

# Lessons from the Trail

## **Start Movie Slide first:**

In a few months (XXXXX days, to be exact), members of Scout Troop 37 and Venturing Crew 37 will be taking to the trails at Philmont Scout Ranch for 12 days of high-adventure backpacking.

During those 12 days, they'll traveling more than 50 miles, carrying everything they need on their backs. They'll be in mountain range wilderness of more than 137,000 acres in New Mexico -- the largest youth camp in the world by size and number of participants. Its elevation ranges from 6,500 feet to 12,441 feet

For the 2007 season there were 34 staffed camps and 65 unstaffed camps, known as "trail camps." A trail camp is a camp without a permanent staff presence. Trail camps always contain several campsites, but they can be spread out over half a mile of trail or more, so that there is no sense of crowding.

Many camps have several live-in staff members who are in charge of the camp's "program," which consists of a wide variety of activities. Camps often carry a historical or modern theme, such as logging, mining or blacksmithing, fur trapping and mountain man life, challenge events or western lore. Program activities include blackpowder rifle loading and shooting, shotgun shooting and reloading, .30-06 shooting, trail rides on horseback, burro packing and racing, rock climbing (on artificial towers as well as actual rock faces, tomahawk throwing, branding, search and rescue training, mountain bicycling, Mexican homesteading, blacksmithing, goldpanning, obstacle courses, archeological sites, spar pole climbing, and a variety of campfires and evening programs.

While adventure for youth is a worthwhile cause of itself, you may be asking "what does this have to do with faith?"

There is, of course, the Duty to God award they can all earn. Under the guidance of a crew chaplain's aide, each participant in a trek may work to fulfill the requirements of the Duty to God Award. Requirements include attendance at a religious service, participation in at least three daily devotionals and leading Grace before a meal.

And, there are the leadership skills inherent in any undertaking they will learn and use in the future, as they become the leaders of your church.

But there is skillset embedded in the experience I prefer to call "Lessons from the Backpack." Some of them are specific to a Philmont expedition -- others are inherent in the out-of-doors, but all of them relate to the ways we interact with God and those around us.

## **Stop Movie Slide - Advance to Old Philmont Slide**

First is a very simple lesson, drawn from Matthew 11:30.

***“For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”***

There are two parts to this lesson. The first is, “you don’t need as much as you think you do.” Material possessions on the trail are as much a liability as they are an asset. Everything has weight. Carrying it -- while it might be nice to have -- requires effort. The first time I went to Philmont (in 1975) my pack weighed upwards of 45 pounds when I left on the trail. The most recent time I went (a couple of years ago), my pack weighed 28 pounds.

## **Advance to Shaky Backpacker and Gear Pile**

Mostly, that’s through experience. I’ve learned which things I will need (and use) and which things I won’t (and don’t). If I don’t have to have it, I ain’t gonna carry it. Sort of like going through life -- we carry a lot of things with us that we don’t have to have.

## **Advance to Shaky Backpacker and Lightweight Backpacker**

I think Jesus was a backpacker -- he knew we would have to carry some things with us -- in John 16:33, he tells us that “in this world you will have trouble.” But we don’t have to carry everything. Putting your trust in Him means taking on his yoke (just like a backpack), leaving many of your worries and all your sins behind -- and that pack is a lot lighter.

## **Advance to Climb Up Baldy**

Lesson number two: there's always another mountain/don't miss the gold. From 1 Corinthians 10:31 - 11:1

***31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for the glory of God.***

Philmont lies in the Sangre de Cristo mountains of New Mexico, at elevations ranging from 6,500 feet to 12,441 feet. The vast majority of the time crews spend hiking at Philmont is spent either going up, or going down a mountain. Just as in life, while you’re going up a steep trail, that’s often all you can think of. I find myself saying, “God, get me up this hill before I die!” During the climb, that’s all there is. When I reach the summit of a mountain, I’m awed by the majesty, the sense that I am a part of all God’s creation; and at the same time, I’m humbled by the realization of how small my space in that creation is.

## **Advance to Mountain View One**

But at the summit, looking around at the glories, at my age, I'm often struck by the thought -- "Yeah, you're at the top now, but way over there is where you're going, and there's a whole lot of ups and downs between here and there."

There's a saying at Philmont to the effect of "Don't Lose the Journey in Getting There," meaning, enjoy the trek -- with its ups and downs -- while you're on the trail. Don't miss out on it while you're focused on your goal.

At Cypher's Mine one year, they told us the story of a gold prospector, who got disgusted, quit, and headed back to civilization. Along the trail, in the dark of night, in a rainstorm, he heard a mysterious voice saying, "pick up a rock." When the voice wouldn't go away, he did just that, stuck it in his jacket, and forgot about it until years later. When he looked in the jacket -- years later -- he found the rock was solid gold.

### **Advance to Mountain View Two**

The story was explained by a staffer this way:

Philmont is not supposed to be easy. It's supposed to challenge you. There's going to be a day on the trail when you've hiked 10 miles, you have blisters all over your feet, your tentmate is smelly and getting on your nerves, and you're not going to want to do anything except go into your tent and go to sleep.

But later on, when you're back at school and not really listening to your algebra teacher, or you advisors are back at work and it's not really where you want to be; you're going to look at the "rocks" and remember your challenges and all the fun and accomplishments you had along the way. And all that will be Gold.

### **Advance to Group at Water Supply**

Lesson number Three:

You need water. Water draws people, fences keep people out.

