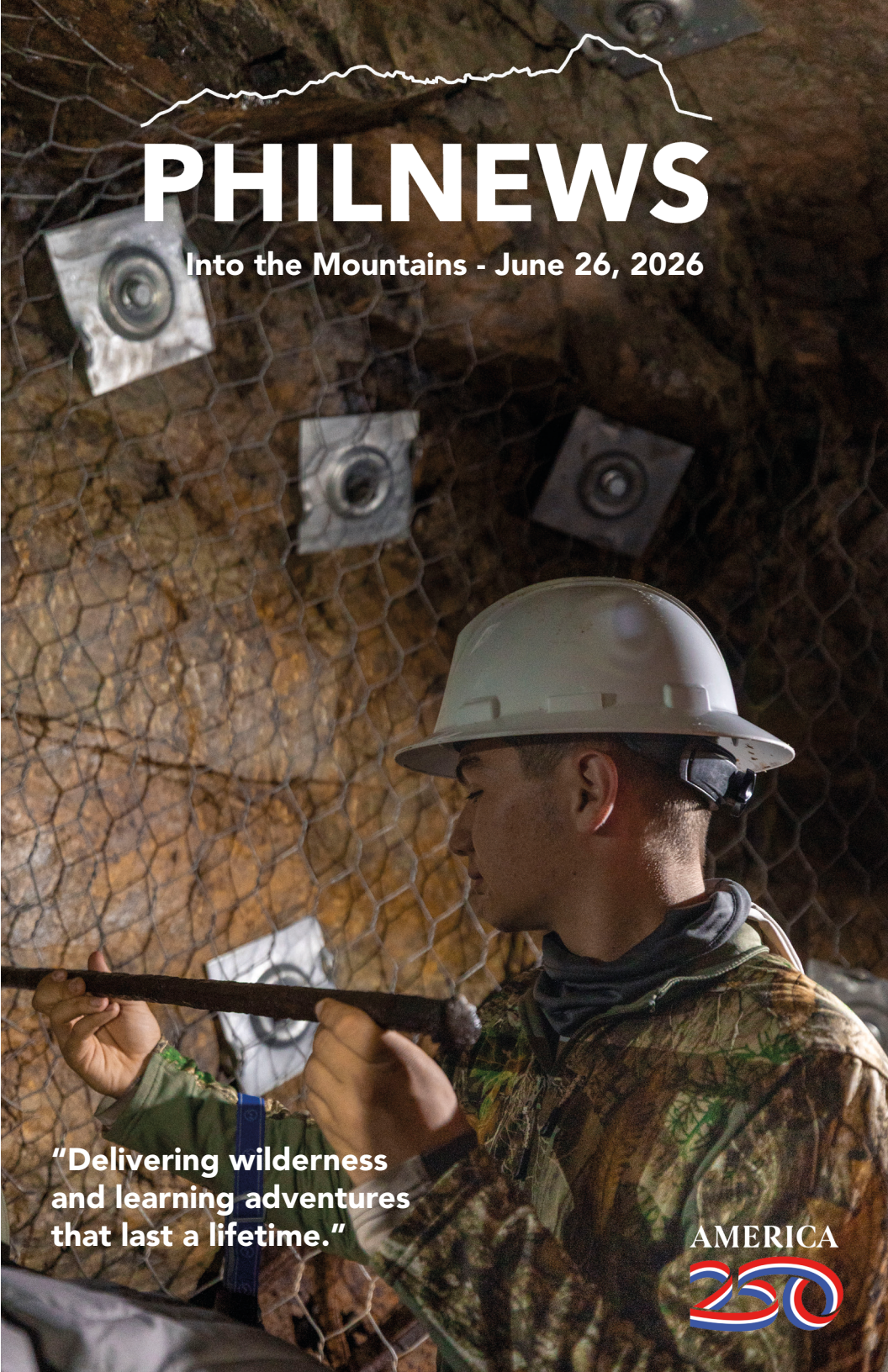


A man wearing a white hard hat and a camouflage jacket is working on a wire mesh structure. He is holding a long, dark, cylindrical object. The background is a textured, brownish surface with several square metal plates attached to it. A white outline of a mountain range is visible at the top of the image.

PHILNEWS

Into the Mountains - June 26, 2026

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Sarah Peplow

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Becker Griffin

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Matt Stepp

A Philmont Father's Day

By John Youngdale

Since its inception, Philmont has been a place for Scouts and their fathers to explore the backcountry together. Through the timeless backpacking experience, kids bond with their dads through challenge and accomplishment, but there are many other ways for them to grow closer together at Philmont.

