

A Journey of A Vietnamese American Scout Troop in Virginia



**Boy Scouts of America
Vietnamese American Scout Troop 904
720 Romeo - Philmont Scout Ranch, New Mexico**

Fairfax, Virginia, 2011

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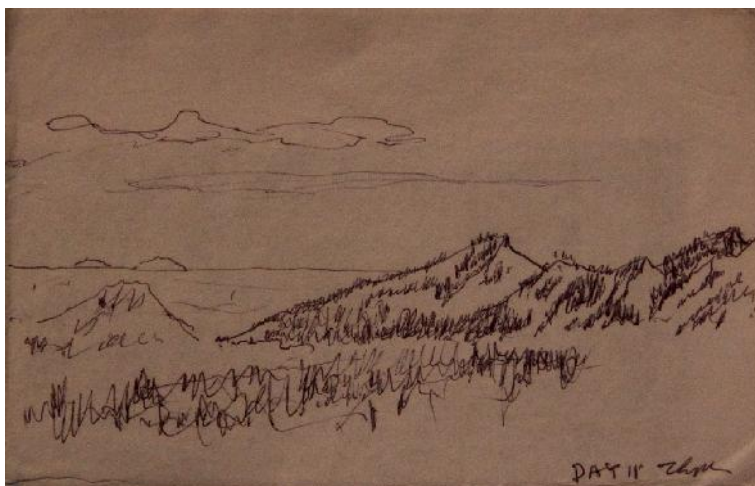
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“We will conquer that little peak!”

INTRODUCTION

In eleven days of the year 2011, the eight scouts hiked 57 miles and up to 11,736 feet, under hail and the blazing sun of the wilderness. Actually, their journey to Philmont Scout Ranch had started on 21 June 2008, at Nicholson Trail, Shenandoah, Virginia. This was the first real challenging backpacking trip in more than twenty-years for Virginia Troop 904, Group 904, aka Liên Đoàn Thăng Long. In the 2008 trip were seven scouts: Andrew "Nam" Pham (Senior Patrol Leader, SPL), Steven Ngo (Assistant SPL), Andrew Pham, Trung Vo, Viet Nguyen, Marvin Nguyen, and Quinton Tang; two Assistant Scout Masters (ASM): Hòa and Phước; and three adults: Đông, Đức, and Thăng.



The Tooth of Time

However, the backpacking program did not progress due to lack of support, "*Backpacking is not the troop program!*" Parents were reluctant, and metropolitan kids who were not involved in outdoor activities chose to stay home with cell phones, texting, rental movies, TV shows, electronic games, online shopping, internet addiction, and junk food. Those scouts who loved adventure had to stay together in a lone patrol and participate in

family camp settings. With little encouragement, the core of the venture patrol, remained Trung Vo, Sonny Nguyen, Steven Ngo, Viet Nguyen, Charlie Nguyen, and Marvin Nguyen.

The Scoutmaster Handbook and *The Boy Scout Handbook* realize the necessity of a venture patrol in a troop. Outdoors is one of the eight Scouting Methods. Therefore, on 13 June 2009, a special *Group Leaders Parents Conference* decided to form at least one venture patrol and to change the troop leadership. However, the newly trained Scout Master (SM) and his ASMs were not officially introduced until December 2009. Troop 904 welcomed its first three Eagle Scouts back as ASMs. Former scouters joined in. Crew 904 got new blood booster from its coming Associate Advisors. All ASMs and Associate Advisors were in full gear supporting the outdoor program. Meanwhile, some deadly outdoor anecdotes still spread around and scared parents off.

With determination and effort, with ebb and flow, the outdoor program tried to overcome many obstacles gaining supports from parents. The outdoor leaders trained scouts in map reading and useful practical knots throughout various games. They invited parents to hike along and enjoy nature with their children. Snow or rain or thunder or sweat, scouts reached Horse Pen and Chisel Branches in Maryland, Dolly Sods in West Virginia, Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park, Cross County Trail and Lake Accotink in Fairfax, White Oak & Cedar Trails in Virginia, and Appalachian Trails...

Gradually, the outdoor program received more helping hands. Some old scouts recently joined the high adventure game. Many young scouts earned the camping merit badge requirement after hiking up a mountain at least 1,000 ft. Webelos of Pack 904 hiked along with their brothers and sisters in Troop 904 as well as Crew 904. Camping and backpacking with deer, bear and “mini-bear” was better than picnicking or car-packing on paved roads; after all, *Scouting* has the “out” and the “ing” in it.

Somewhere along the Appalachian Trails, the scouts learned to prepare by putting everything in Ziploc bags, line the inside backpack with plastic bags to keep things dry, test their new breathable raincoats, and use UV light for water sterilization. The scouts realized many valuable survival techniques such as the necessity of two-layered socks for protection from blisters, the importance of nutritious snacks for long trails, how to tie and untie backpacking shoes faster, adjust backpacks correctly when going uphill and downhill, walk with water inside the shoes. The scouts also learned to warm up and stretch in the morning, program their feet while zigzagging uphill, and not to forget, how to find comfort in pooping in the woods. The scouts were remarkable when they backpacked 20 miles with 6,000ft elevation gain, without altitude sickness, and they safely crossed roaming waters more than a dozen times.

