

Philmont 2015

Overview:

82 mile trek went from northern to southern part of Philmont Ranch. Had 9 boys and 3 adults. One parent/scout became tent partners for entire trip. One adult brought his own tent that the other adults used. Went over 4th of July weekend for 12 day trek. Total time away: 14 days.

Adult Roles:

We had 3 adults going and there was way too much work for one individual to do. So we divided these 4 jobs amongst the adults:

- Jeff => Airlines – Was in charge of finding the best airlines, prices, and direct flight. Had to decide if going to Albuquerque versus Denver based on adult feedback, prices, and flights. He collected all confirmations and made sure all scouts/adults had the correct flights booked. Was in charge of making sure we knew the times to check in at the airport. Organizes when/where to meet at the airport.
- Mike => Ground Transportation in Albuquerque to Philmont. In charge of organizing how we would get from/to the airport and hotel. Food while we were NOT at Philmont. Communicated with Blue Adventure via email. Paid for the travel with his credit card and then was reimbursed. One point of contact for all of this information.
- John => Hikes/Camping – Organize the monthly hikes/camping trips that were for Philmont crew only. Tried to supply information/ideas on back packing and how to lighten the packpack load. This was done by talking to people at round table and previous Philmont crews.
- John => Philmont Point Man – All medical forms, Philmont forms, email from Philmont, checking requirements/records, Wilderness First Aid certificates for Adults/Scouts, etc. I and the Crew Lead were in charge of checking the Crew in/out.

Scout Roles:

The Philmont guide will list out roles for the scouts. All positions were filled out by our scouts during our last shake out hikes/camping.

Extra Roles we had:

- First Aid – We elected one scout to carry the first aid gear. Really nice to have one point of contact for this since we all had blisters, etc.
- Navigators – We had two navigators. Originally this rotated through each scout. But after getting lost several times, the scouts elected to keep the same two in charge for the remainder of the trek.

Transportation:

Took early direct flight from Seattle to Albuquerque via America West. Some of us had miles that made our air trip free. Back packs had to be packed in “Back Pack” bags, duffle bags, or thick black plastic garbage bags (which were then duct taped). All methods worked well. Black Plastic bags worked great and was cheap! Make sure you have extra bags on the other side, if the plastic bags get damaged with the tape.

Note: You can NOT carry any fuel with you. But you can carry your stoves. Make sure they have been aired out and have NO vapor of fuel in them. Fuel can be brought at the Philmont camp store and along the trek at food resupply locations. Knives **MUST** be packed in backpacks. One scout lost his knife because he was caring it in the airport. Double check with your scouts, before you check in your bags.

Arrived day early to Albuquerque and had Blue Sky Adventures took us to the hotel. This was well worth it. No hassles and we did NOT have to do any extra planning. These people are professionals and work with Scouts at all of the “High Adventure” locations. Took care of us having a very nice hotel. Also had dinner and breakfast that was part of the package!

Since we got to the hotel at around 2 PM, all scouts were told they had to be active. Played basket ball, swim, played frisbee. Albuquerque is at 5000 feet altitude. This was a good chance for the scouts to exercise and get acclimated to the altitude. All scouts were also told to drink lots of water that day. (Note: None of the boys or adults suffered from Altitude sickness. I am sure this exercise helped.)

Blue Sky had breakfast set up for us in the hotel the next morning and then drove us to Philmont. This was several hours away. During the ride there – I had the oldest/senior scout start working with the scouts on their Back Packing and Hiking Merit badges. This keep the Scouts busy and engaged.

First Day at Philmont

First day at Philmont deals with checking in, getting your medical forms filed. You will also be checking out your tents and cooking gear and food for the first several days. You are assigned a locker to place your extra gear, clean extra clothes for trip home, etc. Your troop will also be assigned a secure envelop where you will put your wallets and extra money in. Guide will perform a pack check and will help eliminate any extra gear. There is also a very well stocked camping store there so you can obtain anything you need like “fuel” for your stoves and any gear you forgot, like tent stakes. This process is all laid out and does not require planning on your side.

Trek

Your trek will begin your second day. This day will be easy as the guide will be showing everyone the “Red Roof” ends (out houses), reading maps and a general discussion of trail rules. He will hike with the crew for two days and show the correct way to set up your bear bags and where, how to set up your dinning fly. He will tell you about the “triangle of death” (i.e. not to set up your tents between in the middle of the sump pump, dinning fly, fire pit). This is the area the bears are going to go for food if they do come to your camp.

Boy Scouts is boy led. Let the boys fail, safely. This is the only way they will learn. Example: For three days, the boys were getting lost and not reading the maps correctly. I finally pulled the two navigators over on day four and showed them the proper way to read the typo map. All scouts gathered around and wanted to learn this skill. They too were frustrated and wanted to learn. After that – they all did great reading the maps.

Every night I would talk to the “Crew Lead” and we would discuss what went well, what didn’t, and how to improve. This was not done in front of the scouts but was like a scout master conference. Each day I would see the scouts improve based on this discussion.

Your scouts are going to go through the “Forming/Storming/Norming” stages. If you are lucky, they will enter the “Performing” stage. We got to “Performing” stage on day seven of our trip.

Last Day

You will get back to camp and need to wash your tents, turn in your cooking gear, and dispose of any extra fuel canisters. Again – this is well laid out and does not any planning on your side.

Shower and shave. You will feel alive again. Salad will taste great after NOT having fresh greens during your trek.

We took the boys into town so we could all eat Pizza and relax. It was nice to relax, throw the Frisbee, and walk around the small town.

