



### Philmont Scout Ranch Trek

Troop 1333 and Troop 2

Expedition No. 704-J1

Trek No. 29

(Classification: Strenuous)

-83 miles over 10 backpacking days-

July 2007



#### Philmont Camp Headquarters:

The start of our Philmont trek took place at Camp Headquarters (base camp - Day 1). Our crew leader, Jackson, and Crew Advisor, Mr. K. Kaaz, participated in a review of trek logistics with Philmont staff that included topographical map overview, daily itineraries, food pickup locations, conservation project details and camp activities. Our crew was introduced to our ranger (Katie) whose role was to get us up to speed on Philmont hiking and camping guidelines, review the trails on the topo maps, and re-enforce the use of a compass including triangulation to establish



location. She also directed a final shakedown of backpacking gear and the procurement of supplies for the trek (food and cooking gear). This was followed by an evening campfire that included a history of Kit Carson, the Maxwell family, Waite Phillips, founder of Philmont Scout Ranch, and others that ultimately led up to the establishment of Philmont Scout Ranch.

After leaving base camp for our first day on the trek we toured the Kit Carson museum where we learned more details of life in the 1800's, the Santa Fe Trail and the history of land ownership in the area. Joe Bravenec met his match when it came to learning about black powder rifles and especially Aggie "lovers". By the time the black powder demonstration was over Joe and the rest of the Aggie lovers present had received an earful from a quick witted redhead who seemed to know a lot about Aggies judging by the ammunition she unleashed. Needless to say Joe and others wisely decided to take the tongue-lashings in stride. Gig 'em!

After leaving the Kit Carson museum we hiked on to Olympia, one of the few camps that had level ground for our tents. On the way to our campsite Katie reviewed with us the proper way to cross rivers and streams, the essentials about leaving no trace, the proper use of the "red roof inn", digging cat holes while adhering to distance rules from streams and trails, and protecting native trees from human contact by relying on the useful application of rocks.

After crossing streams and getting our boots soaked we made it to Olympia. Joe Bravenec regretted not buying knock off crocks at base camp so his boots could dry. Thank goodness he packed his "man suit." While setting up camp, we also learned about new uses of Nalgene water bottles, especially using them to pound in our tent stakes instead of rocks (rocks were off limits at Philmont except for use in target practice while engaging in essential bodily functions). Learning the principles of the "bearmuda" triangle was also important along with erecting and tying off bear bags, setting up a dining fly, managing "smellables", using a campsite sump, plate and utensil washing techniques, and last but not least how to successfully survive the feared "Spoon of Death".

Katie re-emphasized the importance of leaving no trace- this was paramount to not only surviving the wrath of Katie but the area wildlife. Importantly, if any food landed on the ground, you had to either scoop it up entirely and pack it out or eat it. It became rather clear after our first day that we had very few incidences of food having to be eaten off the ground or scooped into plastic bags. An added incentive was learning that bears eat about 5000 calories a day in the winter and by July they eat 20,000+ calories a day. These are hungry bears that can smell food for miles around.

Before leaving camp the next morning, we learned another important thing- how to fluff grass after packing our tents. Our crew hiked on to Crater Lake and fortunately we took a wrong trail only twice- things got better as the days progressed. During this time Trent, Alex, Joe, and the rest of us soon realized the benefits of knowing how to triangulate since it was a great way to confirm direction and orient ourselves onto the right trail. On the bright side, taking a wrong turn on one occasion enabled us to enjoy some really cool views of the Tooth of Time and Mt. Phillips.

On the way to Crater Lake we stopped at Abrue for some needed rest and ice cold, homemade root beer- man was that good! Before we got to Crater Lake, Garrett started chafing but fortunately was able to resolve this with some Neosporin. It was from this experience in the coming days that we decided to name our burro "Chafey" which we packed on our way from Miranda to Ponil.



Once we got to Crater Lake, we made some new friends who called themselves Bear and Moose. Moose was obliged to give some of us nicknames too; Jackson went by Günter and Michael was called Timmy (from the Lassie movies). This was a wild and entertaining duo who entertained us from the time we got there, throughout the evening campfire where they sang "Fire on the Mountain", "Rocky Top and a bunch of other songs with their musically inclined friends. Katie bid us farewell that night and left us to fend for ourselves for the rest of the trek. The next morning they taught us how to spar climb and how to keep "donkey" happy while climbing and the importance of complementing your donkey to ensure he belayed correctly.

Following our spar climbing activities, we said our farewell to Moose and Bear and began our hike to Shaefer's Pass just at the crack of noon. This hike was one of the most difficult on the trek- mostly steep and uphill. Only Mt. Baldy was more strenuous and oxygen depleting. Once we got to Shaefer's Pass we continued later that afternoon to hike the Tooth of Time. On our way Garrett heard the rattling of a rattlesnake embedded in a rock crevice on the trail. Mr. Kaaz left a note behind warning others of the rattlesnake after we safely passed. This snake was none too "rattled" by our presence. We stopped on the trail for some lunch and soon continued on the trail thinking Tooth of Time was right around the bend. Well, after encountering several "baby teeth" and descending and ascending switchbacks that seemed to put us entirely off course we made it to the Tooth. After a brief break, we ascended to the top and enjoyed the amazing panoramic views of Philmont. This was truly God's country and we were living it to the max!

After taking some pictures and enjoying the scenery we climbed down and proceeded to hike back to camp, encountering deer and, of course, that same noisy rattlesnake that we thought we'd never see again. After carefully strategizing what to do and assessing the situation (it was pitch dark by now and it was a good thing we all had our headlamps) we found a safe way around our dilemma and got back on the trail. While resting on the trail that evening, Daniel had read some of his war poems that were enjoyed by all.