When hiking into the campground at night the first time on May 2011, the scouts felt ready to take on the Philmont Scout Ranch, New Mexico adventure.

Philmont Scout Ranch motto: *Boys run Boys! Advisors are on vacation!*

The following pages tell the stories of our eight Philmont seeds. I am looking toward the future: Viet Huynh, Andrew Huynh, Quincy, Apple, Giang, Abu, Michael, T.K., William, Allen, Liêm, Vũ, Calvin, and many other new scouts coming. With support from adults and their own effort, these young men will become our next scouts to Philmont. Outdoor games will allow an opportunity for teens to pour their energy onto the healthy physical-mental-moral trails. The experience was better than expensive slick gadgets, and a pair of affordable hiking shoes helped knock down rusting locked doors on their way to really finding the ING in “Scouting”.

Smile, relax, and enjoy their short stories.

Tactful Bear TBP
ASM, Troop 904



Crooked Creek

The Boy Who Cried “Homebound”

Sonny Nguyen



Small pieces of white crystalline ice fell from the sky, which roared with anger as bolts of light crashed from the sky. Small rivers formed out of the blue and rushed down the side of the mountain, carrying more debris every minute. Twelve people had to walk in this river, forcing themselves forward as their hiking boots submerged in the water. The skin on their feet started to wrinkle, and their bodies started to shake vigorously as they moved on with their hike. It seemed as though the rain would never stop.

This was a common sight at Philmont, rain was as common as the grass in the fields. Every afternoon, it would rain, usually thundering as well. I remember the first five days on the trail; we had thunderstorms around 1 PM every day. The sky would turn dark, and it would remain dark for quite some time. Our crew would always push to finish the day's hike before the rain came. We only succeeded a couple of times, and those were the best days, partially because we weren't wet.



Singin' in the Hail

We received a ranger on the first day at Philmont. His name is Bryan, and he was quite energetic and fun-loving. He would always crack jokes when our spirits were getting down, and would be serious whenever we needed to be. He was always teaching us new techniques and making sure we had a good time. When Bryan had to leave us on the fourth day, we knew it wasn't going to be the same.

One of the most memorable days was on day four at Philmont, when we hiked from Aguila to our first staff site, Abreu. The day started off horribly; our trail leaders, Marvin and Steven, had no idea as to which direction we were supposed to be headed. We spent almost an hour figuring that out. It seemed as though we would never reach the camp before it rained. However, it was only a four mile hike and all

downhill. We reached camp around lunchtime, one of our fastest hikes yet. We made a pack line, set up the bear bag and dining fly, and then we set up our tents. After all of that, we finally got to eat lunch. It was the best lunch they gave us; everyone loved the chicken salad. Even though it was filled with fake meat, dry frozen onions, and pumpkin seeds, we loved it. We would always look for it at the swap boxes, and we would be lucky some of the times. The best thing about Abreu, however, is that we got a hot shower that day. It was strange to shower with so many boys at once, but it made us closer.

Another memorable event was summiting the tallest peak on our trek, Mount Phillips. It was a great achievement for many of us because we have never climbed that high before. The hike uphill starting at Clear Creek really tested our physical endurance, as well as our mental toughness. It took us a while, but pacing up the mountain proved

to be helpful. It gave our muscles a break although not too much. When we all made it up to the summit, I remember everyone calling home and telling their parents they made it to the top. It was a great feeling. However, I was left with a feeling of remorse as well.

The night before hiking up Mount Phillips, our water supply at Crooked Creek was contaminated from all the animals, mainly cows and horses. One of our members, Trung, only used purification tablets and suffered from diarrhea at night. It wasn't a decision I wanted to make, but Trung had to go back to Home Base after a breakdown.

One of the best moments during the trip was when I hiked down to Sawmill and saw a familiar face. It was a wonderful experience finally being reunited with Trung, who looked happy and clean. He was a light in the dark, literally. It was raining out, and the sight of him just lifted everyone's spirits. Trung looked better than ever, filling everyone with energy and smiles. After being reunited with Trung, we reloaded and shot 30mm rifles, an awesome experience for everyone.

The last most memorable event came when we hiked up to the Tooth of Time Ridge. During the hike, everyone was screaming "homebound, we're almost there." In high spirits, we hike, sang Disney songs, and took small sips of water as we walked. However, around three in the afternoon, the sky filled with clouds and poured hail onto us. Our boots filled with water as we walked through the flash flood, finally getting to camp. That night was horrible because I had to wake up two times to make sure bears would not interfere with our camp.

