

On Saturday, July 2, the twenty-one member Pathway to Adventure Council Philmont Contingent boarded Amtrak's Southwest Chief at Union Station to start their trip of a lifetime. They journeyed overnight across the central plains and got off the train Sunday morning in La Junta, Colorado. After dropping their gear at the Koshare Indian Museum, the two crews drove over to Bent's Old Fort. This National Park is a recreation of a Wild West fort on its original site on the Santa Fe Trail. The fort, built in 1833 by the Bent brothers, was a trading post for exchanging goods with native Americans to get buffalo skins to ship back East. It was also an outpost for military units to stock up and repair equipment. Frontiersman Kit Carson was employed by the Bent brothers and was a regular at the fort. The crews had the pleasure of meeting John Carson, Kit's great-grandson, who is a ranger at the fort now. The contingent then returned to museum, which was founded in 1933 by Troop 232, to watch members of the Troop, as well Crew 2230 to perform native American dances in the museum's dance hall or Kiva. The contingent spent the night on the dance floor then boarded the Amtrak train again on the morning of July 4th for the final train leg to Raton, New Mexico. Philmont buses were waiting at the train station to take them, along with several hundred more Scouts getting off train, to Philmont.

Upon arrival at Philmont, each crew met their ranger, who guided them through the controlled chaos of base camp as well as the first two days and nights on the trail. The ranger's primary job is to train the crew on Philmont's methods including camp set up, navigation, water purification, bear encounter prevention, meal preparation and clean up. All of this information was a review for the contingent as they had all ready been taught these skills during various training sessions the PTAC Philmont Training Committee provided during the six months prior to their arrival at Philmont. On the morning of the third day on the trail, the rangers left the crews and the contingent members were on their own.

Crew 704-T-01 was made up of members from Troop 37 from Arlington Heights and Troop 95 of Elk Grove Village. They selected Trek 16, a 77 mile tour of the South country, featuring programs including shotgun/trap shooting, 30-06 rifle shooting, 3D archery, rock climbing & rappelling, spar pole climbing, and horseback riding. They ascended Comanche Peak, Mt. Phillips, Schaeffer's Peak, and visited the B24 plane wreckage atop Trail Peak. Their eleventh and final day on the trail featured a side hike to the top Philmont's trademark landmark, the Tooth of Time. Unfortunately, upon reaching the top, they came across about 100 Scouts from the National Advanced Youth Leadership Experience (NAYLE) training course, perched on top of the rocky summit. After a brief photo op, the crew headed back down Tooth Ridge trail and through the We All Made It gate back into Base Camp.

Crew 704-T-02, comprised of members of Troop 49 from Lemont and Blackhawk Area Council Troop 151, had the 66 mile Trek 8. Their second day on the trail included the realization they were in the wilderness, where you can't count on technology. A member of their sister crew (a crew on the same trek but from another troop) had an asthma attack and medical help was needed. One of our adults was able to get a brief phone connection to a member of the training committee, stating there was an emergency but was unable to share many details other than they were on the trail from Lover's Leap to Urraca, before losing signal. While phone calls from home were made to Base Camp, the two rangers scrambled up a mountain to finally get strong cell phone coverage and made the call to Base Camp. Medical help drove up and the stricken Scout was taken to health lodge to be stabilized. With that excitement behind them, the crew enjoyed such activities as 30-06 rifle & black powder rifle shooting,

horseback riding, fly tying & fishing, and challenge events. They ascended and camped atop Mt. Phillips, which at 11,771', is probably one of the highest elevation campsites in the nation. Their final night was at Tooth Ridge camp, at the base of the Tooth of Time, which allowed them to wake early and watch the sunrise from the top of the Tooth, before their final hike down Tooth Ridge Trail also.

The contingent came back together at the Closing Ceremony. The youth crew leaders were honored for their leadership, and the adult advisors thanked for their guidance from the background, as the Philmont experience is about youth leadership in the wilderness. The crew boarded a bus the following morning that took them to the Kit Carson Museum. The museum, operated by Philmont, is the recreated homestead of Kit Carson, on the grounds where he actually lived on the Santa Fe trail. Then, it was on to the airport in Denver for a flight home, because after being away for two weeks, getting home fast is important.

Neither crew directly encountered any potentially dangerous wildlife. The only sign of bears was their droppings but Crew 1 did hear the scream of a mountain lion that they believe was following them for a while. The weather was outstanding and the rains of the local monsoon season never manifested. The contingent members came home with memories of sunrises, sunsets, amazing vistas, looking down on clouds, great program, sore feet & hips, blisters, gear problems, trail food, getting lost, topping a peak and all the greatness that a Philmont trek is.

The PTAC 2017 Contingent of two crews is all ready filled but registration will start soon for two crews in 2018.