

NCAC Philmont Advisor Training

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The Big Four

adapted from "The Philmont Advisor's Guide"

For most first time Philmont hikers, it is not unusual to spend \$300 to \$500 in equipment. The most often purchased items are [boots](#), [sleeping bags](#), [packs](#), and [rain gear](#). Hopefully, the decision to go to Philmont comes prior to Christmas so that some of the gear may be obtained as Christmas presents.

Boots. Most outfitting stores recommend leather hiking boots for Philmont because of the support they provide when compared to high-tech synthetic boots. However, leather boots cost more and are harder to break in. Wally's son Wes required a new set of boots each time he went to Philmont because his foot grew. Spending \$125 to \$200 on leather boots just does not make sense when a synthetic pair of boots costing \$40 to \$90 will work just as well. Outfitting stores will also say that synthetic boots will fall apart due to the ruggedness of Philmont's trails. In his nine trips to Philmont, Wally has never seen a synthetic boot fail. Coop knows several Appalachian Trail thru-hikers who experienced no problems with synthetic boots. In fact, several thru-hikers preferred the synthetic boots because of their ability to dry out faster than all leather boots. The jury is still out on Gore-Tex boots. During Coop's 1990 hike through the Smokies, a brand new pair of Gore-Tex boots leaked after two days of rain. While at Philmont, we talked to several rangers who loved their Gore-Tex boots. In any case, if new boots are needed, plan on purchasing them in March. This will provide enough time to break in the boots while reducing the possibility of them being outgrown by Philmont. If you do buy leather boots, make sure that they have been waterproofed several times before you head to Philmont.

Each crew member should wear two layers of socks. The inner layer should be polypropylene or a CoolMax sock liner. The liner wicks the moisture away from the foot to the outer sock. When the foot is dry, there is a decreased chance of a getting a blister. Heavy wool socks as outer layers are great. However, some crew members do not like the feel of wool socks and they take a long time to dry out once they get wet. Coop has switched to an all-synthetic outer layer hiking sock produced by Thorlo that does it not itch and dries out rapidly because but because it contains no wool. Both Wally and Mimi Hoyt use the new Smart Wool socks that were recently introduced on the market. Even though they do contain wool, they still dry much quicker than the all wool ragg socks. Like most backpacking equipment, it really comes down to a matter of personal choice. Whatever type you use, pack three pairs of outer socks and two or three pairs of polypropylene sock liners. Make sure that you check the condition of your crew's socks before you head for Philmont. Too often, crew members will buy new boots and neglect to buy new socks. Socks do wear out! If the socks' padding capability is worn down, get new ones.

Hikers also need to pack an in-camp shoe that can be worn once you get into camp and can get your boots off. A set of moccasins, running sneakers or Teva-type sandals make an excellent in-camp shoe. Getting into in-camp shoes gives your feet a rest and gives you an opportunity to sun dry your boots. You may want to bring along a set of wool in-camp socks. If you are in the high country, sandals alone can be pretty cold. Whatever type of in-camp shoe you choose should have a low impact sole that keeps it from further damaging the ground of your already over camped camp site. In-camp shoes should be easy to get on and off for those late night visits to the latrine. And finally, they should be comfortable enough for you to hike in to the next camp site, if you are having severe boot problems.

An inexpensive pair of ankle high gaiters are nice to have. This is especially true if you use a poncho for rain gear. Gaiters help keep your boots and socks clean and dry. They also prevent small rocks and sand from getting inside your boots.

Sleeping Bags. Sleeping bags should be filled with synthetic fiber, weigh less than four pounds, and be rated to 20 degrees. At Philmont's higher elevations, the temperature gets into the thirties at night and there always seems to be a stiff breeze blowing. Other than boots, the sleeping bag is the most important piece of equipment a crew member will bring to Philmont. Crew members need to know that the one and only place where they will always be warm and dry is in their sleeping bags, inside their tents. Care must be taken to assure that the bag is properly treated. Crew members must never get into their sleeping bags wet, because the moisture reduces the warming ability of the bag. During the

night, the bag also absorbs moisture from the body. Every opportunity should be taken to air out the bag. Otherwise a 20 degree bag will become a 25 degree bag the next night and so on. Down sleeping bags are not recommended because they lose their insulating capability when they get wet. Even though most sleeping bags come with a "water-proof" stuff sack, an additional plastic trash bag should be placed in the stuff sack to provide a second layer of protection.