The next morning, we were finally homebound. Rebounding from the freezing rain, we geared up for the last leg of the hike. We took the steep way down the mountain, which proved to be faster and not a problem for most. When we reached the service road, we could see Home Base. When we finally reached Home Base, everyone had a gratifying feeling of finishing the long and tiresome trek. "We all made it!"

Philmont is a great experience for all scouts, young and old. One never really understands the amount of accomplishment until they go out and do it for themselves. My experience at Philmont has changed my outlook on life, how precious the simple things are. You don't have anything in the wilderness, so when you travel back into society, everything seems amazing. Philmont changes people for the better and should be a part of every scout's life.



Homebound Base Camp

Philmont 720-R

Jonathan Nguyen

Philmont is more than a hiking trip. Philmont is more than a challenge. Philmont is an amazing high adventure trek that lets scouts take charge on their own out in the wilderness for ten days. Scouts get to decide what they do, when they do it, and how they do it. Philmont is a once in a lifetime scouting experience that strengthens scouting skills, friendship, leadership, physical endurance, mental endurance, and spirit.



Shoes on The Gate

The first day at Philmont is full of anxiety but also some concerns. I was excited to start the trek but was also worried about the endurance that I would have to face from ten days in the wilderness. The first and last day at Philmont are both at Base Camp, which is a staffed camp with a scout shop, a snack store, vending machines, basketball courts, but best of all: non-freeze dried food. During the first day at Base Camp, I had lots of fun and learned interesting things from my ranger. I started to think that Philmont wasn't so bad. But as I loaded onto the bus the next day on my way to the start of the trek while a huge thunderstorm rolled in, I couldn't help but curse myself out in my head and think about all the luxuries I was leaving behind. Getting off that bus was probably the worst feeling in the world as I thought to myself "Why did I sign up?" When I got off,

the first thing our ranger taught us was orienteering which was essential if our crew wanted to make it to the end of the trek. During the first couple of miles we walked, our ranger pointed out important things that we needed to do and look out for while hiking. Our ranger taught us many skills like how to set up a bear bag, how to pace, how to cook and wash dishes, how to set up tents, how to filter water, and of course how to poop in the woods. It's safe to say that having a well-trained ranger makes life at Philmont a whole lot easier.

After about three days, our ranger left us because he believed our crew was prepared enough to go hike alone. After he left, some of the advisors hiking with us started to interfere a little more with what we wanted to do and it got a little annoying considering that the hike is supposed to be led by crew members only. However, this is what Philmont is all about. Philmont will throw the smallest issues at us and will make us become irritated. This is where the toughest part of the mental endurance starts during the trek. We became hungry for good food, got tired of hiking, and we became homesick. To help ease our minds, every night our crew participated in a daily reflection called "Thorns, Roses, and Buds" where we talk about the worst part of the day, the best part of the day, and what we are looking forward to the most. These reflections really helped me

mentally because it gave me a chance to reflect on what I had done so far and helped us become closer. Reflecting made us friendlier to other crews as we hiked passed by as well.

Days four through seven were a tough grind where all I thought about was finishing my hike, while pondering on the thought of "I want to go home!". Day eight was the peak of physical endurance for us. Our bodies were weak yet Philmont said "Climb 2000 feet up this mountain". It was extremely tough at that point of the trek but it helped a lot by having positive crew members that told me to keep it up and giving me a simple high five. Doing small things like this makes hiking a little easier and makes everybody stay positive. Before I knew it, I reached the top of the mountain and I couldn't help but sprint to the peak. Being up on top of the mountain with the rest of the crew revitalized me physically and mentally. I screamed in rejoice and gave my mom a phone call telling her that I was on top of the world.

Days nine through eleven seemed easier however the hikes seemed longer than normal because of my anxiety to go back home. I felt a little more relaxed now that I had passed the peak of the climb. Most treks at some point pass "The Tooth of Time", the most historical landmark at Philmont. It's optional to climb but I realized that it was a once in a lifetime experience and decided to climb it. It was tricky and very dangerous because getting to the top of it requires lots and lots of rock climbing. My hands blistered and I was fatigued but when I reached the top, the view was worth it. I could see almost all of Philmont from where we started our hike all the way to the peak of the mountain we had climbed. It truly is a beautiful view, and maybe one of the most beautiful views I will see in my life.

On the last day of the hike, our crew couldn't help but scream "Homebound" all the way back to Base Camp. When I got back to Base Camp, the first thing I wanted to do is take a shower and maybe get junk food at the snack shop. At night, the staff put on a great campfire that made us feel proud of what we accomplished as a crew.

Philmont is an amazing experience that scouts all over the world should experience. It helps me learn all the characteristics and skills a scout should have such as being friendly, thrifty, and cheerful. Looking back at Philmont I truly realized that Philmont is a once in a lifetime experience that no scout should pass up if they get the chance to go.



"Daddy, 57 miles like this and up to 11,736 feet in eleven days."