At the Philmont Training Center, families come to participate in family adventure camp, a base camp program with backcountry activities. Jordan Hitchens, who served as Order of the Arrow Vice National Chief in 2000, brought his family to adventure camp this year for the second time.

"It's a great opportunity to get the kids out and about and doing adventurous stuff," Hitchens said.

Hitchens and his son, who just crossed over into Scouting, hiked the Tooth of Time, which Hitchens calls a "big dad and son thing."

"This is it for a dad in Scouting," Hitchens said. "Bringing your kids to family camp is incredible... I get to see them grow up in Scouting."

For Hitchens, Philmont's program of hiking and adventure is what brings his family together, but for Jason

Smallwood, work is what brings him closer to his daughter. Smallwood, who works as Camping Maintenance Ranger gets to work year-round with his daughter Tooth of Time Traders Assistant Manager Kennedy Alton.

"It seems special now that we're both on full time," Smallwood said. "I just want her to be happy and do what she wants to do, and I'm extremely happy being here [with her]."

Alton, who said her dad was the reason she came to work here, recalled a story from a trek when her dad took her wet sleeping bag so she could have his dry one, risking his own health.

"He gave me his sleeping bag and got in the soaking wet one," Alton said. "He's one of the most selfless men I've ever met."

Smallwood made a sacrifice for his daughter; Father's Day gives us an opportunity to reflect on how the sacrifice fathers make brings them closer to their children. Philmont is a place that brings fathers and their kids together through not only challenge and sacrifice, but also through natural beauty and accomplishment.

A Philmont Father's Day



Photo by Isaiah Mitchell



Photo by Ian Massidda

"We Take Care of Them Because They Take Care of Us"

A Closer Look into Life as a Wrangler

By Urvi Thakker

Tyler Thompson, his left hand tightly wrapped up in a piece of bandage as he works on the paddock, is a first-year wrangler at Philmont Scout Ranch. The wranglers at the Ranching Department help get the horses ready for the busy summer season by exercising and training them. "Oftentimes, working with horses is organized chaos," Thompson said. "These horses have been turned out in pasture for seven months, so they're just kind of feral, but that's given us the unique opportunity to learn

in a Western horse-riding context."

Although the Ranch manages a herd of about 250 horses, it takes an unimaginable amount of individual care and attention to work with these animals. Thompson explains the process of preparing the horses for the season, "We've been exercising them, we've been looking at their personalities and their body compositions, and making sure that they're fit and ready to be ridden by... young people."



Photo by Matt Stepp

A Closer Look Into Life as a Wrangler

"I'm an Eagle Scout myself, so it feels kind of full circle and wholesome to actually be here and contribute to a program that really impacted my life in a positive way, especially regarding horses," Thompson said, reflecting on his experience at Philmont's cavalcade in 2004, which initially sparked his lifelong love of horses. "It just was impactful, and it kind of brought together all of the value systems which we had learned in Scouting."

When asked what his favorite part about working with horses is, Thompson answered: "They force you to work on yourself... they are so sensitive to a weird vibe or body language, and so, part of the reward of working with them is that, in order to earn their trust, you have to do internal work on yourself, develop yourself for the privilege to work with them."

As someone with a background in counseling and psychotherapy, Thompson is here this summer to get hands-on experience with horses and their interaction with young people, taking him one step closer to his dream of working with equine-assisted counseling and psychotherapy. In London, he enjoys playing polo, has a practice of his own, and works closely with an organization called Ebony Horse Club, whose mission is to use horsemanship to raise the education, life skills, wellbeing, and aspirations of young people from disadvantaged



communities in London. "I just feel so grateful to be able to come here again and impact the lives of other young people, but also these horses," Thompson said. "We take care of them because they take care of us."

Thompson recalls how transformative his involvement with Philmont and Scouting has been for him.

"For me, what's most important is that this experience does have the potential to shift the life course of young people in a really profound way," Thompson said. "I wouldn't be able to orient myself in the world in the way that I have been had I not had my experiences here at Philmont and in Scouting."

Full-Time Staff Highlight: Matthew Armao

By Heidi Wakefield

Second year full-time staff member and Eagle Scout Mathew Armao is excited to be back at Philmont, working as one of the ranch's Maintenance Mechanics. Since starting in 2023 as a 19-year-old, he's now been a full-time staff member since May of last year.