An inexpensive closed cell pad is a must for all crew members. Not only does it provide a comfortable sleep even on those not so level places, it also prevents heat loss downward and provides a barrier against moisture should your tents leak in a heavy rain. For advisors, we recommend a Therm-A-Rest sleeping pad because of its ability to provide a good night's sleep. It also adds 5-10 degrees of warmth when compared to sleeping directly on the ground. While a Therm-A-Rest pad costs around \$50, it is well worth the investment. Therm-A-Rest pads come in two models; the full length and the 3/4 length. Although the full length model is a little heavier, it keeps the feet off the ground which could keep the sleeping bag dry should your tent floor get wet.

Packs. As an advisor, it is difficult to recommend a type of pack to bring to Philmont. Pack selection really boils down to individual choice and the amount that you are willing to pay for the pack. External frame packs are the most common and cost significantly less than internal frame packs. They allow you to strap on additional equipment giving you greater flexibility in what you can carry. External frame packs usually come with lots of built in pockets that provide easy access for needed gear. They are also cooler to wear which is a significant plus in the New Mexico afternoon heat. A minimum size external frame pack for a Philmont trek should be about 3500 to 4000 cubic inches.

Internal frame packs are basically bags that are built around a hi-tech suspension system. They fit closer to your back and almost become a part of you while on the trail. External frame packs feel more like wearing a ladder when compared to the fit of an internal frame pack. Since sleeping bags are carried inside of an internal frame pack, minimum size for a Philmont trek should be no less than 4500 cubic inches. Both Wally and Coop began backpacking with external frame packs but have switched because we like how internal frame packs feel and carry the loads.

No matter which type of pack you have, there are four things that you must do to ensure that your crew is ready to go. First, check to see that the pack is fitted to the individual crew member. The hip belt must fit snugly around the waist to allow the full weight of the pack to be carried on the crew member's hips while at the same time providing enough padding to protect the hips. The shoulder straps should be padded and fit the width of the shoulders. When viewed from the side, shoulder straps should be level (or a little upward) from the shoulders to the pack frame. Second, check the condition of the pack. Most scouts have probably never rinsed the salt and sweat from their pack's suspension system. Dry rot of pack's stitching and fabric may already have started. Check the stitching at all stress points in the pack material. Check the grommets on the shoulder straps and hip belt to ensure that they have not pulled out of the pack material. Check the pack frame welds to ensure that they are not cracked. Third, make sure that the pack is large enough to carry all the crew member's personal gear plus his share of crew gear. Finally, make sure that each crew member brings along one or two replacement clevis pins and O-rings. JanSport packs require special nuts, bolts and wrenches which are not readily available at Philmont. If a crew member does not have a pack that you deem adequate, he can rent one at Philmont for a very reasonable cost (1997 cost was \$20.00).

Rain Gear. It is really difficult to give advice to crew members on rain gear other than it is a must and it should be good quality. You should note that the only rain gear listed on Philmont's personal equipment list is a rain suit and not a poncho. If a crew member has money to burn, a Gore-Tex rain suit would be recommended. Gore-Tex allows perspiration to escape while keeping rain out. However, a Gore-Tex rain suit typically costs \$150 to \$300. Nylon coated rain suits work just as well and cost under \$60. The beauty of a rain suit is that the jacket can also be used to keep warm, when layered with a wool or fleece sweater or even a polypropylene top. Our Philmont Rangers thought that an inexpensive rain suit was far superior to the most expensive poncho. If you are going to chance a poncho, it should be a coated nylon one and not a "shred-o-matic" plastic or vinyl one. Before you buy any type of rain gear, make sure that it states "waterproof" and not "water resistant". Water resistant fabric may handle a light dew, but will become water logged and soak the wearer after only a few minutes of an afternoon Philmont rain. Prior to going to Philmont, you should test the seams of your rain gear. Your neighbors might get a chuckle, but wear a light colored t-shirt under your rain gear and get sprinkled with the water hose for about 10 minutes. This will provide a good test of the seams to determine whether they need to be resealed with tent seam sealer.