The Day Was Gloomy

Quinton Tang

The day was gloomy and it felt as if the forecast was a hundred percent rain. What could we have expected, when the weather for the past week was thunderstorms? The dreaded Day Eight, the anxiety for that day was almost unbearable; morale was depleted after seven days of hiking, eating, playing, and more hiking through rain. After five days without showering, our faces and clothes were soiled in mud. To us rain was routine, and thunder was background music.



The worst part of backpacking is the monotonous cycle of packing, hiking, and unpacking. It's enough to drive a person insane. Packing up my backpack on Day Eight was especially strenuous. My mind was wandering about the possibilities for the hike. With grimy and boiled water from Crooked Creek anything could have happened. Leaving Crooked Creek was a relief; a person can only take so much cow feces in one night. Walking was a hassle at the creek with the constant fear of stepping on monstrous cow turds.



"Don't look back!"

The night before, one of our crewmembers was complaining about diarrhea, and it was just getting worse as the night went on. I saw the pain in his face, but he tried to conceal it to not further drain our morale.

The first mile was a blur, due to the combination of being under the influence of massive drowsiness, anxiety, and. Then we stopped for a regular bathroom break. It was normal for us to stop a good deal, we had various names for these assortment breaks: "Five minutes packs on", "20 minutes packs off", "shoe tying breaks", "pacing"; but this one was unexpectedly lengthy.

In Philmont, one of the worst things you can get sent back to base camp for is diarrhea. Thanks to the wonderful water at Crooked Creek one of our crewmembers got hit with a debilitating bout of diarrhea. Watching him leave was harder than the mountain itself. Bad became worse when we found out we had to hike an extra half a mile to reach a staff camp that contained a service road. We sent him and three of our members back to the staff camp while the rest of us waited and prayed for the well-being of our friend.

Two hours passed and still the anxiety loomed over me. The possibilities of something going wrong were endless, and one person already getting diarrhea proved it. Finally our crew was reassembled and we continued our trek. My body went into auto pilot so hiking was easy, but having to think about our ill crewmember was torture. Two miles later, we reached our destination for lunch.

After lunch an hour passed, and it was finally time to hike up Mt. Phillips, the most difficult hike of our trek. The start of every hike is always the hardest. Having to urge

yourself up that first mile is half of the hike; the rest is willing yourself to keep going. Starting at the foot of the mountain, we could see about half a mile of straight incline. As a result of the 70 degree slope, climbing the side of Mt. Phillips was like taking two steps forward and one step back. Every time we stepped up, the rocks would slip from under our feet and we slid down. After pacing for a while we deserved a long break.

Once we reached a comfortable place, we stopped and had a “20 minutes packs off” break. During our break, I took the time to call my parents back in Virginia. After a week of wanting nothing more than to go home, their voices reminded me of the comfort of home, but also the dullness of sitting in front of my computer all day.

Three more miles of mountain and most of us were exhausted. Breaks became more frequent, and it seemed as if the complaining was as well. Our only motivation was the future and what we would do when we got out of Philmont. Slowly step by step we reached less vegetative land, which meant we were almost at the summit. At about one mile left, one of my crewmembers and I decided to go on without the crew. Sick of the constant breaks, we broke into near jog with the peak in sight. Right as we were about to reach our destination we decided to take a quick break. Not noticing my surroundings while hiking, I was awestruck at the scenery. The reduction in trees allowed us to clearly see the clouds, which seemed in reach. On either side of us were steep slopes, which allowed us to clearly see most of Philmont. We witnessed varying biomes, on the left were: forests, and grassy hills, and the right were: deserts, mountains, and Base Camp.

Sprinting towards the peak was the most invigorating moment of my life, and throwing my backpack down was the most relieving. After five miles and 2500 feet elevation, the feeling of accomplishment surged through my body as I watched the rest of the crew slowly make their way up to the peak as well.

Standing on top of Mt. Phillips looking out onto the vast expanse of land that is Philmont, I thought to myself “Beautiful.” Contradicting all thoughts I had during the trip; I was glad to be with my friends on top of the world.

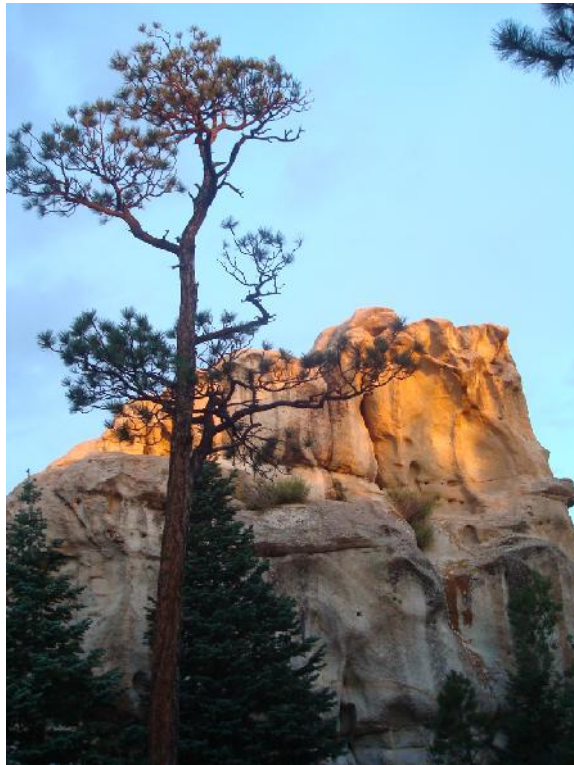


“Everybody, smile!”

