

Selecting Your Itinerary (Part 1)

This is one of the most exciting times of your Watchu Experience, when EVERY member of the crew learns all they can about the programs, camps, and terrain of Philmont and the youth members of the crew decide what they want to accomplish next summer. You have approximately three months to accomplish this task - use the time wisely! Review last year's [Philmont TREKS - 2020 Itinerary Guidebook](#), discuss both your crew's abilities and desires, and prepare a preliminary list of the six itineraries that best meet those abilities and desires. Plus maybe one or two more, in case a trek on your preliminary list is not offered when the 2021 routes come out in December.

Treks are designated as Challenging (formally Typical, which erroneously implied they were easy), Rugged, Strenuous, and Super Strenuous. Itineraries are identified by numbers which reflect a relative rating of their challenge. Low numbers (1, 2, 3 ...) indicate "Challenging" treks and high numbers (... 33, 34, 35) designate Super Strenuous treks. "Challenging" treks are strong on program while "Super Strenuous" treks are strong on hiking and consequently have less time available for programs.

Some thoughts for your consideration:

1. The length of the hike is only one part of how tough it will be. What matters is the combination of length, change in elevation, and the quality of the trails. Accept and believe the classifications in the [Philmont TREKS - 2020 Itinerary Guidebook](#).
2. Philmont is not "just a hike." Picking an itinerary that gives your crew an opportunity to experience the outstanding backcountry programs is the way to go to get the most from your trek. If you are working with a crew that has significant Philmont experience, they might want to select a full-blown, all-out 11-day hike with little time for program (Strenuous or Super Strenuous itineraries). Otherwise, most crews benefit from a balance of hiking and program (Challenging or Rugged itineraries).
3. Details on the available programs are listed in the companion to the [Philmont TREKS - 2020 Itinerary Guidebook](#) - the [Guidebook to Adventure](#).
4. Baldy Mountain or the Tooth of Time are great, but there is a lot more to Philmont. Some of the most beautiful scenery and great views are in the southern part of the Ranch. Don't restrict your choices to a few well-known landmarks.
5. Everyone loves Black Mountain camp... Crooked Creek is an opportunity to relive days gone by.... You want mining, go to Cypher's Mine.... A hike through Hidden Valley to Window Rock is never to be forgotten.... How about starting or ending your trek at Kit Carson's Rayado home? Don't forget to use your *Philmanac* to help your crew select a great trek.
6. If you have a young rookie crew, think about picking treks with a two-night layover.

7. All Philmont itineraries have tough hikes. Don't let your crew come under the notion that the "Challenging" treks are for the weak and feeble. One of Philmont's toughest hikes is from Sawmill to Harlan (or Harlan to Sawmill). That hike and others of similar difficulty often show up in a number of the so called less strenuous itineraries. They are busters.
8. If you have been to Philmont before, don't just go by past experience. Have your crew carefully consider all the trek write ups in the current online [Philmont TREKS - 2020 Itinerary Guidebook](#). Again, the *Philmanac* will be very helpful in selecting a trek that matches your crew's capability and interest.
9. If you select a Valle Vidal itinerary in the Carson National Forest, you will need to make certain your crew is well trained in overland navigation. There are few trails in the Carson National Forest and it is all about navigation. And it is beautiful! Chief Watchu suggests using a GPS unit, which can be lots of fun and good training. But well-trained navigators with a map and compass will do fine as well.
10. Plus there are the unexpected surprises. While you can't plan for them, know they exist. For example: behind site #6 at Devils Wash Basin you will find one of Philmont's most spectacular views. Or it's hard to beat the view of Mt. Wheeler from the upper meadow above Apache Springs.

Advisor Question: "We have a couple of members of our crew who are from outside of Patriots' Path Council. The medical form asks for council name. Should they list Patriots' Path for their home council name?"

Answer: Crew members should use their actual home council on all documentation. However, when at Philmont they should know they are with a Patriots' Path contingent. And they should wear our Patriots' Path Council Philmont patch on their uniforms - get out your sewing kit and put it there now! And when you are asked about it, be sure to mention there are openings in the contingent for this coming summer; it is not too late to be part of the adventure.

Phil Fact: "Chope" Phillips was the son of Waite Phillips and a member of the Philmont Ranch Committee until his death in 2015 at the age of 97. His long history with the ranch includes leading the party to the site of the B-24 Liberator bomber crash on Trail Peak in 1942.

Happy trails - or rather I should say, happy itineraries?

Elliott "Chope" Phillips

Valmora New Mexico