

Troop 6 - Philmont 2004

Newsletter #1, 12/9/02

Greetings!

This is the first of a dozen or so newsletters that I will be using to communicate the details of our 2004 Philmont expedition. Of course all of this information will be posted on the Troop's website. This first edition is intended to provide a high level overview of the things that lie ahead: things like a high level timeline, rough costs and a sense of the whole effort. We won't be leaving for New Mexico for another nineteen months, but planning is key for a successful trip.

We can take 24 people to Philmont maximum, there is absolutely no possibility of taking 25. As of today we have 18 interested individuals, we need to identify the remaining participants in the next thirty days or so. In Philmont vernacular these 24 people translate into two crews, ultimately these crews will function independently and will be comprised of at least 7 and no more than 12 individuals. Of those, at least 2 but no more than 4 can be adults and the majority of the crew must be youth (A crew of 7 can have at most 3 adults). As far as youth members are concerned you need to either be 14 by 1/1/2004 or be 13 and complete the 8th grade by 8/1/2004. Our current vision is to send 18 youth and 6 adults, two crews with a 3/9 split. Once we fill these slots we will start a waiting list. There are a number of factors that can (will) cause people to drop out. If we end up with more individuals who would like to attend than we have slots we will employ a fair process to select our participants.

All participants, confirmed or on the waiting list **MUST** commit to attending all meetings and training for this trip. It will be impossible to bring you up to speed if you drop out. This is particularly important for those with limited backpacking experience or our younger or physically smaller members ... they will need the training time. **I will be brutal about commitment**; this isn't just a walk in the woods. Once we hit the trail we will be alone and dependent on each other. Each member of the crew must be able to, quite literally, pull his weight. We all must be physically, mentally and emotionally ready for the trip. One unprepared individual can adversely affect the experience for everyone, this I simply cannot permit. The only way I can be sure everyone is prepared is to have us all work and train together in the 6 to 12 months before we go. Once we establish the Crews later this year the Crew Leaders will establish participation requirements. I expect that they will be inflexible, you should expect that with the exception of significant academic (SATs for instance) or sports (Playoffs but not practices or regular games) events, attendance will be mandatory. Failure to demonstrate an acceptable level of commitment to the crew will jeopardize your position in it.

Cost

The \$64,000 question. Well, actually less than that. Seriously we won't know the bottom line until we get back from New Mexico. Today our best estimate is \$1300 plus or minus \$100. To this we will add a number of weekend shakedown trips, which will have their own costs. In addition to the cost of the trip itself, you should plan on acquiring some new equipment; certainly new boots will be required. Each participant will be asked for a \$200 deposit tonight. We anticipate quarterly payments of \$200 up through 2Q04 with a final payment in 3Q04. (Tonight's payment is the 1Q03 payment). Philmont requires our deposits in January and payments again in October '03 & March '04. We will make our travel arrangements as far in advance as possible, probably in 3Q03. I've designed the payment schedule so that I don't have to cover any of the costs on my credit card. The troop will maintain an independent account for this trip (as we do for all high adventure trips).

If you want to stay on the active or waiting list, you **MUST** continue to pay the scheduled fees, and also prepare your equipment, as if you are going. Those who cannot be accommodated will get a refund on their fees paid to date. Once you make a deposit and get a confirmed position (as opposed to being wait listed) there is no guarantee that you will get a full refund if you drop out, no matter what the reason. It may be possible for us to replace you with somebody on the waiting list, in which case we can refund all cost associated with the Philmont Trek proper. There may be issues with airfares or costs for events such as shakedowns that have already occurred.

Volunteers

Every family that is sending a participant should also plan on helping us by volunteering to help. As with many things in life, and most things in scouting, many hands make light work. There will be endless small tasks that we will need help with. Please be prepared to step up and help.

