

# The Athens Messenger

## Local Scouts trek through New Mexico wilderness

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*A crew of seven teenage Scouts and four adult leaders from Athens pose after going on a 52-mile, weeklong trek through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains in July at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico. The Scouts were from BSA Troops 71 for Boys and Girls. Submitted photo*

After months of planning and preparation, a crew of seven teenage Scouts and four adult leaders from Athens went on a life-changing summer backpacking trek through the Sangre de Cristo Mountains at Philmont Scout Ranch in Cimarron, New Mexico.

Philmont spans 140,171 acres and covers over 220 square miles of vast wilderness with trails that climb from 6,500 feet to as high as 12,441 feet. During their trek, Scouts from Scouts BSA Troops 71 for Boys and Girls hiked 52 miles over seven days.

The crew (Crew 702-7C) carried everything they needed to survive on their backs while hiking from camp to camp during the trek in July. Each night, Scouts set up

camp and cooked their own food in a new location. They participated in backcountry programs along the way including rock climbing, rappelling, horseback riding, a challenge course, and learning western lore.

Even though the group was away during a summer holiday, Scout Robert Layton said, "I couldn't imagine a better way to spend the 4th of July."

The trek also included a conservation project where the Scouts learned about trail maintenance, erosion control, and the use of specialized tools to shape the slope of trails. The Philmont crew helped to build a new trail through part of the south country of the expansive Scout ranch.

Along the trek, Scouts endured tough challenges including backpacking in bear and mountain lion territory, navigating their way through the wilderness, finding and purifying their own drinking water, and even inclement weather. Before the Athens crew ever hit the trail, Scouts witnessed two tornadoes and weathered a significant hail storm, all while packing food for their trek. The crew even summited the famed "Tooth of Time" at 9,413 feet during the trek.

Their trip was truly a wilderness experience.

"They may meet only one other group of Scouts on the trail in an entire day of hiking," according to Backpacker Magazine. "Even in the most crowded destinations, each Scout group camps in isolation, out of sight and sound of all other groups."

"We often ran into other crews on the trail, but much of the time, we were out there, by ourselves as a group," according to Crew Adviser and local Scoutmaster Keith Milam. "In fact, we even ran into at least three other crews from Ohio at different points in our trip."

The Athens-based crew's trek is considered by many to be a once-in-a-lifetime, "mountaintop experience" available to Scouts. Philmont Scout Ranch is considered by many to be the premier example of four national high adventure bases operated by the Boy Scouts of America. It is the largest youth camp in the world, having served nearly 1 million participants since 1938.