Transportation back to Airport

Blue Sky picked us up early to get us back to Albuquerque. All of the boys finished up the last part of the Back Packing and Camping Merit badges. Since our flight was not until late afternoon, Blue Sky dropped us off in Old Town Albuquerque. We all were treated to a big Mexican Lunch. Then the boys shopped and played frisbee in the square.

Equipment and Advice

- **Blue Sky Adventures:** I can not say enough good things about this outfit. They are very focused on scouts and well run. They could answer all of our questions and took care of the transportation to/from Philmont, our hotel the first night, and all of our food the first day. It was nice not having to worry about anything and have every provided. They also gave us: Sunglasses, Water Bottles. Both of these items were used by everyone on the trek.
- **Showers:** Any chance you can get a shower on the trail – do it! There are three locations in the back country that had hot showers. You will feel so much better afterwards. Philmont camp store sales a small camping towel or you can buy on the trail.
- **Coffee:** I took a small stove and made coffee for the adults each morning. This was a good leadership tool. We would drink coffee and watch the boys break down camp. This keep the

adults from interfering and let the “crew leader” be in charge of the scouts. It was amazing to watch them work together to take down the dining fly and bear bags, distribute the food, back up their back packs and tents, and KP the camp. The whole time we would watch. The scouts became a better crew without us interfering.

- **Hiking Poles:** Practice with your hiking poles. They will really come in handy while you are back packing. It was amazing how much they will help you with a 40 lbs pack and hiking for 12 days.
- **Boots:** Break them in on your practice hikes and make sure they are good before you go. You are going to spend every day wearing them while hiking.
- **Silk Sock Liners:** I had two pair and helped me. Minor blisters, but no big problems.
- **Food in your pocket:** You are going to have more food than you can eat, supplied by Philmont. Take the extra energy bars, nuts, etc. and carry them in your shirt pocket. This way you can snack as you hike. You are going to eat lots of calories every day. Don't worry, you will lose weight!
- **Merit Badges:** Camping/Hiking/Back Packing – We completed the Camping and Back Packing Merit badges on the trip. If I had been more proactive, we would have started these on the practice hikes and camping trips. The boys worked hard on the practice hikes, they could have easily got the hiking merit badge, but it was not started before hand.
- **Plastic Water Bottle:** Clear plastic with cap (i.e. like aqua fina). Take one with you to mix your Gatorade/Kool-Aid in. This is going to be a “smell-able” and will have to go up in the bear bag at night. You do NOT want to use your other water bottle or camel back since you need a water bottle with you to drink in the middle of the night and/or to brush your teeth.
- **Plastic One Gallon Bags:** Put all of your clothes in these. This will keep them dry. It rains hard there in New Mexico when it does rain. We had 3 days where we were completely soaked.
- **Camel Backs:** Great way to carry 3 liters of water. External frame, you add a climbing carabineer to attach. Modern backpacks, they fit inside. Everyone had one and therefore they could easily stay hydrated without stopping to get their water.
- **Clothes:** Don't take too many. You really only need one hiking pants, one pair of shorts, 4 pair of hiking socks (one pair only for sleeping in), a Bandana, a long sleeve hiking shirt, Syntec T-Shirt, Boots, light shoes for in camp after hiking, wide brim hat, rain gear, sweater/hoodie. No cotton.
- **Hat:** My hat also covered my back of my neck. Lots of sun light and you are at 6000'+. You will get burned quickly at that altitude.
- **One Gallon Plastic Bag and Camp Soap:** Used this to wash clothes. It was nice to be able to add soap and agitate. The clothes got pretty clean this way.

- **Bandana:** Multi-uses. When crossing a stream: Wipe down your face/arms then soak it and put on your head/shoulders to keep you cool. End of the day, wash your feet with it. Used as a wash cloth.
- **4 oz of Green Stuff (Pure Aloe):** Every day, mid day – I would put this on my feet and cleaning them. Soon all of the adults were using it. It really made my feet feel good. You are going to tear up your feet with all the hiking. So be good to them.
- **Snow Peak Stove:** This was our backup/2nd stove. I used it to make coffee every morning. Small and light. It could NOT replace the Whisper light we were using to cook the crews food, but it was meant as an emergency backup only.
- **Platypus Gravity Water Filter:** Light and no moving parts to break. Philmont provides you with purify tablets. But the streams we pulled from had lots of debris and dirt. The water filter removed all of that. We drank clear water not brown water. We also ran out of purify tablets at one point and therefore had to use just filter water.
- **Monarch Chair:** Amazing. This small back backing chair was so nice to sit in after a long day of hiking. It was comfortable and nicer than sitting on log/rock. My opinion is that all scouts/adults should have their own.
- **Black Plastic Bag:** I did not have a pack cover. I put “Nic-Wax” on the outside of pack and then used a large plastic bag to cover it up each night. Worked as good or better than the pack covers.
- **Rain Gear:** I used a poncho. It could cover my back pack as well as me. It also would breathe, so I did not over heat wearing it.
- **Back Pack Weight:** Keep it light. I upgraded lots of my gear and kept my dry weight to 30 lbs. Once you add in 3 or 4 days of food and a gallon of water, you will be carrying 40 or 45 lbs. You do NOT want to carry too much weight, really! You are hiking 12 days with that weight.
- **Wake up early and get going:** At each camping spot, there are things to do: Shooting, rock climbing, telephone pole climbs, etc. Also, you want to be on the trail early to avoid the heat of the day.