Equipment

Given that the Holidays are coming it's probably reasonable to talk about equipment. On one hand you should plan on acquiring some new, high quality, equipment for this trip. On the other hand you should not necessarily run out and buy a new pack, boots and sleeping bag tomorrow. You will need a pack, if you have one now it may well suffice, if you don't you might want to try some different ones before settling on a specific type or model. You will need excellent boots, arguably you should spend the most time and money on these. Before we are done you will walk over 100 miles in them. You should wait until the spring of '04 to buy these as your shoe size will probably change. So, as far as the big items I'd suggest you wait. That said, there are plenty of smaller items you should consider now:

Quality Socks – ‘Smartwool’ is worth looking into. Smartwool is made from 90% Merino wool and 10% nylon. Soft as a baby’s butt on the inside. I am a longtime (30 years) user of all wool socks. The Smartwool are definitely superior. They come in three weights, I chose using one pair of the Expedition (heavier) weight socks. Some find all wool irritating but I don’t. Smartwool isn’t irritating to people who normally can’t wear wool socks. At \$16.95 per pair, Smartwool socks aren’t cheap. They can be seen at <http://www.rei.com/cgi-bin/ncommerce3/ProductDisplay?prfibr=2255&prmenbr=8000&cgrfnbr=4501773>

Philmont stocks “FoxRiver Backpacking Wick Dry” sock which is 60% Duraspun Hi-Wick Acrylic, 20% Worsted Wool, 20% Stretch Nylon and 2% Lycra Spandex added to top. At \$3.95 per pair they are a bargain compared to \$16.95 a pair for Smartwool. They are slightly more bulky than the Smartwool socks but if you prefer an acrylic sock to a mostly wool sock, the Foxriver might just be for you. The decision is strictly a personal one, but from what I have determined these two socks are probably number one and two as far as a backpacking sock. Which is which is yet to be determined.

The 2362 Wick Dry Explorer BackpackingFox can be seen at: <http://www.foxsox.com/FoxRiver/SilverStream/Pages/fraCatalog.html?page=pgCategories.html> Then just click on Wick Dry Explorer

The Troop website has hiking and backpacking resources and links. Take your time, look them over.

Pre Trek / Trek / Post Trek activities

If we are going all the way to New Mexico we should take some time to see the sights along the way. Typical trips will take an extra three days or so, usually on the front end as once we come off the trail we will probably be tired and will just want to go home.

Our trip planning process will occur in three stages: Colorado Pre-Activities for both crews; Individual crew selection of geographic features at Philmont; and program features at Philmont.

1. Combined Crew Selection of Colorado Pre-Activities

I’ve included a list of some potential items here, there are no doubt more. I’ve asked Saul Swartout to manage the details of our Philmont Trip with the exception of the 10 days on the trail ... this covers our itinerary from West Chester to Philmont and from Philmont back to West Chester, this is a monumental task and I’ll take this opportunity to ask you all to help him out where you can.

The list of possible pre-trek activities is detailed below. Eventually we will be voting on these, and picking the top 8 or so activities. Saul, his team and I will then assemble a program that will incorporate as many of your choices as possible.

- Visit Royal Gorge (tallest suspension bridge in the U.S. - 1100 foot deep, very impressive place); may include other local attractions - I did this when I went to Philmont in 1974 (ouch) and still remember it.
- Cave of the Winds (commercial cave similar to Luray Caverns); Standard Tour or Discovery Tour (for Scouts)
- Visit U.S. Air Force Academy (standard tourist tour) – 2 – Again I did this in '74, I still remember it.
- Manitou Cliff Dwellings Museum (genuine Anasazi Indian dwellings from the 1200' s, plus Native American Dancing, plus museum tour)
- Visit the Garden of the Gods (extraordinary rock formations, like nothing else you' ve ever seen); walk-around tour, plus tour the Visitor' s Center
- Rock Climbing in the Garden of the Gods or 11-Mile Canyon (the very real deal!)
- Horseback Riding in Cave of the Winds Area
- COG Railway tour of Pike' s Peak (incredible views, 14,100 feet)
- Whitewater Rafting on the Arkansas River, Brown' s Canyon (again, the very real deal)
- Mountain Biking in Buena Vista
- Visit Capulin Volcano - Tour a dormant volcano between La Junta and Philmont .
- Visit Flying W Ranch - Tourist Trap tour of a quasi-authentic cattle ranch; waste of time except for a pretty decent chuck wagon dinner served every night with live music from a truly excellent Country Western Band .
- Go Bowling
- Do a Miniature Golf Course (or a Driving Range)
- Go to a movie
- Attend a Colorado Rockies baseball game in Denver
- Visit Florrisant Fossil Beds/National Petrified Forest
- Visit National Sand Dunes Monument
- Visit a local Ghost town (the real deal, not a tourist trap; abandoned over 50 years ago)
- Visit the Denver Mint – Just like the Philadelphia Mint except smaller and less impressive.
- Do a rail tour of some of the mountainous regions west of Colorado Springs or Denver
- Visit and tour a Gold Mine
- Go Trout Fishing

2. Selecting a Philmont Trek

Trek Difficulty

There is no room for machismo in this process. We don't want to choose a trivially easy trek that is vastly below our capabilities, and be bored to death (and "miss Philmont"); however, we also have to be careful not to pick a trek that's too difficult and end up half dead every day. In general you want to get to your destination early enough to take part in the activities, getting there is half the fun and you want to enjoy the trip, but we don't want to spend all day getting there. Frankly, there aren't any treks we can't do as long as we prep ourselves both equipment-wise and physical preparation-wise. But be aware - picking one of Philmont's top treks requires a rock solid commitment on the part of every trekker.