The Philmont Journey

Marvin Nguyen

Philmont was one of the greatest experiences I've had so far (2 weeks of hell). Other than the long boring walks, it was surprisingly fun. When my father introduced my crew and I to Philmont, we hated the idea. We hated it while we trained, and hated it while we planned. We continued to loathe the idea as we boarded the plane, and even while we were driving go-karts in circles at a fun center in Albuquerque. However when we were at the peak of the Tooth of Time I realized that I was going to miss this place. The ocean blue sky and how it turned dark grey in a matter of minutes, or simply how the sights were. I didn't bother taking pictures; pictures are for people with bad memory. I know that the feeling of achievement when I finished Phillips will stick with me till I'm 30. The most amazing thing about my Philmont experience was that I made it, and I was never even tired, just really bored sometimes.



Morning on The Tooth of Time Ridge

On the first day I was really anxious about finishing, and the walk seemed to take forever. Especially since we would take a turn every 5 minutes and it would look exactly like the turn we took a few minutes ago. Finally we would reach camp and to my disappointment, was plain and boring. It was just a plain field with half grass, half weeds. However our ranger somehow made it fun. He taught me a lot more on the first day than any other day on the trip. That saying he was only there for 2 days. We played Frisbee with our sister crew until dark and went to sleep early. The next 4 days were about the same except for the pouring rain. We would get to camp, set-up and chill a bit until it was time to hit the sack. Some days there were activities the staff would offer, but most of the time it was really boring. The most fun night at Philmont was at fish camp, where we played poker all night

wagering articles of clothing. Other than that most of the nights were same old, setup, make dinner, play cards and go to sleep.

Some days on the trail we would play this movie game that our ranger taught us. It doesn't even have a name yet but you name an actor, and two opposing teams take turn naming movies the actor/actress is in. We had fun for about an hour then back to staring at shoes. Hiking is the most boring thing in the world sometimes, if you don't

have a flow of conversations it can feel like forever. To make it worse sometimes is the rain. Rain in Virginia is fun to look at, run though dance in. The rain at Philmont was very refreshing. Then it turned into freezing rain. I was never so cold and miserable before. It was just terrible, and it happened once every day due to monsoon season. To make it worse our rain gear, Dri-Duck wasn't completely waterproof and the inside was waterproof too so when water got inside, it stayed inside.

The meaning of all of this is Philmont itself was a terrible experience if you let it be, but if you find the fun of it, every last second it can be the greatest experience of your life.



Trung, Hòa, Đông, Sonny, Đức
Việt, Quinton, Nam, Steven, Jonathan, Marvin, Thăng

A Truly Unforgettable Experience

Steven Ngo

The day our ranger left us is when Philmont really started because we had only ourselves to count on. Since learning from our past mistakes we decided from now on to travel early in the morning in case of rain. We reached the next campsite, Abreu, before lunch time. We set up camp early and decided to take our only shower on the entire trek. Our crew bonded the most at this camp. We loved Abreu camp the most because we didn't have to cook dinner, the food was amazing and the one dollar root beer that they sell is so worth it, after a long day.



"Which way to our Trek #10?"

Waking up early is still tough for many of us. We do our best to drag ourselves out of our tents, pack up everything, and leave. As we were leaving for the next camp my big clip that helps support the weight of my pack broke. My shoulders were in such pain that day. After we finished lunch was when it started to hail for a short period of time but then it turned into cold rain. As we kept backpacking on the trail two of our members received altitude sickness. We waited about an hour for them to adjust. Although that wasn't enough time we continued on until we reached the peak of that dreadful mountain and went straight down until we reached Fish Camp. Calling in and asking for an extra clip was essential for me to continue successfully in Philmont. We didn't go fishing due to all the rain but we made our very own fly fishing hook and played in the staff cabin.

The hike was very short on day six to Apache Springs. We did our conservation project which was asking questions about conservation to the conservationist because the rain ruined our chance to help build a future trail. When we finished setting up camp we restocked on our food and I received my brand new clip for my pack.

The hike to Crooked Creek was one to remember. The hike was very easy but the distance was very long. Seeing many cows as we hiked toward our destination. Upon arriving to the staffed camp they gave us the best campsite with a view. The campsite given to us was amazing. Before we all turned in for the night one of our crew members said that he has a bad case of diarrhea. No one knew what was going to happen next.

