

Role of the Philmont Adult Advisor – Advice from Other Scouters

I often read a Philmont email discussion list. While it sometimes involves endless trivia about a topic, it often provides good advice, new information, and insights about Philmont topics from a broad base of experienced Scouters across the country.

Attached are 3 posts regarding the role of the Philmont adult advisor, and measures used to have a youth-led crew. Through my Philmont experiences, I have come to learn more and more that Philmont is a place, one of the best in all of Scouting, where the youth can truly have a personal growth experience, where the youth can step up to the challenges of leadership - if the adults will let them. It's more than just a hike in the NM mountains, it's more than a place to reward dedicated adult Scouters, and yes, it's more than a place to have just a father-son "experience." Measures used to create the best youth-led environment include not only things like limiting the number of adults (below the allowable 4), but also include the right attitudes and actions of the adults.

I don't necessarily agree with all of the extremes detailed in the following posts, but there is some merit to the ideas expressed. Note that the last response is a good story from Cooper Wright, author of the Advisor's Guide. He is one of the most well-spoken contributors to this List.

Remember, you will be "advisors" on this trip. You are not in command or in charge of anything other than safety and support once on the trail at Philmont. The Scouts rule, they come first. They will elect a Crew Leader who will run the show. You should not be assertive in your preferences on the trail at Philmont. A special notes for dads - please try not to hover over your son and tell him what to do and help him doing all of HIS duties (you are there for everyone, not just your son). Let your son have some independence, a challenging and growth and maturing opportunity like the others will have. Some councils don't even let dads be in the same crew with their sons. We don't go that far, but tenting with your son would be discouraged. This trip is for the Scouts. You are along to make it the best experience for ALL of them and you are there to support ALL of them. You will be on vacation.

YIS, Julian

-----Original Message Follows-----

From: "Chris Summers" <chrisinhouston@kingwoodcable.com>

To: Multiple recipients of list philmont

Subject: RE: [Philmont]: Number of Advisors

Date: Tue, 4 Dec 2001 10:42:43 -0600

This is an issue I feel strongly about so I'm going to soap box it.

Sam Houston Area Council highly encourages Council contingent crews to try to have only 2 advisors per crew. We are a big council and each summer our council contingents alone make up 12 full crews at Philmont (144 people). This past summer our Council contingents and individual Troop/Venture treks totaled over 750 people predicating. Our emphasis for our contingent crews is to provide a viable way for the most number of youth to get to go on a trek. For every crew taking 4 adults vs 2 you decrease the number of youth going by an additional 16%! You are taking away something from the youth that the program was designed for and that's not right. Yes, Philmont is a fun place for those over 21, but I hardly think Waite Phillips had it in mind to entertain adults when he donated the land to the BSA. Figure 20,000 total are processed through Philmont each year making up 1666 crews if all crews have 12 members. If every crew had only 2 adults there would be 16778 youth on treks, while adding 2 additional adults per crew would only allow 13336 youth to go. Waite would roll in his grave if he saw those figures.

Furthermore a crew's group dynamics is at it's best when there is a minimum amount of input from the advisors. Philmont is a place for youth to grow and show their full potential. If you want to have an adult weighted trek plan for an Autumn Adventure trek.

As for planning ahead and having extra adults just in case one can't make it on the trail is no solution at all. Adults should not attempt a trek if they can not fall into the weight limits and they should be in shape in advance of the trek. Our Council is considering implementing a policy next year that we will only accept adult advisors at sign up time for Council contingent treks if they prequalify with a weigh in and blood pressure check. We've had too many adults not make the cut at check in.

Philmont has a couple of options for crews that loose advisors at check in or on the trail because of injuries, one being to assign a ranger at a cost to your crew or Council, but they will also buddy up crews if necessary. Almost every crew starting out on a trek has a sister crew that is doing the same trek. Chances are you won't even know it for the first couple of days, until you start noticing you are always ending up in the same camp. In the event you loose your #2 advisor on day 4, the staff camp would advise base camp and most likely you will be instructed to hike and stay together as a larger group, i.e. 3 adults advising 20 youth.

Keep Philmont what it was designed for; offering an opportunity of a lifetime for youth.