Other Gear. Most crew members wear hiking shorts and t-shirts throughout their trek. What we have found that works the best is to have a set of hiking clothes and a set of in-camp clothes. After setting up camp, wash the body salt from the t-shirt, shorts, and socks you have worn on the trail. Put up your clothes line and hang your hiking clothes up to dry. In the morning, even if your hiking clothes are not completely dry, put your t-shirt and shorts on. Don't worry, they will dry out while on the trail. Wet socks can be safety pinned to the outside of your pack to dry as you walk along the trail.

Underwear? No way. Buy a pair of nylon blend hiking shorts with an inner brief to provide support. The smooth surface of the nylon shorts also helps to reduce the chaffing for hikers with thunder thighs like the two of us.

Crew members will also need a set of sleep clothes (t-shirt and a set of nylon running shorts) that is only worn while sleeping. When getting ready for bed, each crew member takes off his in-camp clothes and places them in a plastic bag that is then thrown away from the tent. After putting on his sleep clothes, the crew member can get in his sleeping bag. This will reduce the possibility of having any sort of food smell on you or inside your tent that may attract bears. In 1996, because of the poor snow pack and lack of rain, there was very little for the bears to eat, so they moved into Philmont's low country looking for food. Both our Rangers this summer spent a great deal of time discussing our crews' actions to minimize the chance of a bear incident occurring, including the use of sleep clothes. Another way that crew members can bring non-human smells into the backcountry is through the use of fabric softeners on their trail clothes before they arrive at Philmont. Fabric softener fragrance will last on trail for several days until an individual's natural body odor takes over. You may have to wash your clothes several times without soap at home to ensure that there is no detectable odor. Remember, bears don't see well, but they have a tremendous sense of smell. The bottom line is if you are going into bear country, it is best to sleep in clothes that have not been exposed to any smells.

A set of lightweight polypropylene long underwear can be a plus on the trail, especially if you are scheduled to arrive at Philmont early in the camping season when the mornings are still cold. Long underwear can also be used as a means of increasing the warmth of your sleeping bag, especially if your trek has you camping at higher elevations. We suggest bringing polypropylene long underwear with you and making the decision whether you will bring it on the trail during your shakedown at base camp. In 1997, no one in Mimi's crew (with the exception of one adult) brought long underwear on the trail and they did not miss it. However, Peter Bernier, a member of Coop's 1996 crew, wore his polypro to keep warm during several hailstorms and heavy rains that occurred during his 1997 Rayado trek. Again, it is a matter of choice.

A wool shirt or wool sweater is absolutely required. Hooded cotton sweatshirts absorb moisture and just do not provide warmth when wet. A good substitute for wool is fleece because it is light weight, synthetic, and does not scratch. A wool knit hat is an optional item but is nice to have. Most crew members will wear their knit hats especially at the higher elevations and at night. Wally has used his knit hat each year he has gone to Philmont.

Long pants are required for spar poling, horseback riding and the conservation project in addition to the obvious of keeping warm. Wally has found an economical way to provide for long pants. If you Scotchguard your scout pants before you leave for Philmont, they can be worn enroute and are excellent on the trail. Karl Cheng, Wally's 1993 Ranger, liked fleece pants. They worked really well when coupled with rain pants. Coop uses a set of inexpensive permanent press Army surplus fatigue trousers that wore well and dried quickly. Mimi's 1997 crew all wore high nylon content pants that were extremely lightweight and dried very quickly. She found out that these type of pants are discouraged for use in spar pole climbing because the harness can slip. (Her crew wore them anyway!) But whatever you do, stay away from jeans or sweat pants. Both are made of cotton and are impossible to dry out once they get wet.