We left camp around 6 AM to head toward the Peak of Mt. Phillips. We hiked for about thirty minutes when one of our members felt really weak from the diarrhea. All the advisors decided that member should be sent back to base camp to recover. It took about an hour for four members of our crew to go back to a staff camp to drop him off and meet us back at the rendezvous point. We started the one of the toughest hike in our itinerary at 8AM and arrived at the next camp very late in the afternoon around 6-7. Around 5:30 we reached the peak of Mt. Phillips. We took many pictures of this momentous event and most of the crew called home that day. We set up camp, eat

dinner, set up the bear bag, and all prayed that our crew member would return tomorrow.

The hike to Sawmill was fairly easy. We were all hoping to regain our lost member today as we were approaching the staff camp we saw our crew member with a smile on his face. At this camp we made our own ammunition and shot the bullets we made. It was a swell time. Sawmill was a great camp but it was cramped with crews. Too many crews not enough space.

We are all accustomed to waking up early. The trail was hard terrain and everyone's moral was slowly depleting. We arrived at Cathedral Rock in the early afternoon. Light rain on the tenth day but we had to hike an extra mile from camp to get to a water source.

The hardest day of the entire trek. The day started out easy. We rode horses at the pit stop Clark's Fork. After that we went straight uphill for the longest time. As we got closer to our destination the terrain got rougher. Near the peak there are a bunch of rocks it took us a really long time to complete this day. As we were heading down the Tooth of time near the campsite it started to hail ice cubes. There was so much hail and rain the water rose about an inch off the ground. When arriving at camp we noticed staff members and they were called up there due to the high amount of bear sightings at that camp. We all went to sleep early to prepare to return to base camp.

I was so ecstatic to be homebound returning to a normal bed, no more freeze-dried food, no more stinky red roofs filled with poop, no more wet tents, and having to carry a heavy backpack every day. We reached base camp before 12PM and returned all the materials borrowed from Philmont and relaxed until the next morning. We left our mark at Philmont by leaving our class B shirt and adding a pair of swimming shoes to the gate of Philmont.

This experience is once in a life time. A truly unforgettable experience one could never expect. I would love to return to Philmont one day to relive all the wonderful memories I experienced in one of the greatest two weeks of my life.



Day 8th, 5:30 pm: We were on top of Mount Phillips

Indoor Plumbing And Electricity Never Felt So Fantastic!

Viet Nguyen

Eight Boy Scouts and four adult leaders underwent the Philmont Scout Ranch experience this past summer from July 20 to August 3. We traveled to New Mexico and arrived at an Albuquerque airport on July 17. We had a couple days for vacation or bonding before the strenuous backpacking trip. Philmont is a great scout ranch, located in Cimarron, New Mexico, and has extraordinary staff. The staff consists of almost anyone for any activity that Philmont provides ranging from rangers who teach scouts how to survive in Philmont to aides for the religious services offered everyday for the plethora of arriving scouts. Philmont rangers teach scouts about general scout skills that can be any survival aptitude such as snake bites to washing dishes in the wilderness. At base camp, there is a busy schedule for arriving scouts everyday, which can range from any number such as 100 scouts to 5000 scouts. Fortunately, Philmont does a great job at staffing to help all of these crews stay busy before they hike out for a backbreaking 11 days.



“Need a walking stick?”

My crew, troop 904 (Lien Doan Thang Long aka troop Thang Long) proceeded through trek 10 and was given the name 720-R for Romeo (July 20-Ranger crew). We are the sixth Vietnamese-American crew in BSA history (over 100 years) to finish Philmont. Our crew is very unique not only because of our skin color but because of how well we bonded due to Philmont training (backpacking) and different personalities. Right after we registered, we were greeted by a funny looking guy wearing sunglasses and a mullet hairstyle. A mullet is very peculiar in the middle of the desert. The ranger was very enthusiastic and we advanced on to take a group picture while he tried to learn our names by linking the same beginning letter adjective with our first name. For example, my best friend Sonny was given the nickname “sensational Sonny”. However, my friend Nam and I (Viet) just let our nickname to be “Viet-Nam” like our native country. Once we reached the designated photo area, our ranger Bryan Stigall told everyone to remove their hats and wigs. Instantly, we found out that Bryan was wearing a mullet wig. He tricked us so cleverly. What made my day while walking back from the group photo was that my friend “mystical Marvin” asked the most retarded question ever: “Who is our ranger?” to Bryan, our ranger. ‘SLAPS’ forehead ... oh my goodness. We had hung out with Bryan for at least 30 minutes and “mystical Marvin” was still clueless.