The categories are Typical, Rugged, Strenuous, and Super Strenuous. There will be about 35 treks to select from - 10 each in Typical, Rugged, and Strenuous, and 5 Super Strenuous.

Typical - 45 - 55 miles; fairly easy days, mostly southern/central (lower altitude) territory; probably no major peaks or really tough climbs, many staff camps

Rugged - 50 - 70 miles; mix of easy and moderate days, mostly southern/central territory, possibly 1 - 2 peaks, many staff camps

Strenuous - 65 - 80 miles; mostly challenging days, mostly central/northern/western (higher altitude) territory, 3 - 6 peaks, fewer staff camps

Super-Strenuous - 75 - 90 miles, challenging every day, mostly central/northern/western territory, 5 - 8 peaks, many trail camps

2a Selection of Geographical Features

Each trekker needs to separately decide whether they wish to climb Baldy Mountain, Mt. Phillips, and or the Tooth of Time. This point is one of the major dividers between treks. A few treks do all 3 (these are strenuous or super strenuous treks only), about half do 1 or 2, and the rest don't do any. I did Baldy and the Tooth and both were special ... I'd strongly suggest we do climb one or both of these. .

2b Selection of Primary Programs

A list of all the available programs is below. Pick the 5 you want to do most. Remember that we will do some activities in Colorado that will duplicate programs offered at Philmont - no need to do them twice! Remember also that the programs at Philmont are short "tastes" of an activity - not extensive versions like we'll do in Colorado. Programs are the third leg of the selection triad, but they're the ~~last~~ most important; don't overemphasize their importance!

- Adobe Casa - Creating adobe bricks from scratch and continuing the building of various adobe structures in progress around the site.
- Archaeology - Actual excavation of a archaeological dig (an 800 year old Anazasi Indian Kiva), plus the Indian Writings (Petroglyph) tour.
- Astronomy - Night-time program with expert astronomers and multiple telescopes. Spectacular if Mother Nature is in a cooperative mood. Many satellites, spaceships (when in orbit) and meteors/meteorites can be seen.
- Black Powder Rifle - Excellent but limited program - get to review and actually load and shoot a black-powder rifle; however, almost always just one shot allowed. Usually associated with Mountain Man Rendezvous.
- Blacksmithing - Excellent but limited program - entire crew gets to work with a blacksmith in making a single item from wrought iron.
- Burro Packing - Drag or be dragged by two of the most obnoxious creatures on Earth. A unique experience which you can't do anywhere else in Scouting. "Different." In addition, since the burros can carry up to 40 pounds each, everyone gets a temporary break on their pack weights. One and two-day programs.
- Burro Racing - A super-fun time, enjoyed by one and all.
- Cantina - Cards, checkers, junk-food, music, root-beer and a break from the trail. What's not to like?
- Cantina Show - Nighttime "campfire" program inside the cantina; usually excellent.
- Challenge Events - Excellent Crew building COPE course. Enjoyed by one and all, and very useful for Crew development. Better early in the trek.
- Chuck Wagon Breakfast - A break from Pemmican Bars and other inedibles; however, rarely enough food, long waits, delays getting out on the trail
- Chuck Wagon Dinner - Another break from cooking. Good stuff, universally enjoyed by one and all.
- Continental Tie and Lumber Company - Combination of Events, including spar-pole climbing and railroad-tie building usually some lumberjack-type challenge events.
- Environmental Awareness - Interesting tours, better when Mother Nature cooperates with respect to animal sightings.
- Fly Tying and Fishing - Fun if you're into fishing, and have the patience to stalk wild trout. Yes, you can devour what you catch.
- Shotgun Shooting - Reloading shotgun shells first, followed by minimum of 5 shots from a 12 gauge on a trap range. Most years, you can get 8 shots. Universally enjoyed.