Growing up in Cumming, Georgia he has a deep appreciation for the mountains and the outdoors. He expressed how much he appreciates his ability to "go snowboarding in the winter," and "camping in the summer," as a resident of Cimarron.

He enjoys the variety his position offers. Managing all vehicles at Philmont from changing tires and transmissions on standard SUVs, to working on our own firetrucks, he loves technical problem solving and working with cars.

"The best part of the job... is going out and recovering vehicles," he said. "You get out of the shop, get out into the backcountry, and drive cool trucks."

When stuck on a problem, Armao often looks to his supervisor and mentor Jeremy for technical advice. "Jeremy's a wealth of knowledge," he said. "[He's] like my dad. I mean we bicker and fight, but there's love

behind it."

"This place has been great for learning the experience," he said. "Because there's a lot of scope here," beyond that of what most mechanics encounter at a typical shop.

As for the future, he looks forward to the next several years of working at Philmont. "I definitely think I got to stick around for these, five or eight years to see what happens," he said. "It's a good job, good people, good place."



Photo by Becker Griffin

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Living History: The Aztec-Ponil Mine at French Henry

By Urvi Thakker

The Aztec-Ponil Mine reopened for visitation after a long restoration process following its closing in 2024. At French Henry, only a short walk away from the Aztec-Ponil Mine, Living History interpreters host multiple mine tours throughout the day for crews passing through the camp.

The Aztec-Ponil is one of two mines at Philmont that give tours to Scouts, the other being Cypher's Mine in the South Country. The historical significance of the Aztec-Ponil mine dates back long before it became a part of Philmont's story, operating as a mine under the Maxwell Land Grant.

"We have been operating the mine since the 1960s for Scout tours at the French Henry camp," said Phillip

Ferrier, Associate Director of the Backcountry Program.

"They recorded that they pulled about a million dollars of gold out of [the mine]," Ferrier said about the Aztec-Ponil, a mine which is part of a multi-level mining complex in the region surrounding Baldy Town. "It was one of the last mines that was operating in this area."

Elmer, a historical interpreter at French Henry, said, "I'm so glad that our mine is open again this year. We all celebrated...it's such a beautiful camp. The history of the entire Baldy area is just so interesting."

Through these immersive tours, Scouts get a glimpse into what the mining area was like in 1894 and the



Photo by Sarah Peplow

stories behind the people who ran it. “Everyone likes history, they just don’t know it yet,” Elmer said. “It all has to do with the way it’s presented, with the way it’s taught. I think that historical interpretation is a great way to teach history to the [Scouts], especially because in their classrooms, they’re not learning about this specific area; they’re learning a generalized version of everything that happened out west all at once. So, [living history] allows us to be a lot more specific to really show what it would have been like in this specific area... So many people lived here, this land has passed hands so many times.”

Alice, another historical interpreter at French Henry, echoed the importance of engaging in a living history program integrated with the Aztec-Ponil Mine. “I think it’s cool to kind of disconnect with modern times and things like technology and really go back to the natural aspect of life,” Alice said.

“It’s just really important to think of all that came before you,” said Elmer. “The fact that we are, in the broader spectrum, just a small part of history, and especially a small part of the history of this area.”

The Aztec-Ponil mine at French Henry, post-restoration, is now a site stabilized by both modern and traditional mine reinforcement methods, ready for Scouts and staff visitors to get a closer look and learn



Photo by Sarah Peplow

about its long-standing history. In the mine, one might see dacite porphyry (the igneous rock that forms the Tooth of Time), plant fossils, a water supply box in case the mine collapsed, or even strike gold!



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So Many Ways to Return HOmE

By The Philmont Staff Association

If you are on Philmont's seasonal or full-time staff, served as PTC faculty, or volunteered your time for the Ranch for at least a full week (check our website for full membership eligibility), you already qualify to join the Philmont Staff Association. That eligibility never expires. The door is always open to join nearly 4,000 fellow staff alumni who call themselves PSA family.

In addition to other benefits, PSA membership provides more chances to come HOmE than you might expect.

For starters, PSA members can sign up for backcountry summer and autumn treks, and an annual cavalcade. Eligible family members are welcome to come along for the adventure. This summer, five Summer Trek crews will hit the trail July 5, each group setting its own pace and building its own itinerary. Complete a trek and you'll earn a PSA Trek Arrowhead to mark the milestone.