For the next two days after base camp, we experienced our first New Mexico rain. Rain made me cold and makes people lose lots of body heat. For some reason, I decided to leave all of my warm clothing at base camp and the only long sleeve and pants that I brought were my rain gear. When we arrived to camp, Bryan showed us how to set up camp the “Philmont” way; we were required to locate our camp, set up tents, cook, and clean into the “sump” or place to drain extra food particles from the meal. We also

learned how to put up a bear bag and differentiate a particular tree that smells like vanilla if male or butterscotch if female! Bryan showed us larks-head or the “alien head” knot to secure our bear bags, which took “mystical Marvin” forever to do when the rest of us learned it in less than a minute. After those first two days in the wilderness, at Lover’s Leap and Aguila, Bryan left us ☹. He finished his ranger training to help us survive Philmont, and then we were on our own for 9 days! Bryan fortunately gave us a Frisbee to play with to help pass our time.

We headed out for Abreu, the camp with the best cloud view, also known for Mexican homesteading and root beer. Fortunately at that camp, we were provided a Mexican Dinner, so we did not have to cook that night ☺. The next day, it rained again, when we were heading to Fish camp. All we did in that camp was make fly-ties for fly-fishing, which is much harder than most people would think. The following day, we hiked to Apache Springs where we had did 3D archery with animal targets and also sat in the freezing rain to complete our “conservation project” to help build a new Philmont trail. We went to Crooked Creek the next day where we did nothing, except try to get water where unfortunately, one of my buddies Trung Vo, got diarrhea from drinking contaminated water.

The next day is a day to forevermore be remembered. Trung Vo had to leave us because he could no longer hide his diarrhea pain, so a couple scouts and adults guided him to the nearest staffed campsite. Luckily, that day we reached Mt. Phillips (without Trung), the highest peaking height for our entire trip: 11,657 feet above sea level. We were so happy! Our toughest day was then complete and it was pretty much all downhill from there.

We slept well that night and the next day we came to Sawmill where we saw our buddy Trung, who was completely re-energized from resting at base camp. We made three rifle rounds and shot the 30 caliber rifles. The next day we hung out at Cathedral Rock, which had a great view of a natural image from nature. The next day we arrived to Clarks Fork where all of us rode a horse for the first time. On the final day, we all hiked to the Tooth of Time, the most publicized part of Southern Philmont. Jonny and Nam, two close friends, climbed the Tooth of Time with the adults and me to see the sunrise. After that, we headed to base camp with lots of energy. None of us had showered for over a week. Indoor plumbing and electricity never felt so fantastic!



“Twenty-Minutes” Packs Off

I Wanna Go Back To Philmont

Andrew Nam Dang Pham

Upon the return from my expedition at the Philmont Scout Ranch, the world around has had a different sensation. Fast food restaurants, dry cleaners, public restrooms with flushable toilets and urinals, and even electricity seem to be appliances that seem so irregular when compared to the back country. To think I had once, and possibly ongoing, had a vast dependency on such applications. However, despite the dependence, I have a grand appreciation towards the backcountry, and the outdoors in general. It is difficult to explain quite exactly why and how I appreciate the great outdoors.



Homestead in the Wilderness

Growing up, I never really took in consideration my love for the outdoors. I have always accepted the plain fact that Scouting was a great part of my life, but never realized its true impact. I have to recollect that I first ventured on a backpacking trip at the age of 15. Without going into any extenuating details of my life at the current time, I have to say I did not have as an appreciation to the backcountry as I do today. I only viewed backpacking as lollygagging through randomly assigned trails and paths with no sense of reward. My poorly equipped backpack probably did not help so much either. After a year had passed since my venture, I had obtained my Eagle Scout rank. Although life rewarding, and great on my resume, I still felt unsatisfied with myself as a scout. All the years of going up the ranks of Tenderfoot to Life, gaining the necessary 21 merit badges, and completing my leadership project for my community had all been rewarded with a simple badge, certificate, and neckerchief.

Near the middle of my second semester of my college student career, I was offered the opportunity to venture in an expedition at the Philmont Scout Ranch.

Surprisingly, at the time, I had no clue whatsoever about Philmont. I just imagined it as just another Goshen Camp, but was I wrong. I had heard about the idea of this trip from the beginning of the year, and finally realized its influential potential to our high adventure crew and troop as a whole when I confirmed my spot in Crew 720-R. It really was going to be a trip of a lifetime; the first crew from our troop to venture into the miraculous Philmont. Although maybe over half the regional Vietnamese scouting community may not have known what Philmont is about, just as myself before, I believe it made the reward all the better. To be able to accomplish a feat that many have no knowledge of and where others wished to have been given the opportunity, I think I found my reward.

For all who read this and expect a description of the Philmont Scout Ranch, and my experience there, you might be disappointed. If you really want to know how Philmont is, I give a word of advice. Those who do not have the heart and fervor to venture will already be at a disadvantage. The Philmont Scout Ranch and its employees are driven by the scouters' aspirations. I do not think there was a single scouter I met there that was present by force, but rather choice. Just as with any other activity or hobby, those driven by passion are those who successfully tread.



"Meal time!"

Not Something You Can Describe

Trung Vo

The state of New Mexico does not seem to have much to offer. Dry air, high altitudes, and a roaring sun bear down upon oneself the minute they step out of the airport onto the seemingly endless sands. It is a desert with the occasional house, road, tree, or cactus lying around.