- 30.06 Rifle Shooting - Also a reloading course, with shooting at stationary and moving targets. Not sure how many shots, but at least 4 (with the chance to purchase more) is what I've heard. Most Scouts enjoy, but some are afraid of the rifles (which are loud and have a pretty good kick to them.)
- Geology/Land Management - A interpretive lecture put on by experts from the Bureau of Land Management. Not as boring as it sounds, because the area has tremendous geological and man-made features. Best is at Baldytown
- Gold Mining and Panning - Tour a few hundred feet in one of the dozens of goldmines scattered throughout Philmont (only 3 can be toured.) Interesting. Gold panning - the real deal, in the coldest water you ever stuck your hands into. If incredibly lucky, can actually find a gold nugget. This program is usually tied to the Blacksmithing program.
- Homesteading - Visit an actual operating homestead in the Valle Vidal area, learn about low-technology living in Wilderness environments.
- Horse Riding - A "dude-Ranch" nose-to-derriere tour on one of Philmont's many trails. Early morning versions are usually excellent, afternoon versions less so (danger of thunderstorms mandates low altitude rides.) Lots of fun. Ride is just long enough to get tired of it, and marvel at folks who do it for a living.
- Jicarilla Apache Life - Tour a mock village, participate in a variety of American Indian activities, including a "sweat lodge" and arrow point chipping.
- Mexican Dinner - Similar to the Chuck Wagon Dinner, except you get everything and bring it back to your site to cook and eat. Plenty of food, and a break from the trail stuff, but a greasy mess to clean up.
- Mountain Biking - New Program in the Valle Vidal. Mountain Biking in a wilderness environment for several hours.
- Mountain Living - Participation in additional homesteading skills.
- Mountain Man Rendezvous - Another "interpretive" program, with backcountry staff done up as mountain men. Displays of trapping accoutrements, plus knife and hatchet-throwing. Usually associated with black-powder rifle shooting.
- Mountain Technology - A lecture format review of new technologies enabling modern living at remote wilderness encampments - satellite imagery, solar powered stills, etc.
- No Trace Camping - Lecture and practical skills on low-impact camping, usually run by N.O.L.S. and Sierra-Club type fanatics with an insulting and condescending attitude. Interesting, but nothing to go out of your way to get.
- Philmont Story Campfire - Either a flaming waste of time, or one of the best campfires you'll ever see; no way to predict year-to-year.
- Rock Climbing/Repelling - A taste of the real thing. Universally enjoyed, but a very limited experience. Experienced climbers need not apply.
- Rocky Mountain Fur Company - Another "interpretive" display and lecture.
- Search and Rescue - Another new program in the Valle Vidal, emphasizing Wilderness First Aid and proper search and rescue procedures. Quality varies year.
- Western Lore - Associated with the horseback riding. Mock cattle roping, boot branding, horseshoes, sometimes an interpretive lecture (by real cowboys) on the life.
- Wildlife Safari - Similar to Environmental Awareness Program.

- Some of the above programs may not be offered this year. There may also be new programs, which we will not know about until we receive our "Guidebook to Adventure" booklets.

There are a number of great Philmont related web sites, take some time in the coming months to look them over. Extra bonus points to the first person that finds the site with the trek calculator (you enter events & geography, it gives you the trek number) or the pain calculator (you tell it how old you are, what you weigh, how much you exercise and how much your pack will weigh and it tells you how much it will hurt.)

Merit Badges and other awards

Philmont does not offer merit badge programs. That said, we all would meet many merit badge requirements as a byproduct of our Philmont experience. Right now I plan to incorporate all of the necessary preparation work as part of our pre-trek shakedown for the following merit badges: [Backpacking](#), [Camping](#), [Hiking](#), and [Wilderness Survival](#). This will allow interested scouts to complete these badges.

Fifty Miler. We will hike Fifty miles or more, so by doing some conservation work before we go (rather than at Philmont) we will qualify for this award.

Wrap-up

I'll be setting up a dedicated area on the Troop's website to archive material related to this trip. In addition you should expect communication by direct mail and email. There will be little activity until spring when we start crew building and training. Even then we really won't get going fast and furious until next fall. In the mean time if you have questions give me a call, or better yet, shoot me e-mail.

- Jim

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If you want to go, or think you want to go, you should let me know as soon as possible by filling out the interest form on the Troop's website at WWW.Troop6BSA.ORG