Prefer to give back rather than just hike? Philmont Service Corps puts members to work at backcountry camps each spring and fall. Recent crews have helped renovate Cimarroncito, Ponil, Baldy Town, Indian Writings, Beaubien, and Clarks Fork, leaving their mark on the Ranch for future generations of Scouts.

If trail work calls you, Volunteer Vacation is the PSA's fall service event, coordinated with Philmont's Conservation Department. Over the past 10 years, participants have shaped four major trail projects: the spur trail to Cimarroncito Peak, the connector between Sawmill and Cyphers Mine, the trail to Cito Peak from Webster Parks, and now a new connecting trail from Sawmill to Webster Parks. Additionally, PhilBreak welcomes PSA members and any registered Scouter or Scout aged 16 and up for two weeklong service projects in March. The projects



Welcome HOmE



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So Many Ways to Return HOMe

vary depending on the Philmont's need and the weather restrictions, making it a great way to introduce others to the spirit of service that defines Philmont.

Then there's the time many members look forward to all year: HOMecoming. This year's reunion brings the PSA family back to the Ranch July 2 through 5, coinciding with Cimarron's Fourth of July celebrations. Participants will gather for special activities, old stories, and new friendships, all rooted in a shared love for Philmont.

Once you're a staffer, you're always eligible. If you have not joined the PSA yet, there is no better time to start. Visit the PSA office or check us

out at philstaff.org. Your way back to Philmont is waiting, whether that is on the trail, on a service project, or back at HOMecoming with the family that will always be here for you.

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**HWY 21, Mile Marker 11
Rayado, NM**



Encampment on the Rayado, 1846:

A Living History Event

24-26 July 2026

Kit Carson Museum, HWY 21 Mile Marker 11

"Having progressed seventeen miles, we encamped on the Rayado (sic), where there was neither grass nor fuel."

John T. Hughes,
Doniphan's Expedition, 1847.

In the summer of 1846, Colonel Stephen Watts Kearny and his Army of the West marched overland from Fort Leavenworth to Bent's Fort on the Arkansas before advancing into New Mexico Territory. In the summer of 1846, this force encamped on the Rayado River.

Camp open to the public:

Friday: 8:00-5:00

Saturday: 8:00-5:00

Sunday: 8:00 until 12:00

Observe living history volunteers as they portray elements of the Army of the West encamped along the Rayado River. There, Missouri Volunteers, civilian scouts, freighters, traders and American civilians accompanying the volunteers encounter the Nuevo Mexicano population. Witness both sides engage in diplomacy, conduct trade, and debate the future course of the territory.

Counselor's Corner

By Dr. Luke

This summer, I have many great talks about neurology and mental health. I wanted to pass on some information on increasing the use of neurochemicals in our brains. Happy chemicals, including dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins, can be naturally produced through lifestyle changes, diet, and social interactions

Understanding Happy Chemicals:

Dopamine: Often referred to as the “reward chemical,” dopamine is released when you experience pleasure or anticipate a reward. It plays a crucial role in motivation, attention, and learning.

Serotonin: Known as the “mood stabilizer,” serotonin helps regulate mood, sleep, appetite, and digestion. Adequate levels of serotonin contribute to feelings of calm and emotional balance

Oxytocin: Commonly called the “love hormone,” oxytocin is released during physical touch, social bonding, and childbirth. It promotes feelings of trust and connection

Endorphins: These are the body's natural pain relievers, released during physical exertion, stress, and pleasurable activities. They help reduce pain perception and create feelings of well-being

Ways to Boost Happy Chemicals Naturally:

Exercise Regularly: Engaging in physical activity, especially aerobic exercises like running or cycling, can significantly increase endorphin levels and improve mood. Group activities can also enhance oxytocin production.

Get Sunlight Exposure: Sunlight helps boost serotonin levels. Spending 15-30 minutes outdoors a few times a week can enhance your mood and overall well-being.

Maintain a Healthy Diet: Foods rich in tryptophan (like turkey, eggs, and nuts) can help increase serotonin levels. Consuming dark chocolate and spicy foods can trigger endorphin release.

Practice Mindfulness and Meditation: Mindfulness practices can help regulate serotonin levels and improve emotional well-being. Start with short



Photo by Isaiah Mitchell

sessions and gradually increase the duration.