Philmont was a pleasant change. Lush green forests lasting further than the eyes can see, animals, such as chipmunks (also called mini-bears), deer, and bears, roaming across the land, and even cattle grazing their pastures. Of course, no person could possibly forget the vast array of mountains. Scouts coming to Philmont always hear about the peaks of Baldy and Mount Phillips, hoping to have the opportunity to stand on some of the highest mountains in the entire Philmont Scout Ranch.

“Scout Ranch”, the description Philmont, gives an astoundingly brief explanation of the things Philmont has to offer. “Scout” refers to the hundreds of thousands of scouts who have come to Philmont, including their trekking through the trailside. “Ranch” refers to Philmont’s purpose to the city of Cimarron and the state of New Mexico; Philmont is an active ranch home to countless cattle and elegant equestrian steeds.



Sweatin' on the Trail

The scouting part of Philmont allows Boy Scouts to truly become scouts. On reaching the trail, they are given a map, compass, brief instructions, and are set off on their journey measuring over 50 miles. There is no restroom, there is no electricity, and there is no air conditioning; just a shovel, flashlights, gas stoves, and fresh air. There is no other definition of scouting; the Philmont experience gives one all the scouting they need.

The ranching portion of Philmont allows scouts to partake in different types of activities, such as goat milking, chicken feeding, lassoing, horseback riding, and branding

their shoes and hats with a hot iron (don't tell mom about that one). Live the life of a cowboy in the Wild West and plan to have a memorable moment indeed.

I would like to point out that I have not described my personal experience at the Philmont Scout Ranch, member of patrol 720-R. This is simply because Philmont is not something you can describe. It is not something you can come home and tell people about. For instance, what if I had told you that the most terrifying beast of the mountains were dirty, little, rotten, buck toothed chipmunks? You would call me crazy and point out that a bear could kill a man in an instant. However, mark my words: the mini-bear is the most fearsome animal on the entire ranch.

You likely do not believe me because you have not been to Philmont. You have not been through the experience, the twelve days on the ranch, the seventy mile hike, the fifty pound packs, the rain, and the hail. Philmont is nothing like the rest of New Mexico. Philmont is nothing like anything you may have done and/or will ever do, unless you come to the Philmont Scout Ranch. You will experience unexplainable things, amazing things, and unfortunately, some horrid moments as well when those darn chipmunks come to attack. But you'll love it, and you will long for the day you can return to this land, this desert known as New Mexico. Philmont, here's to thee, scouting paradise, out in God's country tonight.



Philmont Campfire

Appendix

About Philmont Scout Ranch

Excerpt from <http://philmontscoutranch.org/> , September 08, 2011



Philmont Scout Ranch, the Boy Scouts of America's premier High Adventure™ base, challenges Scouts and Venturers with more than 214 square miles of rugged northern New Mexico wilderness. Backpacking treks, horseback cavalcades, and training and service programs offer young people many ways to experience this legendary country.

Born in 1938 as Philturn Rockymountain Scoutcamp, today's Philmont Scout Ranch is a bustling center for high adventure and training. Youth and adults take advantage of the ranch's camping, training, and work programs. Most activity takes place during the summer, but Philmont also offers Autumn Adventure and Winter Adventure programs.

More than 930,000 Scouts, Venturers, and leaders have experienced the adventure of Philmont since the first camping season in 1939. Throughout its existence, conscientious attention to low-impact camping techniques have helped maintain the ranch's wilderness flavor.

The area surrounding the ranch is rich with history, from the Native Americans who made this arid land their home to the land barons of the 19th century. The town of Cimarron boasts a number of historical buildings, including the St. James Hotel—site of at least 26 killings during Cimarron's wilder days.



PHILMONT SCOUT RANCH
BOY SCOUTS OF AMERICA



Arrowhead Award Patch

720 Romeo (July 20 Ranger)

Vietnamese American Scout Troop 904
Liên Đoàn Thăng Long, aka TL Group or LĐTTL

Sonny Nguyen, *Crew Leader*
Trung Vo, *Assistant Crew Leader*
Jonathan Khiem Nguyen, *Crew Chaplain's Aide*
Viet Nguyen, *Crew Wilderness Pledge Guide*
Andrew Nam Dang Pham, *Crew member*
Steven Ngo, *Crew member*
Quinton Tang, *Crew member*
Marvin Long Nguyen, *Crew member*

Hoa Cao Nguyen, *on-vacation Advisor*
Thang Ba Pham, *on-vacation Advisor*
Dong Vo, *on-vacation Advisor*
Duc Van Nguyen, *on-vacation Advisor*

OUR THANKS

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Finally, we all thank Boy Scouts of America and Mr. De Tan Nguyen for supporting our eight scouts financially, mentally, and physically to made our dream easier in registration for this high adventure.



Our photo album: <https://picasaweb.google.com/116738321962321790144/720RomeoInPhilmont#>