

## Philmont in the Rain

All crews must be prepared for tough weather in the New Mexico Mountains. Normally in June or July at Philmont you can expect to be exposed to rain almost every day. In the lowlands this may come as a mid-afternoon shower lasting a half hour or less. In the high mountains you can expect at least one explosive lightning, thunder, cold rain, and/or hailstorm event during your trek. Often more!

If prepared for these possibilities they become an exciting part of the crew's Philmont experience. Knowing how to take care of yourself and the crew is very important and a big confidence builder. Aside from the safety issues, your crew will come to enjoy these welcome breaks from the searing sun.

So what do you need to know? The most important thing to know is that ponchos will NOT do. You must have a good, full rain suit, with both a jacket and pants. These items are your best protection against hypothermia. Unfortunately, hypothermia is not unusual at Philmont - the high mountain heavy rains accompanied by a fast drop in temperature have caused many a case and it is one of the top reasons crew members are taken off the trail. So everyone needs a rain suit and to put them on at the first sign of rain. In the mountains, you can go from lots of sun and no rain to a downpour and lots of cold in a matter of minutes.

If the rain comes hard and long, many crews will take a break and sit it out. You may see some crews break out their tarp and all gather under it to avoid the rain. This absolutely is NOT the thing to do if you can hear any thunder. A surprise flash of lightning is the real danger. So if you hear thunder, the safest thing and recommended procedure is to separate and wait the rain and thunder out. The crew MUST reduce its exposure to lightning. It is very important to get away from mountain peaks, ridgelines, open areas, single trees, bear bag cables, aluminum pack frame, aluminum tent poles, and similar danger zones. All crew members must separate by at least 5 to 10 yards and "hunker down" with feet together. This process reduces the likelihood you will become a conductor of electricity.

The "hunker down" position is not comfortable but definitely is the way to go. Some years ago serious injury occurred when a crew was attempting to hang their bear bags on the bear cable in the rain. Don't do it. Don't even think about it. Hunker down and wait for the rain and the danger of lightning to pass.

Check out the Watchu Experience Web site's [Lightning Safety](#) page, including a photo of someone demonstrating the "hunker down" position, and the St. Barnabas Burn Foundation's ["Avoiding a Bolt From the Blue"](#) video. Both links are on the [Training](#) tab of the [Crew Development](#) page of the [Watchu Experience](#) Web site. We highly recommend these important resources to all - please take time to review them with the

other members of your crew. In addition, there will be a lightning safety exercise during your hike on the Trail of Discovery at the Watchu Mountain Adventure in May.

So pray for rain on your next crew training campout. It is much easier to convince a crew to properly prepare if they spend a weekend hiking and camping together in the rain. But there is not much you can do to make it rain except hope it happens, so rain or shine, you **MUST** work with the crew to get the "rain and lightning" essentials across. When you get to Philmont, check with your Ranger for the latest research and information. Do what your Ranger tells you. They will know the latest and best approach.

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**Tip:** Always put your rain suit on at the first sign of rain. But just as important, take your rain suit off as soon as the rain stops to prevent overheating.

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**Bonus Tip:** Test your rain suit by putting it on and standing under the running water of your shower or a lawn sprinkler!

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**Reminder:** A Philmont requirement is that at least one adult who has completed BSA's Weather Hazard Training must be with the crew at all times in the backcountry. The Watchu recommendation is that all advisors complete this valuable training, which includes a very good coverage of lightning.

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For raiment,

Melaquías Epínosa  
Philmont Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico  
*Cowboy*