

In order to see the stars fill up the night sky, you've got to go west...that's exactly what eight Pearl River Scouts did, and thus shared the adventure of their lives

By Peter W. Sluys, managing editor

IT'S BEEN MORE THAN 100 YEARS since anybody has seen the stars fill up the night sky over Pearl River like dust.

To get that view now, a Pearl River resident generally has to follow Horace Greeley's advice and go to out West.

Eight Orangetown scouts (led by scouter Richard Reisenauer of Pearl River's Troop 37) took that opportunity this summer, as they traveled to Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico.

Philmont is a national high adventure camp owned and operated by the Boy Scouts of America. It consists of 215 miles of rugged mountain wilderness in the Sangre De Cristo Mountains of the Rockies.

For as long as there have been men in the North American continent, they have visited Philmont. Ancient Indians chiseled their writings into canyon walls there, Spanish conquistadors moved through there, and mountain man Kit Carson blazed trails across the land.

The hills and canyons of the camp are filled with deer, elk, coyote, antelope, mountain lion, buffalo, beaver, bear, and wild turkey, in a natural landscape that is almost second to none.

For Reisenauer and his eight scouts, the idea of going to Philmont arose in November of 1995 when Reisenauer was with Scoutmaster Ken Reichner at a camping trip at Harriman State Park.

Reichner was a Philmont veteran, and urged Reisenauer to put together a group of young men from Troop 37 to experience Philmont.

Reisenauer, at that time, was 37 and not quite sure that he was up

to a high adventure trip with eight Pearl River scouts.

"On the other hand, I knew all our scouts loved camping and hiking, and I enjoyed hiking myself; I figured why not do it," Reisenauer said.

And so it was that the scouts got themselves organized and joined the Morris-Sussex council in New Jersey in a Philmont expedition this July.

Among the scouts taking part in the expedition were Reisenauer's son Greg, and scouts Mike Curato, Jason Blacksburg, Mike Warren, Gary Vetter, Liam Confrey, and Tom Cinque.

The scouts were a minimum of 14 years old, and a maximum of 19 years old. Some of them were Eagle Scouts, and some had only three years experience in scouting like Greg Reisenauer.

Greg Reisenauer joined the troop initially because "there were some great camping trips, particularly to Doodletown and Harriman. Scouting was fun, so I joined it and stayed with it."

Greg's dad, Richard, got involved because he enjoyed scouting when he was growing up in Old Tappan, New Jersey.

"I was always involved with scouting in Old Tappan, and it was easy to join Troop 37 when I moved to Pearl River," Richard Reisenauer said.

In the two years in which the Philmont campaign came to fruition, Reisenauer said that his decision to go to Philmont was supported by his wife, Cynthia.

"In those two years, I always had doubts, but my wife was behind me supporting me, and saying that I could do it."

Mike Curato was senior patrol leader for the trip - effectively the



The Reisenauers - father and son - with some of the rugged Philmont terrain in the background. The trip West was an adventure of a lifetime for the Reisenauers and scouts who accompanied them.

number two man under the crew chief, who was Eagle Scout Jason Blacksburg.

NONE OF THE SCOUTS WHO joined with Reisenauer - or for that matter, Reisenauer himself - had ever hiked or camped in the Old West; Philmont is - definably - the Old West.

At Philmont, scouts enter territory that has looked the same for 10,000 years. There are no trails on which to hike; scouts move from campsite to campsite by dead reckoning, compass, and map reading.

After all - as Greg Reisenauer said - "a scout never gets lost; he just gets turned around."

The troop left Newark Airport and flew to Colorado in early July, where they toured the Air Force Academy, the Flying W Dude Ranch, and then stayed at the University of Colorado dorm.

On Friday, July 11th they left for Pikes Peak, one of the highest mountains in the United States.

"That was quite a trip," Mike Curato said, "the mountain was so high there was even some difficulty breathing."

For Mike Warren, "Pikes Peak was incredible - there you were 14,100 feet up having gone up the side of the mountain on a mono-rail; it was a tremendous experience."

They spent about 50 minutes at the top of Pikes Peak, and then traveled to La Junta, Colorado, the home of the Koshare Indian dancers.

According to Richard Reisenauer, "The Koshare Indian dances are a Boy Scout troop who studied the original native American dances for more than 40 years. The troop has this four decade old tradition of authentic reproduction of Indian dances, and authentic reproduction of Indian costumes. They did a great job; we were all very impressed."

By the next morning, at eleven o'clock they were at Philmont.

