

- Philmont Advisor Fitness and Training -

[2021 Update (of Prior Editions Dated 2002, 2005, 2007, and 2014); **this was a PowerPoint Presentation for the Council High Adventure Training.**]

Proper physical preparation for Philmont is critical, not only for the Advisors, but also for their Crews.

1) Pertinent Adjustable Parameters for Advisors

What are the critical variables for Advisors? There are only 3 adjustable parameters if you are a good Advisor, plus a 4th if you're a bad Advisor. What are they?

- * **Pack Weight** - The Lower the Better
- * **Personal Weight** - The Closer to the Ideal, the Better (Almost Always Lower)
- * **Fitness Level** (Aerobic, Strength, and (most importantly) **Backpacking Conditioning!**) - The Better **Backpacking** Shape You're in, the Better.

and if you're a bad Advisor:

- * **Trek Difficulty** (This is the Scout's Choice, Not the Advisors! ...but Many Advisors Dictate!)

Pack Weight Reduction and Trek Selection are handled elsewhere, so I'm here to hassle you about topics you really don't want to talk about, or even think about - but let's anyway!

2) Consequences - Good, Bad, and Worse

* **The Worst** - What is the worst that can happen to you? You can DIE! (yes you can!) from stroke or heart attack - either on one of your pre-Philmont shakedown, at Philmont, or sometime after you get back (the first and third categories are not included in "deaths at Philmont," but they certainly should be). Picture this - you're Day 6 on the trail, and climbing Baldy Mountain. You're only 5 miles into a 14 mile day, climbing a 40 degree scree slope at 12,000 feet, and you're as tired as you've ever been in your life - and those Scouts of yours are bounding up to the summit like gazelles, while your heart is beating like a set of conga drums. Think you can't die? Think again.

* **The Ugly** - What is the next worst thing that can happen to you? You are forced to drop out due to physical inability to perform, either before or during Philmont, or you fail your Philmont medical recert at Basecamp (weight and blood pressure checks). If your Crew has 3 or 4 Advisors, this just means a loss of a pile of money and self-esteem for you - but if you have only 2 Advisors, now your Crew is in trouble. If it's before Philmont, and you can't find a replacement, and Philmont can't help, **YOUR CREW IS HISTORY**. If you're at Philmont, if you're lucky, there might be a Rent-a-Ranger available (none some years), or maybe they'll let your Crew continue on as an adjunct to your sister Crew if they're willing, or maybe a third Advisor from another Contingent Crew will join you, or maybe your Crew will have to switch itineraries in mid-trek to link up with another Crew that's willing to help - or maybe your Crew will have to come off the trail altogether. Think it can't happen? Think again.

* **The Bad** - What's the next worst thing that can happen to you? Your entire Philmont trek is an exercise in total misery, from beginning to end. This is the fate of far too many Advisors, and it's really sad. They figure they can tough it out, and most of them can - but at a terrible price - because their

misery directly impacts on their Crew's Philmont experiences, and in the worst cases ruins it. Most of you are taking your sons, or Scouts you have known for many years, to Philmont. You have a responsibility to them as well as yourself, to maximize their experiences as well as enjoy your own.

* **The Good** - And that's the point of today's rant. I don't want you to survive Philmont, I don't want you to endure Philmont. No, I want you to excel at Philmont, and to have one of the all-around best experiences of your life. **That's what it should be**, and that's what it will be if you heed all the advice you're getting here today. Let's begin.

3) **The Grim Reality:**

According to Philmont:

50% of all Advisors have done NO physical preparation for Philmont

30% of all Advisors have done minimal physical preparation

10% have done moderate (adequate) physical preparation

10% have done extensive physical preparation

Extensive prep is defined as everyday or nearly everyday backpacking, carrying a heavy pack, for a minimum of 1 hour per day for at least 2 months prior to the trek start date, plus a minimum of 2 "realistic" backpacking shakedown events (10 miles minimum, including at least 2,000 feet of total elevation change, or 15 miles minimum with a lesser amount of elevation change), during the 2 months prior to the trek. "Extensive Prep" is rigorously defined as *weight-bearing practice* that toughens up your weight-bearing points (shoulders, hips, and feet), as differentiated from simple aerobic (cardiovascular) or strength exercising.

Moderate (adequate) prep is everyday or nearly everyday aerobic exercising (hiking, running, cycling, high-activity sports, treadmill, etc.), with occasional backpacking practice (1 - 2 per week), for a minimum of 1 hour per day for at least 2 months prior to the trek, plus 1 realistic backpacking shakedown event (as defined above), during the 2 months prior to the trek.

