us our tents for our first night's stay in tent city. We woke up the next morning to pose for our crew photo.

PHILMONT IS RUN like the Sierra Club on steroids. There are rules that dictate how to camp. They have what is called the Bear-Muda Triangle. It determines the placement of tents, dining fly, backpacks and bear bags. Yes, there are bears, Oh My! There are

also rules that determine the height of a campfire in a predetermined fire ring and the procedure for packing out the ashes from the fire the next day. The staff teaches you how to open a food package wrapper without tearing off the end that will often become litter on the ground. And we were taught the proper method of folding trash to take up the least amount of space.

Additionally, we learned other things: fluffing your duff, kicking and raking of the grass up where your tent laid the grass flat, and how to tie and hang bear bags to avoid feeding wild life, especially "mini bears." Mini bears are chipmunks, mice, squirrels and such.

After completing two long days of training there was a final grand benefit: Philmont Scout Ranch is the most pristine and beautiful wilderness I have ever seen. The attention to all of these details and training resulted in the most successful conservation of wilderness anywhere in the United States. There are tens of thousands of





visitors each year, yet Philmont is just as beautiful as it was before a single man stepped foot on it. There were times we were sitting in camp and a deer would walk within 10 feet of us. It did not fear us; we were not considered predators. We also hiked near a bear, who also paid us no heed.

Everyone working at Philmont is inviting and accommodating. They do everything they can to make your visit fun. One evening after the campfire, a young staffer serenaded us under the stars for a half hour. It was truly memorable. There is an interesting and noticeable difference between the staff and the Rangers. The staff members are typical summer camp leaders that most of us are accustomed to – happy go lucky and fun to be around. The Rangers,

chines in sight, we drank water, lots of water. Each camp at which we stopped for the night had its own theme; staff members were dressed for and acted the part of the period they were representing. Scouts were allowed to participate in many activities, ranging from spar pole climbing, panning for gold, tomahawk throwing, shooting 50 caliber black powder rifles, horseback riding, master high rope “COPE” courses, rock climbing and rappelling, and side hikes to Baldy Mountain and the Tooth of Time.

WHEN I TOLD a good friend that my son and I had the opportunity to go to Philmont, he told me that it would change my life. The trek is not just a backpacking and camping trip, it is a grand learning experience. It is one of team building within a crew and learning leadership skills with the Scouts. The Scouts learn perseverance and the ability to overcome difficult challenges and to achieve personal reward in the end.

How difficult is the trip? We had one of our adults drop out due to injury and were assigned a new Ranger, Jake, to make up for her absence. Also, on day seven, one of our Scouts rolled his ankle and was sent to base camp.

We had hiked from Baldy Mountain, some 20 miles away, the prior two days. We had reached the top of another mountain and were looking back on the view from where we had been. In the distance we could see Baldy Mountain. And in disbelief, we were all impressed with how far we had gone. At that point I stated to the boys, “This should prove to you what you are capable of.” Ranger Jake turned and

looked at me and said, “That was profound.”

Hiking through the wilderness at Philmont Scout Ranch is a tremendous physical and mental challenge. Many tears were shed by the boys. There was much stress and pain, and we worked our way through a couple of meltdowns. The trials, with the many hours of training, made every moment special. In the end, I built a closer bond with my son that I could not replicate anywhere else – and that was magical. **A**



The “Philmont Team” from Troop 118, Crew 719 O: Conor Callaway, Josh Holm, Laura Holm, Ranger Will, Nicholas Michaels, Andrew Miller, crew leader Nathan Holm and Corey Callaway.

on the other hand, are more like Rambo; they have been trained hard and eat up the challenges of the backwoods. I thought beforehand I would be overly prepared. The Rangers quickly showed me I was not.

Our hike was supposed to be 71 miles, but based on Ranger Jake’s FitBit, the 71 miles must have been as the “crow flies.” We actually walked an additional four to five miles per day, putting our total distance somewhat in excess of 100 miles. And, with no Coke ma-