

The spirit of Philmont

When it comes to planning a trip to Philmont Scout Ranch, the conversation almost always turns to gear, advance training, and other preparations.

And rightfully so.

As a first timer who recently completed trek 7-6, I was very preoccupied in the months, weeks, and especially days leading up to our 20-hour Amtrak trip on July 6. Would this 57-year-old flatlander from Illinois actually be able to complete multiple back-to-back days of this rigorous trip? They don't call it high adventure for nothing!

After six nights and seven days, I could thankfully say none of my fears -- altitude sickness, proper training, an old high school "water on the knee" track injury -- came true, not even a single blister. Even Mother Nature cooperated during monsoon season! In addition, aside from a few minor flareups and breakdowns you would expect on this kind of trip, Scout Spirit stayed high and our crew got along well throughout the trip.

As we know from Philmont History, oil magnate Waite Phillips made an initial donation of 35,000 of his 300,000 acre working ranch in 1938 and by 1941 brought the total up to more than 127,000 donated acres for the creation of what was first called Philturn Rocky Mountain Scout Camp. It was made in the spirit of "for the benefit of the Boy Scout organization" because he was so impressed by the Scouting program.

The spirit of Philmont might not always be intentionally thought about during the thousands of steps on the trail or the whirlwind of activity at basecamp before heading out. Really it took me a few days of distracting myself from the rigors of this physical challenge that it struck me. I can think of so many staff, from cashiers to basecamp offices; porch talks at staffed camps; those working conservation sites and in the middle of the burn area; the performers of the opening and closing campfires and the campfire show at Clarks Fork; and staff appearing at random places along the trails; that everyone was full of scout spirit. I can't remember anyone seeming like they were even close to having an off day.

This is more than a summer job. It is clear that everyone genuinely wants to be here, help you, and make your trip to Philmont, whether it's your first time or your fifth, memorable. I also felt as though everyone had an answer for anything I could ask.

This especially included our ranger, Ethan E. He was with us step by step for the first two days, patiently and painstakingly explaining everything from navigation on the trail, to purifying water, cooking, cleaning, setting up camp, finding the Red Roof Inn, and so forth. Our scouts, in a thank you card they signed and gave to him at the end of our trip, said he

“prioritized his time and had the utmost patience with those who struggled” even after a long, demanding day on the trail. He was amazing!

Probably one of the most impactful times was our first night on the trail when Ethan took us out to an overlook at Toothache Springs. From that awe-inspiring vista view somewhere around 7,800 feet, he invited us to note in silence five things that we could see and hear. After we shared, Ethan then told us his Philmont story about his first trek back in 2018 and how it changed his life, so much in fact that he chose it as the location for his college internship. Like the other staff, it was not just a summer job, not just a requirement. He specifically chose to be here to share his passion. We then closed out by committing ourselves to the Philmont Wilderness Pledge. What an inspirational first evening!

It is this leadership and spirit that then filtered down through to our crew leader, wilderness gaia and chaplain's aide. You could argue they completed requirements just to earn their badges, but that didn't take away from the focus they had fulfilling their respective roles. And I would be remiss not mentioning the camaraderie, encouragement, and high fiving that was always evident with Scouts and Scouters that you crossed on the trails.

I'm sure Mr. Phillips is looking down with a huge smile, knowing that the spirit in which he made his majestic donation is alive and well to this day throughout Philmont. Thank you for such an impactful experience!

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