

*Included in this message:*

- [Optimizing Your Trek](#)
- [Check in Logistics for the latest backcountry information](#)
- [Your Ranger knows best, and has the latest updates on procedures](#)

## Optimizing Your Trek

By this time everyone in your crew should know all the important details of your itinerary by heart. If you call out the "day number," all will be able to recite the length of your hike to which camp and its elevation, water conditions, program, staff situation, and so on.

Once you know the basic outline of your trek, you can then study it in detail to optimize your experience in the Philmont backcountry - managing water, getting in an extra program or taking a particularly scenic route. Before beginning, remember that you can eat your meals in any sequence you choose - lunch for supper, breakfast for lunch, or Supper #5 before Supper #3 (Philmont does recommend eating the three meals for a given day on the same day, as the three meals are designed in combination to provide a fully balanced diet). Second, you are eligible to participate in any program you should encounter along your trail if the program staff is not overloaded. Third, it makes no sense to rush into an un-staffed camp with no program. Such camps are candidates for a late arrival, say just before dinner time, giving you more time to do something along the trail. These factors all come into play when optimizing your trek. The following are specific examples of applying the points and how a trek can be optimized.

- **Example #1:** Your trek calls for a stay at Tooth Ridge camp. The night before you are staying at Clarks Fork. Your hike will be through Shaefers Pass. Since Tooth Ridge has no water, no staff, and no program, it doesn't make sense to rush into this camp. So why not sign up for morning horseback riding at Clarks Fork? Then check to see if there is water at Shaefers Pass. Shaefers Pass is one of those camps that sometimes has water and sometimes does not. If it has water, hike to the Pass after horseback riding and cook supper at lunchtime. Don't forget to put up the tarp and have your rain suits ready to ride out the daily mid-day rainstorm in the Pass. Then about 2:30pm, with a clear sky and no lightning, begin your hike to across Tooth Ridge to Tooth Ridge camp. There, eat lunch at dinnertime; thus avoiding the need to carry water to cook with after you reach the camp.

If Shaefers Pass has no water, cook supper for lunch at Clarks Fork directly after horseback riding. Take a break and then begin hiking. This makes for a long afternoon hike, but it is better than hauling water up the mountain. By the way, you **must** sign up for Horseback Riding at Logistics during your check in at base camp. So you need to have thought through this strategy before you get to Philmont. Also, at Logistics you can check on the latest water conditions at all camps. When you get to Clarks Fork it won't hurt to double check conditions at the Pass with the Clarks Fork Staff. Further,

you are much more likely to get a reservation for morning horse rides than afternoon rides.

- **Example #2:** Your hike starts at Black Mountain camp, takes you through Phillips Junction and ends at Comanche camp (not Comanche Peak camp). Comanche camp is un-staffed and has no program. But along the way you can take a side hike and go to Crooked Creek and participate in the Homesteading program at that very beautiful camp. Then, you will have plenty of time to hike from Crooked Creek to Comanche camp and get there in time for supper. Did you know you can sometimes take a shower at Phillips Junction on your way through? Check with the PJ staff.

Recall there is no need to pre-register before hitting the trail for any program except horseback riding and burro packing. You can just drop in on any program and the staff will welcome you if they are not backed up.

- **Example #3:** Your hike calls for a start at Sawmill camp and ending at Webster Parks. Tomorrow you will hike to Clarks Fork. This calls for a two-day plan.

Since Webster Parks is un-staffed and has no program you can hike in early, drop your packs, put up the bear bags, set up camp, and then take off with your rain suits and water bottles for Cimarroncito a mile down the trail. At Cimarroncito you can take part in one of the best rock climbing programs at Philmont. It is but a short hike back for an evening dinner in a spectacular meadow with a wonderful view of the back side of the Tooth of Time. When at Logistics in Base Camp ask about the Cimarroncito rock climbing schedule.

Next day, rise bright and early. You could take a bee line hike from Webster Parks on a new trail to Hunting Lodge and then on to Clarks Fork, but there is a better idea. If this won't be your last night on the trail and you scheduled your horseback riding at Clarks for the morning after, you will have plenty of time to explore one of the most beautiful trails at Philmont. This hike will allow you to arrive at Clarks Fork in plenty of time to get ready for the wonderful Clarks Fork chuckwagon dinner.

After a hardy Webster Park breakfast hike back to Cimarroncito. From Cimarroncito take a short hike to Aspen Springs and into the spectacular Hidden Valley. Hike Hidden Valley to Window Rock. Here the view of the Philmont Training Center, Tooth Ridge, Antelope Mesa, the mountains of southern Colorado, and the western plains of Texas is breathtaking. **Caution:** these are dangerous cliffs. No matter what you see other crews doing, everyone should stay 25 feet back from the edge. The gravel can cause you to slip and fall. The view 25 feet back is just as awe-inspiring. The fall is not acceptable.

Don't stop here for lunch. Take the short hike down the mountain to the trail passing Cimarroncito Reservoir. Here in the shade on the trail, never in the meadow, stop for

lunch. You will find this moment hard to beat. After lunch it is a short hike into Clarks Fork and in plenty of time for a fun and delicious chuckwagon dinner. If you are early for lunch, a short hike to the Hunting Lodge for the program there is also a possibility. Check your map.

Hopefully this gets you thinking about your itinerary. Every itinerary has opportunities for applying these sorts of strategies. Don't miss them! Study your trek. Get all the crew members involved. Put the finishing touches on your plan during those few spare moments on the tour in Colorado or the bus ride to Philmont. When your Crew Chief and an advisor meet with an itinerary planner in Logistics at Philmont, they should be ready to discuss the possibilities you have discovered with the planner.

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**Important Note:** When you are in Logistics make certain you check the *New Trail Board*, the *Water Board*, and the *Special Notice Board*. Each board contains very important information. To the extent they apply to your trek the information should be recorded on your maps. For example: new trails are always being constructed. If you are hiking in an area with new trails they need to be transcribed and shown on your map.

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**An Important Notice:** Your Ranger knows best. Regardless of what you know now or what we have recommended, be certain to camp and hike as specified by your Ranger. They have been trained with the latest, up to date, Philmont backpacking practices. Philmont is an ever-changing experience. Each year new and improved practices are put in place. Be good students and follow your Ranger's instructions to a "T". However, Advisors must always keep an eye out for any health and safety issues that may accompany any suggestion from anyone, including your Ranger. You are the keepers of your crew's welfare.

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Welcome to my mesa,

*W.P. Wilson*

Cimarron, New Mexico Territory

*U. S. Army Captain, assigned to the Cimarron Indian Affairs Agency (1870)*