Minimal prep is occasional (3 - 5 per week) aerobic exercising, for a minimum of 1 hour per day for at least 1 month prior to the trek. [Note that this is where about a third of all Advisors and most H.S.-athlete-Scouts fall.]

None is anything less than the Minimal category. [Note that this is where half of all Advisors, and most non-H.S.-athlete-Scouts, fall.]

Which category do you see yourself in?

4) **All the Usual Excuses:**

No Time to Exercise (AKA: "I'm Too Busy")

I'm already in Good Shape because I do _____ (Usually Sports or Work)

No Time to Exercise - "I'm Really Busy"

I'll get in Shape on the Trail (Yep, Just in Time to Go Home, if you Live)

No Time to Exercise - "I'm Incredibly Busy"

How Hard Can it Be? (A Lot Harder than You Know!)

No Time to Exercise - "Do You Have Any Idea How Busy I Am?"

5) What's the Absolute Minimum? Wrong Question to Ask! Welcome to the Wall....

- * **Medical Recerts at Philmont** All Advisors must pass a medical recertification upon arrival at Philmont, covering weight and blood pressure. If you fail, your Philmont trek is OVER, and you will be sent home.
- * **Failure to Make the Minimum Standards** The policy is ZERO TOLERANCE. There is NO Court of Appeals. No matter how much you cry, argue, or threaten. And no refund either. End of story.

6) Philmont Weight Charts [Handout]

See: <http://www.scouting.org/sitecore/content/Home/HighAdventure/Philmont/Hikers/weight.aspx>

7) Philmont Blood Pressure Limits [150/95 is the upper limit]

8) The Timeline

- * **When Should You Start?** - "Today" - It's never too early to get started - even if just marginal changes in diet and exercise - anything is better than nothing.
- * **When Do You Need to be in Decent Shape?** - **BEFORE YOUR FIRST BACKPACKING SHAKEDOWN!** So when do you therefore need to start getting in shape? Depends on your shakedown schedule, and your current fitness level - for most of us, about 10 weeks before that first shakedown.
- * **What are Your Intermediate Goals?** and **What are Your Final Goals?** - Establish Realistic, Achievable OBJECTIVE Goals, and from there a timeline and program to reach them. Human Nature: Most of us have little motivation to reach vague goals. Subjective Goals ("I will get in good shape") ARE MEANINGLESS.
- * **What Do You Need to do BEFORE you get Started?** - Before you start, talk to your physician. Show him the Philmont medical form (THAT'S WHY THERE IS A SPECIAL PHILMONT MEDICAL FORM IN THE FIRST PLACE), explain what it is you're going to be going, get his advice on both exercise and diet.

9) Fads, Myths, and Other Bad Ideas

- * **Crash Diets Work** - We all know better than that. Short term at best, and leave you too weak to do Proper Fitness Training.
- * **Crash Exercise Programs Work** - Not if you're over 30! Crash Exercise Programs greatly increase the risk of a debilitating injury - just before Philmont - and leave you exhausted. Very bad idea. Start gently, build up to real conditioning.

- * **Sports is Philmont Training** - Absolutely False. Even the “best” Sports only hit two of the three fitness needs - and many hit only one. None help the most important fitness need - backpacking fitness.
- * **Shakedown are Fitness Training** - Absolutely Not! Shakedown are PROTOCOL “How-To-Do-Philmont” training. They are utterly useless as Fitness Training, except to serve as a warning. Fitness is what you do every day, not what you do two or three times in the 6 months before you go.

10) Proper Dieting

- * **Do You NEED to Diet?** - If less than 10 pounds over ideal, just increasing your activity level (Fitness Training) will almost certainly take care of it - as long as you don’t start chowing down as soon as you start exercising!
- * **Maximum Recommended Weight Loss Rates** - SIZE DEPENDENT! Smaller men, ½ pound a week; larger men, 1 pound per week.
- * **Establish a REALISTIC Plan** - With your physician THAT YOU CAN LIVE WITH; stick with it. If you develop a plan that you can’t stick with, YOU HAVE NO PLAN!
- * **Avoid Fad Diets** - Again, usually short-term duration, and leave you too weak to do fitness training (or really anything else - including your real job).
- * **If you need to lose a lot....** - Develop Plan with your physician or dietician. Get a “Diet buddy” For help in self-monitoring. Join a Weight Loss Support Group.
- * **Abandoning your diet just before Philmont (and why!)** - EVERYONE - Change your Diet as you’re approaching departure - need to switch to more Philmont-like things, rich in fats, carbs, and sugar, and reduced caffeine, salads, meats, fresh fruits, etc. (avoid dietary shock to the system = diarrhea or constipation on the Ranch). [Analogy to vegetarians. If a vegetarian starts eating significant amounts of meat, he or she will get sick; they have to build to it slowly.] As my friend Wally Feurtado always said: “It’s Hard to Hike in a Squatting Position.”

