

## Water-Part 2

The prior information mentioned that the sources and availability of water may well dictate what your crew does on the trail days where water is not readily available. During your crew's Trail Planning session at the Watchu Mountain Adventure your trail planner will discuss this issue regarding your assigned itinerary. General considerations include:

The *Philmont TREKS - Itinerary Guide* and *Philmanac* identify which camps are "dry" with no immediate water source, or one that can not be relied on at all times. Your crew will need to carry water, often a considerable distance, to such camps. Day 1 at Philmont in Logistics, check the "Water Board" for the latest conditions at all camps.

All staffed camps have water, which is usually (but not always) treated. Is there one (or a trail camp with water) along the way, or almost along the way, as you hike to your dry camp? One where it would be easy to set up and cook your evening meal for lunch and maybe even take part in the program, saving your lunch for dinner and eliminating the need for hauling cooking water into the dry camp. Since dry camps are trail camps without staff or program, there is little need to rush to one.

If there is no camp along the way, how close is your dry camp to the nearest water source? Check your navigational section map for water clues. Also, *Philmanac* will often help you find a nearby water source, such as another camp, natural spring, or small stream.

Itineraries which end by camping the last night at Tooth Ridge camp, which is always dry, provide an example of the above. IF water is available at Shaefers Pass (the spring there is not always flowing) consider pulling into Shaefers Pass camp about noon, finding an open campsite, setting-up, and cooking your evening meal where the water is. At about 2:00pm (assuming the skies are clear - lightning is definitely an issue on Tooth Ridge, which is very exposed) set out on an afternoon hike after a leisurely meal and rest period. But if water is not available at Shaefers Pass, your crew will need to carry it either from North Fork Urraca or Clarks Fork camps, a considerable distance.

If you must carry water a distance to a dry camp, the question is what type of containers to use. The "Equipment Supplied by the Crew" list in the *Guidebook to Adventure* includes "two or three 2.5 gallon collapsible water containers." Such a container filled with water weighs 20 pounds and is awkward to carry. Two would only be appropriate for a crew much smaller than 12 members; three such containers is 30 quarts, or 2.5 quarts per crew member in a crew with 12. Many crews elect to distribute that weight among all the crew members using a number of smaller three- or four-quart containers with the equivalent total capacity, and realizing that all the containers do not necessarily need to be completely filled. Check out [Water](#)

[Containers \(crew\)](#) in the [Equipment](#) section of [Training Videos](#) page of the [Watchu Experience](#) Web site to see some examples of container other crews use.

Even if you do not have any dry camps on your itinerary, you will need containers for crew water. If you only need to carry water a short distance from a source to your camp site, those 2.5 gallon containers become a lot more manageable and possibly are more convenient for purifying with Micropur, cooking, and cleanup.

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**Tip:** Unless specifically told otherwise by a staff member, you must treat all water in the Philmont backcountry prior to drinking it. Since 2005, the treatment system has been chlorine-based Micropur tablets (rather than the iodine-based Polar Pure used prior to that time.) Check out [Water Purification](#) in the [On the Trail](#) section of [Training Videos](#) page of the [Watchu Experience](#) Web site to see what the Micropur tablets look like and the process to purify water, including how to "bleed the threads" of your Nalgene bottle.

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**Advisor Question:** The *Guidebook to Adventure* lists "2 or 3 water purifiers / filters" in the list of equipment to be provided by the crew, but the Watchu Web site's [Crew Equipment FAQ#4](#) states that they are an optional item. Can you elaborate on that?

**Answer:** This is one area where the Equipment Lists in the *Guidebook* can be modified. As discussed in the FAQ answer, Philmont will not allow a crew to rely solely on purifiers or filters - the Philmont supplied water treatment chemicals (Micropur) must be carried in addition to the mechanical units. Of course, the treatment chemical only deals with biological contaminants in the water, while the filters also treat physical contaminants, which is an issue for some crews. Purifiers deal with biological contaminants, and may or may not include a filter for a two-stage treatment. Many water filters/purifiers may also have an advantage in drawing water from very shallow sources, compared to filling water bottles. Ultimately, it is a crew decision if the benefit of filtering is worth the effort of carrying and operating the filters/purifiers.

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**Advisor Question:** On the trail I was planning on shaving regularly. I found some airline miniature size shaving cream cans. However they are pressurized. Will this present a problem at the higher altitudes? If so what do you recommend to use?

**Answer:** Aerosol cans are not allowed in the Philmont backcountry. Camp Suds, a concentrated all-purpose biodegradable soap perfect for backpacking use, can be used to create lather for shaving and you will be carrying it already - multiple uses is a key backpacking principle to reduce the weight of your pack. Like teeth brushing, shaving

should be done at the sump. Shakedown hikes are the perfect opportunity to experiment with this and other procedures prior to arrival at Philmont.

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**Phil Fact:** Gretchen Chase Sammis, the last owner of the historic Chase Ranch, was a member of both the Cowgirl Hall of Fame and the Philmont Ranch Committee. She died in August 2012. In October 2013 Philmont entered into an agreement with the Chase Ranch Foundation to manage the property as a model historic ranch (in accordance with Sammis' will) in return for having access to the land for some of its own Scouting programs. Since 2014 itineraries included trail camps on the Chase Ranch, and staff camps opened in 2019. In addition, the Chase homestead is now a museum about ranching.

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From Baldy to Car-Max, the country that we love,

*Gretchen Chase Sammis*

Chase Ranch, Cimarron, New Mexico