



Taking A Break

Taking a two-minute break on a mountain trail to enjoy the view during an 11-day summer Boy Scout trek in New Mexico are, from left, Michael Thomson of Chatham Township Boy Scout Troop 121, Joseph Reach of South Plainfield Boy Scout Troop 207, Tim MacLaga of Chatham Township Boy Scout Troop 121 and trail advisor David Setzer of Florham Park.

Scouts complete New Mexico trek

Seven Boy Scouts, including four from Chatham Township Troop 121 and one from Chatham Troop 28, and two adult advisors completed an 11-day trek in New Mexico in July.

The Scouts were Casey Gotliffe, Timothy MacLaga, Michael Thomson and Brian Yurachek of Chatham Township Troop 121, Francis Moran of Chatham Troop 28, Daniel Kowalczyk of Troop 91 in Clark and Joseph Reach of Troop 207 in South Plainfield.

The trek's toughest day began before sunrise as the Scouts broke camp in the pre-dawn light. Their backpacks each contained 45 pounds of camping gear, food and water.

They climbed from Sawmill Camp, elevation 9,000 feet, up to a ridge at 10,200 feet. The climb was followed by several miles of scenic trail, rewarding the crew with spectacular vistas of the valleys below and mountain peaks in the distance.

The Scouts agreed the splendor of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in northeastern New Mexico is breathtaking and was well worth the climb.

The final destination of the day was Comanche Peak Camp, elevation 11,200 feet. The crew took a four-mile hike to Cypher's Mine to tour a gold mine and to try their luck panning for gold.

It was also the crew's only opportunity to obtain water for the rest of the day. Since that night's campsite was a dry camp, the crew cooked dinner for lunch and took advantage of the mine program. The day ended with the tough climb to the top of Comanche Peak Camp. The crew arrived in time to set up camp and enjoy a mountain peak sunset. Nine hours later and about 100 yards to the east, the next day started with an

equally spectacular sunrise."

Backpacked And Hiked

They backpacked and hiked over 70 miles in rugged terrain, which included ascending and descending over 20,000 feet. The trek took place in the southern and central regions of the 137,000-acre Philmont Scout Ranch, located near Cimarron, New Mexico.

The Boy Scout High Adventure Camp offers over 35 different treks to Scouts ages 14 to 17. The Scouts navigate to a new campsite daily, using topographical maps and compasses.

The crew began planning and training seven months before the trip as part of a contingent of 150 Scouts from the Patriots Path Council. Planning included acquiring the necessary light weight equipment and selecting a trek.

Training included hikes in Jockey Hollow and along the Appalachian Trail. The crew practiced teamwork and the skills needed on the trail, including cooking on small backpacking stoves, sterilizing plates and utensils and purifying water.

The fire and water duties were handled by Thomson and Yurachek. They were responsible for making sure the stoves worked properly and that the crew had sufficient pure water to drink. The cooking chores were performed by MacLaga and Gotliffe. They cooked dehydrated dinners and parceled out the other cold meals.

MacLaga and Casey Gotliffe doubled as the crew's lead navigators. Clean up and sterilization duties were shared by Kowalczyk and Reach.

Crew Chief Frank Moran made sure everything ran smoothly.

Shakedown Weekend

Training culminated in a May shakedown weekend at Alla-



At The Summit

Posing at the summit marker at the 11,171-foot level on top of Mt Phillips during an 11-day Boy Scout trek during the summer are, from left, first row, Casey Gotliffe, Frank Moran, Tim MacLaga and Joseph Reach. Second row, Alan Gotliffe, Michael Thomson, Dan Kowalczyk Brian Yurachek and David Setzer.

much Scout Reservation for all Patriots Path Council crews going to Philmont. The weekend training emphasized proper packing and weight optimization, tips on cooking and avoiding bears and navigation skills.

The Scouts flew from Newark Airport to Colorado where they toured for two days to acclimate themselves to the high elevation hiking at Philmont. The Colorado tour included a visit to the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs and a trip to the 14,114-foot top of Pike's Peak.

Troop 121 Scoutmaster Alan Gotliffe prepared the crew for Philmont.

"My job was to get the crew ready for Philmont," he said. "Once we got to Newark Airport, I turned the crew over to Frank Moran, and I was on vacation.

"One of the key elements of a successful trek is that the Scouts

run the show."

Accompanying the crew as an advisor was David Setzer of Florham Park who was also responsible for training all the crew advisors in the council's contingent.

Setzer referred to the trip to Philmont as "a life-altering experience" because Scouts are faced with making the types of decision that they may never have had to make before.

The daily backpacking and camping activities at Philmont were supplemented by staff-run programs at many of the camp sites. The crew tried rock climbing, rappelling, riflery, 3D archery, and fly fishing and learned about western life in the 1800s, including the mountain men and Jicarilla Apache.

The Scouts and advisors also helped to build part of a new trail while learning about Philmont's environmental programs.