

Twelve Cranford residents reach incredible heights at Philmont Scout Ranch

Published: Thursday, September 20, 2012, 12:12 PM Updated: Thursday, September 20, 2012, 12:20 PM

C By [Cranford Chronicle](#)



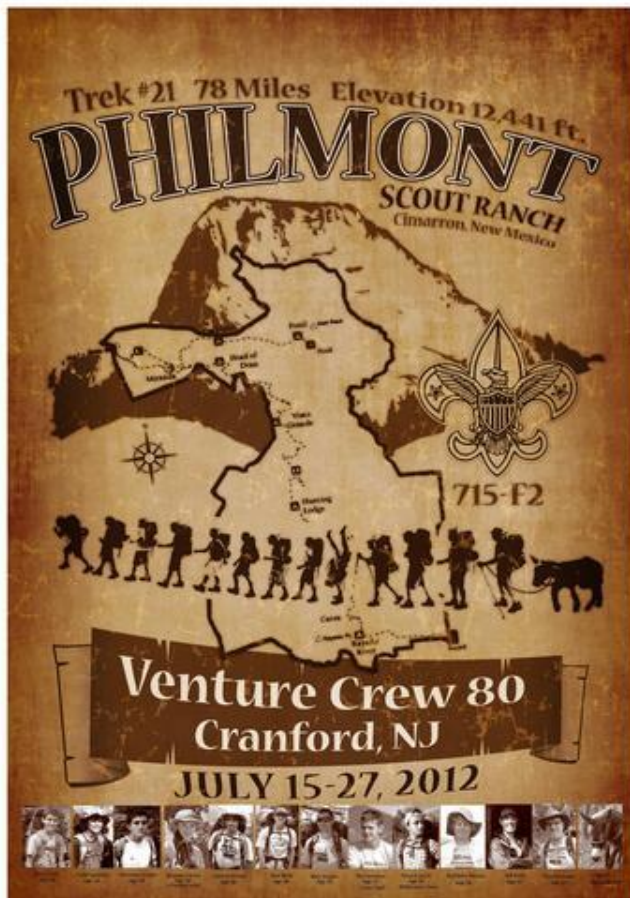
Crew 715-F2 consisted of Nick Stryker, Ben Curtis, Liam Lonergan, Pacer the burro, Shamus Garcia, Chaplain's aid; Patrick Lynch, Wilderness Ghia; Bill Ilaria, advisor; Ben Ilaria, Jim Sweeney, crew chief; Kathleen Murray, lead advisor; Todd Sweeney, crew reporter; Brendan Aszklar and Don Sweeney advisor.



Upon conclusion of the trek at base camp Crew 715-F2 surrendered a pair of trail boots to the Philmont Archway, a timeless Philmont tradition. Pictured (from left) are Shamus Garcia, Kathleen Murray, Liam Lonergan, Ben Curtis, Patrick Lynch, Ben Ilaria, Bill Ilaria, Todd Sweeney, Jim Sweeney, Don Sweeney, Nick Stryker and Brendan Aszklar.



Looking out over five states crew 714-F2 poses for a picture after completing the climb of 12,441-foot Mt. Baldy.



The custom designed T-shirt worn on the trail.

This summer 12 Cranford residents stepped on a plane at Newark Liberty Airport to start a trip of a Boy Scout's lifetime to Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron New Mexico. Scouts and scouters for generations have headed west to Philmont for the ultimate high adventure experience. Next year will mark the one millionth Scout to visit Boy Scouting's ultimate destination.

The 214-square-mile ranch opened in 1938, a gift from oilman Waite Philips, is a piece of the real Wild West. Sitting at the foot of the Sangre de Christ Mountains, Philmont hosts more than 25,000 Boy Scouts each year, making it the largest youth camp in the world.

While the trip started on July 13, the journey really started 18 months before. A rigorous training schedule was followed by each member of the crew. Personal cardio training and regular backpacking trips to The Watchung Reservation, South Mountain Reservation, Jockey Hollow Reservation and Harriman State Park were part of the monthly program for fitness. A month before departure the crew attended a comprehensive training weekend at Mt. Alamuchy scout camp, at Waterloo Village, where camping and backpacking skills were tested.

The 14-day event started in Colorado Springs, Colorado for a two-day altitude acclimation program where the scouts were treated to a trip to Pike's Peak elevation, 14,114 feet above sea level, a tour and hike in the beautiful red rock formation park at Garden of the Gods, a tour of the U.S. Air Force Academy and concluded with a whitewater rafting adventure in the Arkansas River.

Upon arrival at Philmont the crew was introduced to the ranger that would conduct their final training and spend the first two days with them, teaching the scouts the ways of the trail, cooking, navigating, sanitation and first aid skills were some topics of this walking, two-day university of survival. Upon completion the ranger bid them farewell and the crew was on their own for the next 10 days. Sporting their custom designed team shirts featuring their own silhouettes, the crew hiked five to fifteen miles a day, using map and compass skills to find their way to each camp. More than 500 pounds of trail food, water, and gear were carried in backpacks by the crew for the 12-day trek. The high altitude and extreme thunder and lightning storms tested the training of the fit crew on several occasions during the trek. Starting at 6,000 feet above sea level they traveled to the top of two huge mountains, The Tooth of Time at 9,200 feet and the pinnacle Mt. Baldy at 12,441 feet.

While in camps, the crew was treated to the featured activity of that camp. Blacksmithing, real rock climbing, black powder rifle and 45-caliber pistol shooting, adobe brick making and horseback riding were a few of the fun events. The staffed camps featured period reenactors of the mountain men that ran logging camps in the early days of the 20th century. A comedic musical show by the reenactors was the evening's entertainment for two nights on the trail.

In keeping to the history lessons taught, as the trek unfolded a burro was issued to the Scouts on day 10. Just like the early settlers and gold prospectors of the era, the boys learned to pack the burro as well as feed and water their new four legged friend. The burro carried 50 pounds of the food and equipment and became a valued member of crew 715-F2.

On the trail, five of the trekkers celebrated birthdays. As a special treat, a couple of Philmont rangers, at the Hunting Camp cabin, arranged a bacon and egg breakfast with homemade brownies to celebrate. It was a much appreciated meal for a crew that had been eating protein bars and trail mix for several days already.

For many decades Boy Scouts and leaders have taken to the foothills of the Rockies at Philmont Scout Ranch. It has been said by many scouters that this trip takes boys and transforms them into men. While we are not sure that an instant transformation has taken place. We are sure that the responsibilities taken on by each of these boys in taking charge of a group of 12 across this untouched wilderness for more than 100 miles was life changing. This was a huge step toward manhood. Everyone agreed it was truly a journey of a lifetime.