***John 4:14 "those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty."***

New Mexico is a dry state. Humidity at the elevations where Philmont is located is very low. It's classified as a "high mountain desert." You dehydrate even sitting around, and the constant mantra is "drink more water." Dehydration is the bane of high altitude mountain activity.

One hike -- the last one into Base Camp on many treks -- up over Shaeffers Pass, past the Tooth of Time and down Tooth Ridge -- is notoriously dry. If you don't plan right, or carry enough water, you can find yourself in difficult situations when you run out of

water. Some camps are “dry camps,” so you have to adjust things to carry water in, have water for meals, and have enough water to get to the next source.

Fortunately, there are streams in the mountains, and some camps have water supplies. These areas are hubs for the groups trekking through the wilderness. Clark’s Fork, at the bottom of Shaeffer’s Pass and the last camp going up from the north; Shaeffer’s Pass Spring, at the top of the pass, are places that crews headed for Tooth Ridge camp, gather, spend time, eat and re-load on water before attempting the long hike into basecamp.

Jesus used water as a metaphor for his lessons -- in John 4:14, in talking to the woman at the well, he said, “those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty.” Anyone who’s finished the trek into base camp with an empty canteen can fully understand the pleasure in that metaphor.

### **Advance to Windmill Slide**

But, speaking of water, there’s another point to be made here: in our area, we have fences to keep cattle in. On the plains of West Texas, and eastern New Mexico, on the way to Philmont, there are large areas where there are very few fences. In the old days, before barbed wire, there were no fences, because there were no trees to make them or the fence posts out of, and using rocks (even if they were available) would have cost far too much.

But the windmills and water holes and the few streams -- cattle would never get too far away. If they did, they’d die. Too many times, we build fences around the living word of Jesus -- sometimes to keep people in, sometimes to keep others out.

Think of the Word like the wells on the plains. Some people may be closer, and some may be farther away from the source, but the water itself draws them near, where the fellowship of others and the refreshment of the water enables us to make the trek home. Don’t build fences to keep people in, or to keep people out.

### **Advance to Food Pile Slide**

Lesson Number Four

*2 Corinthians 8:13-15*

*13I do not mean that there should be relief for others and pressure on you, but it is a question of a fair balance between 14your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance. 15As it is written, “The one who had much did not have too much, and the one who had little did not have too little.”*

Expedition backpacking is a team sport -- that seems a little odd, but it’s true. Philmont requires that crews travel together -- the saying is that “A split crew is a lost crew.” There’s also -- no matter how light you travel -- a certain amount of gear that, if it’s dispersed among all the members of the crew is shared and eases each person’s

burden. Food and cooking water, for instance, is heavy. Three days worth of food for 12 people weighs around 24 pounds. Water -- at eight pounds per a gallon a day (the recommended minimum) is close to 100 pounds.

Here's a good illustration of how it works -- a two-man tent weighs close to 5 pounds. We split it between the two people sleeping in the tent, and each carries half that.

### **Advance to Phillips/Philmont Map Slide**

Those are mechanical things, but here's a moral illustration.

Waite Phillips was born in 1883 into a family of 10 children. Two of his brothers would go on to found Phillips Petroleum in 1917, and he worked for them for 11 years, learning to oil business from the ground up. But he left his brothers' business in 1914 and started his own oil company.

The Waite Phillips oil company was a huge success, partly because he shared the wealth with his employees, and after he sold the oil company in 1925, he was worth \$40 million (roughly \$500 million today). By 1926, he had bought more than 300,000 acres near Cimarron, NM.

Phillips was impressed by the values of scout troops who camped on his land, and in 1938, he decided to make a gift to the Boy Scouts of America. His first proposal was to give more than 35,000 acres of land to the scouts. Scout officials were worried about funding such a large camp; so, Phillips added \$50,000 for construction and funding to his gift. This time, the Scouts accepted.

### **Advance to Philtower/Villa Slide One**

Phillips wasn't through, though. In 1940, he contributed \$11,000 for improvement, and in 1941, he added in an additional 91,000 acres, his summer home (it's a mansion), his ranch headquarters buildings, several backcountry lodges, and \$50,000 worth of livestock. He also threw in a 23-story office building in Tulsa whose rent would provide the BSA with \$81,000 a year.

### **Advance to Villa Slide**

Because of Phillips' gifts, more than 20,000 scouts a year travel the mountains of New Mexico, learning their lessons of Philmont. The ranch is expecting its 1,000,000th trekker in 2013. Phillips' generosity wasn't limited to the scouts -- over his career, he gave away half of what he earned.

### **Advance to Philanthropy Quote**

For an explanation, you can turn to his book of epigrams, which have been published since the days he carried the book in his pocket every day, writing down important thoughts and distilling them to easily remembered sayings.

*Real philanthropy consists of helping others outside our family circle, from which no thanks is required or expected.*

**Advance to Keep Permanently Slide**

and, perhaps his most noted quotation:

*"The only things we keep permanently are the things we give away."*

To close, your Scouts and Venture Crew's trip to Philmont will provide them not only with a lifetime memory of fun and accomplishment, but also reinforce some of the most basic lessons Jesus taught, as he traveled the trails of the Holy Land.

**Advance to Movie Slide, play movie**

**Then, Advance to Philmont Grace Slide**

Close with Philmont Grace:

*For food, for raiment,  
For life, for opportunity,  
For friendship and fellowship,  
We thank Thee, O Lord. Amen.*