YOF Chris in Houston

----Original Message Follows----

From: "Brad Borgstede" <bradlborgstede@attbi.com>

Reply-To: philmont@troop47.com

To: Multiple recipients of list philmont <philmont@troop47.com>

Subject: [Philmont]: Philmont Advisor Role

Date: Fri, 7 Dec 2001 07:58:54 -0600

I wanted to share with the Philmont Discussion Group the approach that the Advisors of 719-H1 took to providing leadership to the Youth members of our Crew this past summer. We didn't! We were on vacation and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

In all seriousness, we focused on the fact that our role as Adult Advisors was to provide guidance with respect to health and safety issues. We did our best to allow the Ranger to teach the Crew and the Crew Leader (Youth) to lead the Crew. Each night, following Thorns and Roses, we had a discussion with the Crew Leader concerning issues facing the Crew. Many of these discussions were merely to thank him for a job well done. Our Crew Leader was the only fifteen year old on the Crew, the other eight crew members were fourteen.

There is a tendency for Scouts to ask Adults for guidance because that is how they have been raised at home, at school and within their Troop. Philmont is an experience where they can learn self reliance and grow in confidence as they conquer the mountains with their fellow Scouts, literally and figuratively. If Adult Advisors spend too much time on the Trail teaching them Outdoor Skills, this defeats the real purpose of a Youth led Philmont Experience. We observed Crews who were constantly being "taught" (another word for led) by the Adult Advisors. Save the teaching for the tune-up treks. Take it to heart, the Adult Advisors are on vacation at Philmont!

Help your Crew to discover the answers that they seek from within themselves or from the other Youth members of the Crew.

During our tune-up treks and on the trail at Philmont, the three Adult Advisors of our Crew adopted a standard answer for questions that did not deal with health or safety issues. I always answered Yes, Max Robertson always answered No, and Albert Johnston always answered Maybe. The Scouts of our Crew soon discovered that they were in essence answering their own questions by selecting the Adult Advisor with the answer that they wanted to hear. They also learned that if they wanted a real answer to their question, they needed to seek out their Crew Leader. This technique was more fun than the three of us always replying "Go ask your Crew Leader."

Was it frustrating for the Scouts to realize that we would not answer their questions? Yes! (Max would say No!, Albert would say Maybe!). Our Crew Leader soon realized that he could not come to us for "real" answers and our Crew discovered that this was their experience to manage, not ours. The Adult Advisors didn't tell the Crew that they had to take a side hike, we didn't set a schedule of when to get up in the morning, and most importantly we didn't lead the Crew.

We didn't provide our standard Yes, No, Maybe answers to questions that were inconsequential or that would occur in casual conversation. We provided our standard answers to questions that should not be asked of the Adult Advisors. Almost all questions on the Trail are more appropriately directed to the Crew Leader. Our Crew Leader discovered that he had to answer the Crew's questions and could not look to the Adult Advisors to answer them for him.

Our standardized answer methodology will not work for every Crew, and will not work for the leadership style of every Adult Advisors. It is a lot of fun to help the Scouts discover that they are truly in charge of the trek. Our Crew came off the Philmont Trail smiling and hoping to return someday. Philmont is a personal growth experience, not just a hike in New Mexico.

As a member of a Council Camp Staff, I learned that rule #1 is "The Program is for the Youth!" Follow Philmont's advice and let the Youth members of your Crew be in charge of the Philmont Experience. Most importantly, enjoy your vacation!

Respectfully Submitted,

Brad Borgstede

Philmont Participant - 1972

Vacationing Philmont Advisor - 2001

Eagle Scout - 1972

St. Louis Area Council Camp Staff Member 1974-1979

Vigil Honor - 1975

Woapalanne Chapter Advisor, Nishkin Halupa A Pe Lachi Lodge

----Original Message Follows----

From: CoopWright@aol.com

Reply-To: philmont@troop47.com

To: Multiple recipients of list philmont <philmont@troop47.com>

Subject: Re: [Philmont]: Philmont Advisor Role

Date: Fri, 07 Dec 2001 09:28:37 EST

Brad

Awesome post!!!! It is amazing after all the Ranger training, to see advisors on the trail with the map and all the youth plodding along behind him or an advisor in camp yelling instructions to the crew.

One experience I would like to share. In 1996, the crew had just finished coming down Baldy and were sitting in Copper Park on their way back to Miranda for the night. The crew was discussing the pros and cons of whether they would go to French Henry or not. We knew that we would be in Cyphers Mine in a couple of days and that we still had a commissary stop in Baldy Town before we could head back. After some discussion on the pros and cons, the crew was getting ready to take a vote, when one of the fathers jumped in to tell everyone how he was voting. The crew leader (God love him) looked at the father and quietly said "I appreciate your comments, but you don't have a vote. You are on vacation". That set the way the crew did business for the rest of the trip. It took some real guts by the crew leader, but this crew was going to be youth-led.

Cooper Wright
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