

# Local Boy Scouts trek to national high-adventure base

Special to the News

Lee County Boy Scouts left Auburn on June 14 for Philmont Scout Ranch in northern New Mexico, the Boy Scouts of America's largest national high-adventure base, to complete a 12-day backpacking trek as part of the Chattahoochee Council contingent.

The 12 members of Expedition 617-R, led by Troop 50 Scoutmaster Andrew Baird, included Scouts and leaders from Troops 15, 50, and 128 — with all but one making the trip to Philmont for the first time.

Philmont covers 137,000 acres, about 214 square miles, of rugged mountain wilderness in the Sangre de Cristo (Blood of Christ) range of the Rocky Mountains. Philmont, just outside Cimarron, New Mexico, is situated among high mountains with rough terrain, beautiful scenery and bountiful plants and wildlife. Phillips 66 founder Waite Phillips donated the land to the Boy Scouts in 1938, making 2013 the 75th anniversary of the base. Today, Philmont operates 34 staffed camps and 55 trail camps, with a season-

al staff of 1,000 and more than 22,000 Scouts who participate in the various backcountry programs.

The contingent traveled by air from Atlanta to Denver and spent two days sightseeing at locations such as the U.S. Air Force Academy, Pike's Peak and Capulin Volcano National Monument before heading to Philmont.

Expedition 617-R's 12-day itinerary covered more than 85 miles of backcountry hiking at elevations ranging from 7,100 feet to 12,441 feet above sea level — a contrast with Auburn's top elevation of 845 feet above sea level. Due to wildfires south of the Philmont property and drought conditions throughout the area, the group faced a number of challenges specific to backpacking in the Southwest. A fire ban restricted the group to the use of lightweight backpacking stoves and fuel. Dried up springs and streams forced the Scouts to pack water into their campsites from wherever it could be found.

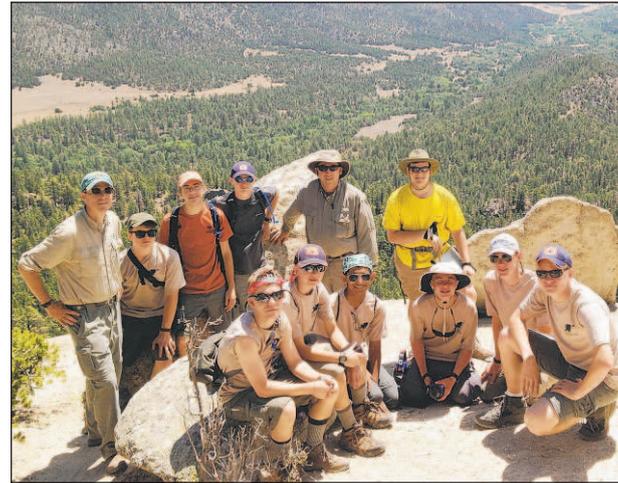
The days spent sightseeing in Colorado and New

Mexico allowed the Scouts to adjust to the altitude, thus avoiding issues with altitude sickness or other problems. One of the highlights of the trek was when all 12 scouts and leaders summited Baldy Mountain, the highest mountain within the Philmont boundaries at 12,441 feet.

Troop 15 Life Scout Joseph Farrow said that while running cross-country aided him with the physical demands of the 85-mile excursion, backpacking at the higher altitudes affected every member of the contingent to some degree.

"Being that high up, especially when we were hiking up Baldy Mountain, required us all to take more frequent breaks (than we would at home)," Farrow said. "We felt tired more quickly, and we needed to stop sometimes just to catch our breath."

The itinerary allowed Scouts to participate in several backcountry programs such as shooting .50 caliber black-powder rifles, gold panning, rock climbing and horse rides at several staffed camps. The group also assisted with



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**Shown on the bottom row (from left) are Jake Camp; Andrew Stanford; George Abraham; Dakota Burkhalter; Davis Baird, crew leader; and Andrew Sellers, Wilderness Pledge guide. On the top row (from left) are Andrew Baird, adult advisor; Will Pendleton, Robert Perry, Joseph Farrow, chaplain's aide; Brian Moore, adult advisor; and Cameron Nix. The group is atop Window Rock at Philmont.**

a conservation project in order to give back to the environment. Scouts carried all their personal and group gear on their backs across rocky terrain for an average of eight miles per day.

Andrew Stanford, Life Scout in Troop 50, said the group took several training hikes to build up their stamina and test out their gear in the weeks leading up to their trip.

"We each packed what we planned to bring with us to Philmont, then went to places like Cheaha State Park and hiked about seven miles at a time to get used to carrying that much weight," he said.

Temperatures on the trail ranged from the 50s overnight to near 100 degrees during the afternoons. Breakfast and lunch were typically dried foods such as granola, packaged meats

and crackers. Dinners were dehydrated foods such as pasta and rice that were prepared using hot water. Due to the scarcity of water, the Scouts became quite dirty in the dry, dusty conditions. Nights were spent camping in lightweight backpacking tents. Scouts were also responsible for securing all food or other smellable items out of reach from bears and other animals.

Robert Perry, a Life Scout in Troop 50, said the group had a great deal of fun together hiking, climbing and participating in team-building activities, but the camping aspect was much different and challenging than his typical Scout camping experiences.

"I've got to say it was a lot more work," Perry noted. "You couldn't just drive up and set up camp (at Philmont). You had to go through a whole day of hiking first."

An account and photos of the contingent's experiences at Philmont are available through its blog at [www.philmont617-r.blogspot.com](http://www.philmont617-r.blogspot.com) or at [www.facebook.com/Philmont617R](http://www.facebook.com/Philmont617R).