

Rotating vs. Permanent Crew Assignments

An earlier Watchu Gram, "Organizing your Crew," described the various duties that must be done every day while your crew is on the trail, and provided a sample organization of the crew into teams to accomplish the tasks. Three of the positions, Crew Chief (Leader), Chaplain Aide, and Wilderness *Guia* are specified by Philmont and will be filled by one youth for the duration of the trek - they are permanent assignments (note the Wilderness *Guia* is available for another crew assignment). How all of the other assignments are handled is a crew decision. The two most common approaches are to rotate them through the crew so that each crew member does each of them a couple of times, or to make permanent assignments so each crew member does the same job the entire trek. What follows is but one approach for filling the other positions in crew - there are many possibilities. If you prefer, invent your own process. However, the following suggestions are known to work.

No matter your choice of "permanent" or "rotating" assignments, a crew starts off using "rotating assignments" and a duty roster. Each crew member should have the opportunity to perform each position at least once during the months of training. The Crew Chief and the Chaplain Aide positions should be included as rotating assignments on the crew duty roster. This way every member of the crew gets to experience all of the crew assignments, and the crew gets to see each member in the leadership positions.

In the prior Watchu Gram it was strongly recommended to hold your Crew Chief election during the Watchu Mountain Adventure in May. The election sets the stage for the last, and most important, seven-to-ten weeks of training and makes for an exciting finish to the Watchu Experience. Once the Crew Chief is in place, the crew then decides whether they want to use rotating or permanent assignments for the other crew positions.

If the crew decides to go with "rotating" assignments, simply continue using a duty roster, now prepared by the Crew Chief, throughout the rest of training and during the Philmont trek. If they go with "permanent" assignments, the elected Crew Chief and the crew members together assign each crew member a position. The permanent assignments are based on the "capabilities" and "preferences" of the youth members of your crew. Again, the Scouts make all these decisions. Since you have trained them well, they will allocate the tasks properly. They will have worked as a team throughout the months of training and they know who can do what ... better than you do, guaranteed.

There are pros and cons to each approach:

Rotating Assignments - the duty roster approach

1. Pro - Scouts experience all assignments throughout training and the 11 days at Philmont.
2. Pro - There is a clear sense that the assignments are fairly allocated.
3. Con - There is considerable variation in performance. For example, not everyone is a good cook.
4. Con - Speed of execution will not be optimum, since each crew member has a new job every day.
5. Con - No matter how well the duty roster is documented, disputes may arise as to who does what.

Permanent Assignments - each crew member has fixed tasks

1. Pro - Scouts gets to experience all the assignments during the early months of training.
2. Pro - There is no question who does what, eliminating the Crew Chief's need to enforce the duty roster.
3. Pro - Things get done with excellence, quickly. Each task is performed by an expert.
4. Pro - Generally there is more time for blue skies and backcountry program.
5. Con - Scouts do not get to experience all assignments during the final months of training and the 11 days at Philmont.

For some, item #5 under Permanent Assignments is a big "con", but that is not necessarily so. In the end, with a well-trained crew, either approach will work very well. All else being equal, the permanent assignment approach may stand a better chance of guaranteeing the real Philmont experience. But it is the crew's choice! Either way, make sure nothing gets in the way of time spent engaged in the fantastic backcountry program. Do all you can to provide plenty of time for the most incredible outdoor adventure many will ever experience.

Advisor Question: The "Organizing Your Crew" Watchu Gram did not include the position Crew Reporter. What about that assignment?

Answer: The Crew Reporter(s) can be any of the youth members of the crew. They will work with your hometown newspaper, the Philmont News and Photo Department, and your crew in order to document your trek for publication in the local news media after you return home. The Reporter assignment is independent of and in addition to the backcountry crew assignments outlined in the earlier Watchu Gram. The Crew Reporter position will be described in the upcoming March Advisor Package - look for a flyer in the package which details the work of the Philmont News and Photo Department. In addition, there will be a briefing for all Crew Reporters at the Watchu Mountain Adventure in May.

Tip: Many crews produce a memory album to celebrate their Philmont trek. In recent years these albums have not only been published in paper format, but also on CD or DVD and the unit's Web site. If the 12 members of your crew each records a journal of one of your 12 days at Philmont, bingo! - there you have it, the text of your crew album. Then working with your Crew Reporter(s) and Crew Photographer(s) your crew will find it is a simple matter to create a super memory book for all.

Expedition Openings: The Watchu Administrator reports that at the present time there are four openings in the 2012 contingents - one in 630 and three in 713 that could be filled by either youth or adults. And an unfortunate fact is that between now and leaving for the airport additional openings will likely develop. Surely there are Scouts, Venturers, and Scouters you know who would love the opportunity of an adventure at Philmont this summer. Have them contact Debbie Wickham (phone 973-765-9322 x239, e-mail dwickham@bsamail.org), for details. In particular, with the fourth payment due next month, a reasonable payment schedule can be worked out for anyone joining up at this time. The next four months are the heart of the preparation portion of Watchu Experience, and new crew members still have time to get up to speed.

The hills are aspen-covered along the Rayado,

Clay Allison

The St. James Hotel, Cimarron, New Mexico Territory
Train robber, gunfighter, and guest