11) Fitness Training

- * **Aerobic (Cardiovascular) Exercising** - Improve Heart and Lung Capacity and Endurance Compensate for Altitude and Mountainous Terrain. MUST LAST AT LEAST 20 MINUTES IN ORDER TO HAVE ANY LONG-TERM BENEFITS.
- * **Strength Exercising** - Improve Carrying Capacity, Overall Muscle Tone, Resistance to injury and Fatigue
- * **Backpacking Exercising** - Toughen Weight Bearing Points (feet, hips, and shoulders). Get adjusted to walking “at a tilt” (extremely important). Break in Boots. Train feet to “read” trail.

Develop a REALISTIC Plan THAT YOU CAN LIVE WITH; Stick With It - You HAVE to

SCHEDULE Fitness Training. **What is the best timeframe for most of us?** (early mornings best times - late afternoons and evenings tend to get overtaken by other priorities).

Build from 2 - 3 Times a Week (Early) to Every Day (Late) - Why every day? Because **your body needs to be ready for the everyday repetition at Philmont**. If you take every other day breaks, your body will begin to anticipate the same out there (and guess what, it won't happen out there). Also, easier to skip days if you don't make it an everyday thing (it's sleeting out, it's a Code Red Day, I'm not going to hike in a thunderstorm, etc.)

12) **Aerobic Cardiovascular) Exercising - Examples**

Hiking/Treadmill, Running, Rollerblading, Biking/Exercycles, Climbing Stairs/Stairmaster/ "Stadiums", "Sprint" Exercises (Basketball, Team Handball, Racketball, etc.), Swimming, "Gym" Exercises (Jumping Jacks, etc.)

13) **Strength Exercising - Examples**

Weights, Technical Equipment Circuits, Formal Strength Exercises (Push-ups, Crunches, Pull-ups, Squat-Thrusts, etc.)

14) **Backpacking Exercising**

Why is backpacking the best exercise? - Includes aerobic and strength conditioning. Toughens shoulders, hips, and feet (prevent blisters!) **Gets you accustomed to walking "at a tilt" - which involves completely different stresses on lower back, hips, knees, and ankles than normal walking or running**. Breaks in boots.

What is "Dr. Bob's Gold's Gym?" - 1/2 mile of trail over a small but fairly steep hill in Potomac Overlook Park in Arlington. Work towards 12 minutes reps (a lot harder than it sounds)

Why There? - Convenient, reasonably quick, heck of a workout, but down, level, and up hiking, trains feet to "trail read", hits all three aspects of fitness training.

You Can Find a Place Like This!

15) **Case Studies**

What did I do in 2012? Extensive Level Training!

Post-Thanksgiving – Turkey Hike. Started walking/biking and watching my food intake; increased general fitness. Nothing dramatic.

January through March: Briskly walk 4 miles a day on most weekdays, plus at least one 10 miler each weekend in January (two 10 Milers some weekends), a 20 miler each weekend in February, and a 25 miler the first weekend in March. Modified diet to start losing weight.

Mid-March - 50/20 Hike (50 miles in 20 hours or less; I did all 50 miles in 17 hours)

April 1 - All hikes include a backpack. Stretches before and after each hike. Backpack 4 miles almost every morning, starting with 20 pounds. Added 5 pounds per week til I was at 50 pounds. Started taking the stairs at work (7 stories); walked a mile at lunch. Bike or walk for errands when possible.

Mid-May - 1st Shakedown

June 1 - Start Gold's Gym at Potomac Overlook Park, 4 reps (1 hour); add exercises to walks (push-ups, crunches, squats).

Mid-June - 2nd Shakedown; increase Gold's gym to 8 reps (2 hours), start eating more Philmont-like items for most meals; cut back on caffeine. Increase water intake.

July 1 - for last two weeks, two a days, up to the day before I step on the plane. Also did 10/10's at work (10 story building staircase 10 times in a row, up and down) every day (but with no weight, just me).

16) On The Ranch:

Used vitamins to supplement the food - helps compensate. Stretched before every hike. Used anti-inflammatories judiciously.

17) End Result?

Good Time at Philmont - despite my age and need to carry a very heavy pack (60-65 lbs) on several days.

18) Want to Know How You're Doing?

Use the **Philmont Challenge Index** See:

<http://www.troop111.org> – High Adventure - Philmont

“See You Down the Trail.”

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