

Madison Boy Scouts take on the mountains of north New Mexico

WHEN THEY SAY ‘ADVENTURE’ BOY SCOUTS AREN’T KIDDING



Members of Madison Boy Scout Troop 7 pause during a hike this past summer through the unusual and steep rock formations of the “Garden of the Gods” in Colorado Springs, Colo., acclimating themselves to the higher elevations they’d soon face in the mountains of New Mexico. Sitting in front, from left, are Kenny Sych, crew chief Conor Reeve and adviser James Hogan; standing behind them, from left, are Raj Phakey, Russ Lopez, Jack Anzul, Taylor Picillo, Tommy Sych and Eddie Sych, and sitting up on the rocks is adviser Sean Kennedy.



Boy Scout Troop 7's "A-Team" hikes down after camping atop the Urraca Mesa, elevation 9,400 feet, overnight on the Philmont Scout Ranch property in northwest New Mexico. The Scouts saw no ghosts on the supposedly haunted mesa, but everyone did fall ill that night, and they were hurried along their way by a diamondback rattlesnake.

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Editor's note: The writer is a Madison High School senior and an Eagle Scout who served as the "crew reporter" for Madison Boy Scout Troop 7 on its backpacking trek July 1 through July 15 through the mountains of the Philmont Scout Ranch in northwest New Mexico.

MADISON - Over the past summer, Scouts from Madison Boy Scout Troop 7 took a "once-in-a-lifetime" journey to Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, N.M. Philmont is an active cattle ranch and backpacking haven in the middle of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. It was a gift to the Boy Scouts from Waite Phillips in 1938, and has grown to encompass 137,493 acres.

Our crew, denoted "703-R1," was better known by the nickname "the A-Team." and we first embarked on a fantastic three-day experience in Colorado Springs, Colo. This portion of the adventure was there to help our Northeastern-based Scouts to acclimate to the demands of the higher elevations to be found at Philmont.

Highlights included:

- A tour of U.S. Air Force Academy in Denver, Colo., with its breathtaking architecture of the Cadet Chapel (the most popular man-made attraction in Colorado, with 17 spires soaring 150 feet high), servicing all denominations;
- A geology hike at the "Garden of the Gods," where we saw some of the world's most beautiful rock formations. At the conclusion of our walk we feasted for lunch and enjoyed an original Indian Dance made up of a father-son team from the Jicarilla Apache Tribe.

This was followed by a “climb” to the summit of Pikes Peak via a Swedish Cog Railway, with an elevation of more than 14,000 feet, or almost eight times what New Jersey has to offer in altitude.

The day after began our real trip, with a four-hour bus ride to Cimarron, N.M., where our busy lives would leave us and everything we needed for the next two weeks would be carried on our backs. At the ranch, we picked up all our necessary crew gear and went through the various informational training sessions. We concluded with a campfire and hit the trail the next day.

At first we traveled relatively easily, including a four-mile hike to Lover’s Leap with our “Ranger Paul” (Paul Backus), helping us learn the keys to “Leave No Trace” camping in the wilderness.

We followed up that with a trip to the haunted Urraca Mesa. This campsite is claimed to be haunted, but was actually full of various challenge events as well as team-building games and a campfire. That night started what was known as the Urraca Plague, where everyone, including our “Ranger Paul,” became terribly sick.

The A-Team escaped the “plague” and hiked on to another backwoods location, as a Diamondback Rattler hissed us on our way.

Bear Attack

Next at Zastrow Trail Camp we took part in land navigation, Dutch Oven desert cooking, and a traditional Scouting ceremony fun-filled with skits and songs. That night there was a bear attack, as a camper in the campsite next to us was clawed by a bear. He survived, with more than 100 stitches, as the “A-Team” worked with the camp staff to help keep the bear at bay while others provided first aid and evacuation.

The adult leaders and the staff were well-prepared and, if it were not for them, this incident could have been much worse. Unfortunately the young but rogue bear had to be put down after the attack.

Other camps were less noteworthy, in regards to the bears and rattlers, but added a great deal to the overall experience.

At Carson Meadows, we took part in search-and-rescue, and then camped in Lower Bonito more than 10-miles away.

Western Lore, Branding, and Trail-Camp Conservation were at Buck Creek.

We stopped and did some Homesteading, Ax Throwing, and Black Powder Rifle Shooting at Crooked Creek before arriving at the top of Mount Phillips, more than 11,000 feet in elevation.

The following day we enjoyed .30-06 rifle shooting, as well as learning to reload our own shells.

‘Burro Racing’

Then, we had fun with 12-gauge Shotgun Skeet Shooting, and the locally famous “burro racing,” where the burros always win against their two-legged teammates.

As our journey was coming to an end, we still got to enjoy some super-extreme rock climbing at Dean Cow.

On our final day, we hiked out to Six Mile Gate, where we were picked up by a camp bus to be driven back to Base Camp to take a much-needed shower, and enjoy a fantastic closing campfire. At the end we were all clutching the coveted Philmont Arrowhead Patch that denotes a successful trek.

The next day, we were driven back to Denver Airport for the flight home to Newark where our trip of a lifetime was finally complete. The “A-Team” came home safe and sound.

The “A-Team” was made up of Madison Troop 7 Scouts: Conor Reeve, our crew chief; Raj Phakey, assistant crew chief, Jack Anzul, Eddie Sych, Kenny Sych, Tommy Sych, Russ Lopez and me. Adult leaders James Hogan, Sean Kennedy, Robert Beaman and John Kennedy rounded out the group.

Other Troop 7 Scouts on a different trek with another crew included Scouts Brendan Dore, Umang Kansara, Kyle Smith, and Scouter Ted Dore.

Troop 7 is sponsored by St. Vincent Martyr Church and meets from 7:30 to 9 p.m. Tuesday evenings from September to June at the church at 26 Green Village Road in Madison. For information, call Assistant Scoutmaster John Hogan at (973) 377-5214.