Engage in Social Interactions: Positive social interactions, physical affection (like hugging), and acts of kindness can boost oxytocin levels, enhancing feelings of connection and happiness.

Laugh and Have Fun: Engaging in activities that make you laugh or bring joy can trigger endorphin release, contributing to a happier mood.

By incorporating these practices into your daily routine, you can naturally enhance the production of happy chemicals, leading to improved mood and overall well-being.

Remember, if you want or need to talk to somebody stop by the infirmary and ask about in person or virtual options.

Backcountry Recipes

Chocolate Butterscotch Pie

Ingredients:

¾ cup brown sugar

½ tsp salt

6 tbsp of Hershey chocolate syrup

½ tsp vanilla

½ cup all purpose flour

2 1/2 cups milk

2 egg yolks, well beaten

2 tbsp butter

9-inch deep dish pie shell

Instructions:

Thoroughly combine sugar, flour, and salt. Stir in milk, chocolate syrup, and egg yolk. Next, cook over medium heat until thick, stirring constantly.

Remove from burner; blend in butter and vanilla. Pour into pie shell.

Recipe courtesy: Heath Shelton



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Phil-Lingo

By Urvi Thakker

Hiking around the backcountry with your friends on a hot summer's day, sweaty and grimy, pretending to know what your friends are talking about when they say things like "Phil-Crud?" Can't decode the words of gibberish that others seem to understand? Just nodding along every time someone says a bunch of Phil-Lingo? We see you. We got you.

I-Camp: Inter-camp mail is a system through which staff can send one another mail within Philmont. Pro tip: You can send almost anything, as long as it's legal, through I-Camps! Example: "I got five I-camps in the mail today because I am so cool and

have so many friends!"

WFA/WFR: Pronounced "Woo-fah" and "Woo-fur," they stand for Wilderness First Aid and Wilderness First Responder, respectively. (I know, I was sad too when I heard it didn't have to do anything with woofs and dogs.) Example: "Don't get injured doing silly stuff in the backcountry just because there will be WFRs there to save you."

Single Digit: Senior management with low radio unit numbers designated to respond to sensitive or emergent issues. Example: "I have a sticker of a Single Digit, Andrea Watson, on my Nalgene."

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Hard and Awesome Can Both Be True

By Andrea Watson

One of the things that makes Philmont meaningful is also one of the things that makes it hard.

A Philmont trek asks a lot of us. There are early mornings, heavy packs, steep climbs, afternoon thunderstorms, hot days, sore feet, and moments when everyone wonders how much farther they have to go, along with the quintessential question, "Are we there yet?" It is not always easy, and we should not pretend that it is.

The other night, I spoke with two participants who were less than 12 hours away from hitting the trail. They were excited, but they were also honest about being nervous. They wondered whether their itinerary would be too much, what the weather might bring, and how they would manage the weight of their pack. They wondered whether they were up for it.

That is a pretty normal feeling before a Philmont trek.

When I was an Explorer Scout preparing to go on a trek in 1995, my dad, who was our lead adviser, told me something I have remembered ever since: "It's going to be hard, and it's also going to be awesome." I date myself a little when I refer to myself as an Explorer Scout, but he was right. Sometimes the hardest part of the

day becomes the story everyone talks about later. A climb that felt endless. A thunderstorm that rolled in at the wrong time. A crew member who was struggling and kept going because their fellow crew member encouraged them.

To this day, members of our 1995 crew talk about the long climb up Mount Phillips while carrying extra water. For a group of kids from Florida, it was the biggest climb most of us had ever done. And when we reached the top, we saw views none of us had ever imagined. It was also the first time I had ever seen snow, just a small patch near the top of Mount Phillips. We do not just talk about how hard it was. We talk about what it felt like to make it to the top together. It was hard. And it was awesome.

That same hard-and-awesome truth is part of a summer on Philmont staff, too. It is exciting, but it is not easy work. There are long days, unexpected problems, tired moments, and plenty of times when Philmont asks more of you than you expected. That is true whether you are in the backcountry, in a dining hall, repairing equipment, caring for animals, checking in participants, or doing one of the many jobs that most people never see.

People do not come to Philmont because they expect an easy summer.

Hard and Awesome Can Both Be True

They come because this place is real. It will challenge you, and you get through it with the people around you. Sometimes a hard day is just a hard day. But later, those are often the days you remember most.