Our next stop on the trail the next day was Waite Phillip's hunting lodge where we saw mule deer in a neighboring meadow, ate cookies and brownies and did some fun skits with other scouts from different treks. "Three Blind Jellyfishes", "Callisthenic Exercises" "Throwing Fairy Tales Out the Second Floor Window" and the "Belt Competition" were some of the favorites. Later that evening we were taken on a cabin tour to learn about Waite's hunting friends and their hunting activities "in the day".

The next morning we got up and left close to the crack of noon again. Our hike that day took us to Ute Gulch where we ate lunch and picked up provisions for the next three days. We continued our hike to Vista Grande/Cimmaroncito where we encountered a rainstorm and demonstrated the lighting safety position for about an hour until the storm passed. Once we arrived at Vista Grande, our crew learned about the environment, soil conservation, erosion and the impact of forest fires on the ecosystems. This is also where we completed our three hours of conservation work cutting logs and branches. After leaving Vista Grande, we continued our hike to Upper Dean and on the way we encountered fire damaged forests from the fire of 2002. Once there we spent about an hour trying to find a campsite that was overgrown with grasses and brush. More mule deer were observed and filmed during the evening and early morning hours.

Our next stop the following day was Miranda where we all had the opportunity to shoot 50 caliber black powder rifles. Michael got special treatment of sorts- he got to shoot 10 times unlike the rest of us who only shot twice. Actually he was having trouble with his rifle but finally got his rounds in. We all got to shoot our own targets- hats, playing cards, slices of wooden logs, and bandanas. Tomahawk throwing was also a skill most of us seemed to master at Miranda while



competing with other crews. Probably the best event was playing Mountain Ball. It's a twisted version of baseball where there are five bases, 3 tams, and 5 strikes instead of three. Alex, Trent, Joe, Tyler, Daniel and the scouts from Troop 2 all learned how to play, even though the final score was tilted heavily against them.

Following dinner, we experienced our first and only hail storm. The Bad News: lots of equipment and clothing got wet; the Good News: we had our tents already set up and were able to squeeze in the camp activities before the hail started. Having the dining fly set up to huddle under during the storm allowed us to stay fairly dry. Mr. Kaaz, Mr. Gerdes, several of the scouts collected firewood, pine needles, and kindling to help start a fire. We could have picked a better evening to do this but those of us who decided to stay up that evening were all determined to start one since we had not had the time to do so at previous campsites. After a lot of work, creativity and perseverance we got the fire started. We later learned that the crew down the trail at a nearby campsite tried to start one that evening but was not successful.

The next day we embarked on our planned side hike along the challenging south face that eventually took us to the top of Mt. Baldy. The hike up was not too difficult until we got to the last 700-800 ft. It was at that elevation, around 11,600 ft., that the steepness of the climb and the oxygen level made this a truly strenuous climb. Alex had to make an emergency stop on the way up to dig a cat hole before the final ascension. Getting to the top, though, was an extremely satisfying experience and the views at the top were spectacular. Other than the wind, it was very peaceful viewing the surrounding mountains in the distance. While descending Mt. Baldy, we all left with a sense of pride in what we had accomplished that day. Mr. Kaaz handed out metal pins inscribed with information about Mt. Baldy. Accompanying each pin was the following notation:

*"Nothing worthwhile was ever accomplished without the will to start, the enthusiasm to continue and, regardless of temporary obstacles, the persistence to complete."*

We continued on to Baldy Town where we purchased refreshments and picked up our final two days of provisions. After returning to Miranda, we camped and hiked to pick up our burro for that day's hike. After learning all the steps on how to pack a saddle, we packed our burro with some of our goods from our backpacks (we let our burro off the hook when it came to weight- more than we should have that day). We named him Chafey after Garrett's medial condition from days earlier. We wound up taking a detour to avoid washed out trails and on the way, we encountered Philmont's roaming rabbi who gave us continued encouragement and Philmont trail snacks before we headed on our way to the next trail camp, Flume Canyon. Once we got to our this campsite we set up camp, fed Chafey and later hiked back to Problano for the evening campfire activities consisting of some really great songs and country music mixed with lots of humor).

The next day we hiked to Ponil, our last stop before returning to base camp the following day. While at Ponil, we returned Chafey and said our heartfelt goodbyes to him. After lunch we picked up our horses and went horseback riding. Mr. Gerdes had a fun time trying to retrieve the reins to his horse after dropping them once at the corral and again on the trail. He still owes the trail guide a Dr. Pepper, the penalty for rein dropping.

After riding our horses, we returned to camp that afternoon and got in the chuck wagon line that evening for some tasty stew, bread and beverages. Following dinner, we went to the cantina for some good ol' fashioned homemade root beer and listened to some very fine fiddling and songs. Joe learned some very important cardinal rules from the bartender that evening: Remove your hat before entering the cantina, stay away from the cantina door, do not knock until it opens, do not leave your valuables unattended in the bar, and correct change is preferred. Joe broke one of



the rules and had to get his hat out of hock for \$2 after the bartender confiscated it because he had left it unattended at the bar. At 6 AM the next morning all the adult crew advisors at camp were assigned to prepare and cook pancakes and bacon for breakfast for the scouts. After our overnight stay at Ponil we hiked the next morning to the site outside camp where a bus picked us up and took us back to base camp.

Once we returned to base camp we all got to take showers (none of us had taken any showers during the entire trek). We spent time at the scout shop to purchase Philmont scout belts and other souvenirs and then attended church afterwards. All of us had dinner which was followed by an evening campfire and a crew leader awards ceremony. The singing and comedy skits at the campfire were great. After the campfire, we headed back to our tents, hit the sack, and woke up at 5:45 AM to pack and have an early morning breakfast before leaving Philmont for Dallas.