After a brief orientation, and a night at base camp (affectionately known as "tent city") Reisenauer and his scouts were loaded onto a bus, and taken 12 miles into the wilderness.

"When we got off the bus, I thought to myself wow - we're really here - the experience is really about to begin," Mike Curato said.

The first two days hiking is **SCOUTS: Page 4, please**

sometimes the hardest, as scouts need to get acclimated to the higher elevations, to the heat of the West, and to hiking in true wilderness country.

"Those first couple of days we only did three and a half to four mile hikes, but during the rest of the time we sometimes did 12 or 15 mile hikes a day," Mike Warren said.

FOR THE FIRST TWO DAYS, A Philmont ranger traveled with them, but after those two days the ranger left (hiking his way out), and Reisenauer and his scouts were on their own.

They started at the Abreu Campsite and the trip from Abreu was hardly easy, as one experienced Philmont scouter told this newspaper, "each crew is subjected to physical demands, such as carrying a 50 pound backpack; gasping for breath at high elevation; facing weather conditions varying from hot, blazing sun, to cold, wet, fog and rain; and getting started on camp chores early and doing them efficiently to participate in programs at the next staffed camp."

"There were days that we were really tired," Warren said, "there was some awfully demanding hiking."

The boys also took part in trail work and other conservation activities, as they made their way from camp to camp through Philmont, over a 12 day period.

Bears are an ever present reality in Philmont, and they are not cuddly teddy bears.

Greg Reisenauer said, "We were told that bears come to the campsite because they smell something



Members of Pearl River's Troop 37 at work at a conservation project in Philmont. There's plenty to see, do and learn in the rugged environment, where rattle snakes and wildlife rule their domains, and man is an intruder.

Scouts head west

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sweet. That something sweet can be anything from our food, to the smell of soap or even deodorant."

For that reason, the Pearl River crew put all items that had a smell in a bear bag at night, and the bear bag was hung off a tree; that way, even if the scent attracted bears, the bears were frustrated in attempting to get to the scent.

"We didn't really see any bears, but we did have a bear that decided it wanted to get into our ranger's pack; you should have seen the claw marks on that pack," Mike Warren said.

In addition to bears, there is all other sorts of other natural life at Philmont, including rattlesnakes.

One day, in the middle of the expedition, Mike Curato - as senior patrol leader - was leading the way. "Suddenly, something moved in the bush, and it was a six foot rattlesnake. When I saw that snake, boy did I run," Curato said.

Next in line was Mike Warren, who was about to run just as quickly as Curato did when the rattlesnake struck at him.

"I remember that everything was going through my mind; I was wondering how much the bite was going to hurt, I wondered how far away we were from the nearest base camp, whether they would send somebody in to get me, and what my odds were of surviving the snake bite. It was over in just seconds, but that snake looked like the devil himself; I'll never forget it as long as I live," Warren said.

The snake did not strike Warren; the strike it made was a warning strike, designed to keep Warren and the scouts away from it while it moved off what had become the Boy Scout trail.

The sight of that diamond back rattlesnake, the sound of its rattle, and the sight of it striking at Warren, is something that is indelibly imprinted in the minds of the young men who

went to Philmont.

Though the ranger had warned Warren and the other scouts that rattlesnakes were around, "it's one thing to talk about one - it's another thing to see one strike."

Winston Churchill once said there was nothing quite so exhilarating as being shot at without result, and Warren shares that feeling when it comes to rattlesnakes who strike and don't hit.

In addition to hiking, and their meeting bears and snakes, Reisenauer's crew saw what he describes as "some of the most beautiful scenery you can imagine."

"On Philip's Mountain, we could see into four different states so clear and open was the view; and the stars at night were marvelous to see, they were so thick and white - unlike anything that you can see here in Pearl River," Reisenauer said.

The scouts themselves found on the Philmont trip not only the beauty of nature, but an interior toughness that will be with them always - a belief that they faced a real challenge, perhaps one of the most daunting physical challenges that a young man can face in America today.

Then too, there was another benefit of the trip. "The friendships that we made were simply great," Mike Curato said.

"Before we began the trip, we knew each other, but not as well as we know each other now at the end of the trip. The people we went to Philmont with will remain in our memories forever," Curato said. "The one thing we will always have is our memories, and our friendships,"

And so, the Reisenauer Pearl River crew which left Pearl River specializing in trivia about the movie Monty Python and the Holy Grail, came back to Pearl River two weeks later loaded with memories, self-confidence, and stories of real adventure in the old American West.