To those two participants who were nervous before they hit the trail: you are not the first Scouts to wonder whether you can do it. We have all felt that. Take it one hill, one camp, and one day at a time. The important thing is that we do not have to do it alone. We have our whole crew to help each other. "We all made it" means something here.

And to our staff: thank you for being part of the reason those moments become possible.

It is going to be hard, but it is also going to be awesome!

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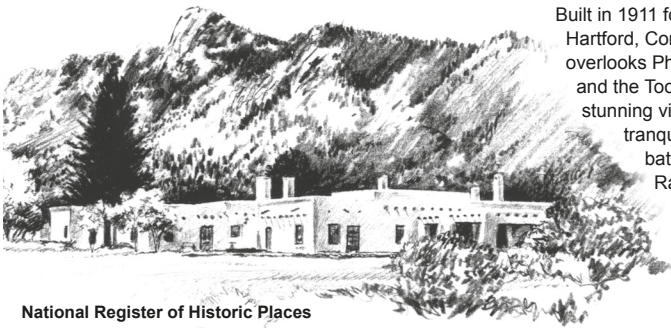
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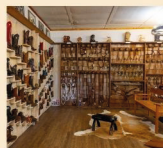
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From Trees to Trails: Scout-Focused Conservation

By Heidi Wakefield

“Education is not preparation for life, education is life itself.”

-John Dewey, educational philosopher and reformer.

Environmental Educators take John Dewey’s words seriously on the ranch with their play-based, outdoor–classroom-style teaching methods. Founded in 1971, Philmont’s Conservation Department follows that philosophy, through trail maintenance, forest management, stream restoration, and unconventional projects such as the restoration of burial grounds in the backcountry.

In 1943, Waite Phillips wrote to national council leadership the outlining the extensive work he performed on the ranch, from building “roads, trails, camps, the best of fences,” to his efforts to “develop springs, irrigation reservoirs... and other items of improvement too numerous to count.” With all his work, and little support externally past those of the camp operations, he stated, “What I am concerned about, therefore, is the conservation of these business properties.”

That concern took root. By 1971, the Conservation Department grew into what it is now an integral part of the Philmont experience. With a required three hours of work for any participant who completes a trek, it teaches Scouts

the importance of hard work and leaves them with a sense of pride, having contributed to Waite’s vision for the ranch’s longevity.

In honor of that mission, Philmont offers three conservation-focused trek programs: Roving Outdoor Conservation School (ROCS), Training Crew Trek (TCT), and Order of the Arrow Training Crew (OATC), open to the members of the OA. Each combining Environmental Educator guided lessons, guest lectures, and outdoor hands-on experience.

ROCS, that runs a week longer than the TCT and OATC, offers scouts an immersive 21-day program. Two Environmental Educators accompany each crew through 12-14 on trek-lessons covering everything from ecology to meteorology, between 40 hours of hands-on conservation work. Guest lecturers meet crews in the backcountry to speak on specialized topics, extending Philmont’s conservation outreach well beyond the ranch itself.

“I want to help them actually watch the earth turn,” Andrea Lommen said, an astrophysicist joining the 612 TCT as a guest lecturer this summer. Hoping to encourage Scouts to not just learn about the environment but observe the change of land firsthand.

From Trees to Trails: Scout-Focused Conservation

Danial, a Scout on the 612 TCT, noted his crew was able to “focus on one area for a very long time,” when asked what he liked most about his TCT.

So far, along their trek, the five 612 TCT Scouts mentioned they learned about the carbon cycle, rock types, water cycles, and fire. At the time, they were sitting down for a Meteorology lesson in Lookout Meadow, led by Eddie Menso, Environmental Educator Coordinator.

Across the backcountry, both traditional and conservation crews have access to eight cons sites covering three areas of focus: forest management, stream restoration, and trail development. Scouts interested in forest management can plant trees at Cimarroncita and perform restorative

thinning at Beaubien. Those drawn to trail building can develop trails at Elkhorn, Sioux, Sawmill, and North Fork Urraca. Scouts curious about aquatic systems can go to McCrystal Creek and Cito Creek to learn about Beaver Dam Analogs.

When asked what he learned on the trail, 612 TCT Scout Aarav did not recall a scientific name or a cloud formation, but rather a small sentiment that came up throughout his trek. “Appreciate the little things,” he said, reinstating that Philmont’s conservation work is not just about building trails and clearing forests, it’s about teaching the next generation of Scouts that this land is worth working for, one small project at a time.



Photo by Matt Stepp







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