Some hikers like wide brim hats. They provide protection from the increased level of ultra violet rays found at higher elevations, but are cumbersome while hiking. If a baseball cap is used, be careful of severe sunburn on the tops of the ears. For fair complexion crew members, we recommend a 15 SPF sun screen as a minimum. The sun and low humidity can also cause severe chapped lips. The one lip balm that seemed to work best and received outstanding reviews by both our crews was Carmex. There are also other lip balms on the market that contain sunscreen that can reduce the possibility of sun burned lips.

Each crew member needs two 1-quart canteens. If you know that your itinerary will have a dry camp, we suggest that each crew member brings along an extra 1-quart water bottle. Mimi's 1997 crew all carried a third water container. It is a lot easier to supply the crew with water if each crew member carries an additional liter of water into a dry camp instead of having one or two members try to carry the very bulky and heavy 2 1/2 gallon plastic water containers. The 1-liter plastic bottles are extremely durable. You may want to replace metal caps with plastic caps from other soda bottles before you go to Philmont.

A butane lighter works better than matches and is more dependable. Get a see-through type so that it is easy to determine when the lighter is out of butane. Each crew needs a sewing kit with safety pins. If an advisor travels a lot, ask him to take one from a hotel where he stays. Heavy duty thread and needles need to be added to this kit in case a pack comes apart. Duct tape comes in handy along the trail for all sorts of jobs from patching tents to attaching a loose sole of a boot. An easy way to carry duct tape is to wrap it around your flashlight or around a fuel bottle.

If you can find an old closed cell sleeping pad, you can make your own "Advisor's Pad" to sit on by simply cutting out a two foot square section. It sure is a lot more comfortable than sitting directly on the ground. For those advisors who may have a "deep seated" problem, fold the pad in half to double the cushion.

Finally, be sure to mark all common items such as canteens, ragg socks and sock liners with a permanent marking pen. Things begin to look alike after ten days on the trail and it becomes hard to tell them apart. A suggested personal equipment list is contained in Appendix E.

APPENDIX E

SUGGESTED PERSONAL EQUIPMENT

Equipment Worn or Packed for Travel

1 scout uniform
 1 pair scout socks (if shorts are worn)
 1 neckerchief slide
 3 t-shirts
 3 pair underwear shorts
 1 pair sneakers/moccasins/Teva sandals
 1 large towel
 1 scout red jacket (optional)
 1 scout belt

Equipment for Travel and Trail

1 sleeping bag in waterproof stuff sack with second plastic bag
 1 set of sleep clothes (inside sleeping bag)
 1 sleeping pad
 1 toilet kit
 toothpaste and brush
 biodegradable soap (Camp Suds)
 comb or hair brush
 small mirror
 extra sanitary products (women)
 sun glasses
 chap stick (Carmex recommended)
 \$ 100-125 for souvenirs
 watch
 camera with film (optional)
 1 flashlight (with new batteries)
 1 rain suit

Equipment Worn or Packed for Trail

1 pack
 1 pack cover or several large trash bags
 1 pair hiking boots (recently waterproofed)
 2 or 3 pair wool/nylon ragg or Thorlo socks
 2 or 3 pair polypropylene sock liners
 2 1-quart canteens
 1 pair long pants
 2 pair shorts (one hiking, one in-camp)
 2 t-shirts
 1 long sleeve wool shirt or lightweight wool or fleece sweater
 1 nylon windbreaker or light jacket (if you don't have a rain suit)
 2 or 3 bandannas
 1 pair polypropylene long underwear
 1 hot spot kit
 moleskin
 bandaids
 foot powder
 small scissors
 sun screen
 1 knit hat
 1 wash basin (bottom half of plastic gallon milk container)
 1 small towel (can use a bandanna)
 1 pocket knife (optional)
 1 pair camp shoes
 1 cap (baseball or wide brim)
 1 emergency blanket/ground sheet
 safety pins (for hanging wash on pack)
 1 mess

kit

large plastic mug

spoon

20 feet of 1/8 " nylon line (parachute cord)

extra trash/Ziploc bags

1 pair wool in-camp socks (optional)

1 pair of gaiters (optional)

clothes pins (optional)

1 hike log and pen (optional)

pillow (optional)

Advisor's Pad (optional)

5 post card stamps