

### Keeping Equipment Costs Reasonable

Relatively speaking, “basic” backpacking is an inexpensive pursuit. However, that changes quickly when you start looking for higher end gear. When combined, “High Quality,” “Durable,” and “Lightweight” are expensive specifications. It is now routine for state-of-the-art tents, rainsuits, and sleeping bags to retail at or above \$500, backpacks, boots, and some electronics at or above \$250, and many other standard items at or above \$100. Completely outfitting yourself with state-of-the-art gear in 2021 would likely run over \$5,000.

Fortunately there is no need for such excess for Philmont, or (really) for any similar Scouting backpacking adventure - or even multiple such adventures. Furthermore, it is possible to outfit yourself with high quality gear for far less than retail or even sale prices. And finally, it is also possible to use some everyday items as substitutes for high priced camping gear. Remember, Philmont is only 11 days on the trail, in a 3 season environment that only rarely experiences extreme weather conditions. Even adding the various shakedown events, it would be unusual for a standard Philmont trek to have more than 20 days of backpacking total. In short, **the average Scout or Scouter does not need state-of-the-art gear for Philmont** - or even for an extended backpacking career.

So, how do you control costs?

1) Borrow it. Including recently graduated Scouts now in college or still living in the area, the Troop has between 25 and 40 Scouts and adults who have gone to Philmont or on similar backpacking treks over the past 10 years. At least some of these former trekkers would be willing to loan gear to Scouts going on the Troop's next Philmont trek. And if they've outgrown the gear, they may either donate it to you, or sell it to you dirt cheap. Ask! Furthermore, this option is not limited to Troop 111 - there are over a dozen other Troops in Arlington, some of which also do Philmont and/or similar treks, and many of our Scouts know their Scouts; again, ask! Adults may find similar opportunities among co-workers or Adult Scouters in nearby Troops.

2) If you can't borrow it, rent it. Several local camping outfits (notably Casual Adventure and REI) will rent gear for reasonable rates. Note that this varies by outfitter, and also by year, so “will rent” may have changed to “used to rent” - there's no way to know that until you ask. Rental rates vary widely - a good rule of thumb for a 2 week trip would be about 20% of the price of the same item, new. However, the total cost obviously increases if you're also renting for the shakedown events (which is a good idea, for familiarization). Refundable damage and/or cleanup deposits may also be required.

3) If you can't borrow it, or rent it, buy used. Camping and backpacking tend to be pursuits where a lot of folks went once or twice and “never again.” Usually because they were badly unprepared or did a killer trip, and had a miserable experience. In many such cases their gear - often very pricey stuff - sits around for a couple of years and then gets sold off for 10 cents on the dollar, either at yard sales or (much more commonly) on internet sites. Without beating it to death, here are some standard leads:

craigslist - often the best with respect to deals (some items are even free). In addition to the Washington, DC craigslist, you can search Baltimore, Richmond, or towns where older siblings are attending college. There are also “Search the Entire Craigslist” programs available, but it's kinda hard to pick up a bargain 1,600 miles away, and most people will not mail items even if you pay using PayPal or a similar service. In general, craigslist requires regular checking

(multiple times a week) for popular or hard to get items (try “camping”, “backpacking”, “backpack frame”, and “ultralight” as good general search terms).

ebay - Virtually anything is available, often inexpensive, often new or nearly new. Unlike craigslist, however, remember that you are competing against the world, so bidding wars can quickly turn an initial bargain into a very expensive item. Patience can sometimes result in extraordinary deals, especially during the winter months. Items that are currently out of favor (e.g., external frame backpacks) or “yesterday’s technology” (e.g., first generation sil-nyl backpacking tents) tend to go for low prices, but current stuff (e.g., the latest GPS unit) tends to go for 50% or more of their original prices. It helps to do some pricing research before jumping in, and it REALLY helps to “snipe” the sales (“sniping” is putting in your high bid with 3 seconds to go, thereby avoiding bidding wars).

Yard Sales - Inner suburbs like Arlington, Falls Church, and McLean, especially in wealthier neighborhoods that still have a lot of kids running around, are good sources of Scout personal gear (backpacks, foam pads, etc.) - and sometimes also Troop gear that was never returned to its respective Troop (tents, cook-kits, etc.) Many neighborhoods (including Cherrydale) hold a “neighborhood yard sale,” and these are good places to go to quickly review the offerings of many dozens of families (have to go EARLY – though late will usually result in much lower prices). However, note that any large sale with commercial dealers (like the monthly Civitans sale at W&L) are usually NOT good places to find bargains - the dealers on-site grab anything good as soon as the sale opens, for later resale at market value prices (which are no bargain!)

Neighborhood Internet Forums – Nextdoor.org, freecycle, trash nothing, and similar forums are sometimes utilized to sell or give away camping items. This tends to be very hit or miss, however, and quality items at bargain prices are rare.

4) If you can’t buy used, buy cheap junk for “one event use” - This is an alternative approach used by many Philmont Crews. A classic example is tents - you can probably purchase six 2-man dome tents on sale (at a “box store”) for less than \$250 total. No, they’re not great, but brand new they’ll do for a single Philmont and its associated shakedown events, especially during the dry season (June through mid-July). The tents can then be sold to the Crew members for half price after the trek, further reducing the cost - or if you prefer, given to Scouts who did the pre- and post-Philmont “scut-work.”

5) Miscellaneous Sources - Better for Crew (as opposed to Personal) gear.

Ask Other Troops! - Personal solicitations in Chainemail (the District Newsletter) can also result in loans, donations, or low-cost rentals or sales of “group” backpacking gear (like tents or stoves) from neighboring Units.

Chain Bridge (Arlington/McLean) District Gear Giveaway - Held once a year, usually at the June Roundtable (second Thursday). Both Troop and personal equipment available. The quality varies from usable to recycling bin/trash-can bad, but it's all free. Some other local Districts have picked up on this idea, and some don't mind if folks from neighboring Districts come.

Folded Units - When a Troop folds, often their gear is abandoned in place, and the Chartered Partner usually wants it removed, sometimes immediately, sometimes after a couple of years of waiting. These are usually treasure troves of useful Troop equipment, and sometimes some personal gear also (uniforms, etc.) However, the lapsed Unit's storage space is usually a disaster,

and removing and sorting all the gear can be an arduous, multi-day task. But again, it's all free if you're willing to do the work.

## 6) Outfitter Sales

“One Day Sales” - Some camping outlets hold an annual or biannual, one day sale where discontinued, little used rental gear, and returned (slightly used) items are sold for dirt cheap. The REI annual “Attic Sale,” and Casual Adventure’s Clearance Sales are the best known such sales in our immediate area. These sales usually require some pre-scouting, and camping out at the door, in order to grab specific one-of-a-kind items. The savings can be amazing – for example, 75 - 90% off on discontinued, one-of-a-kind items, are routine at REI.

Other “Routine” Sales - Casual Adventure holds an Annual 20% Off Scout Sale, usually on the second or third Wednesday in March. REI holds “members-only” sales, all through the year, with similar savings. Some internet outlets offer similar discounts - Alps Mountaineering (Scout Direct outlet, not the main site) and Coleman Non-Profit are two of the better known such sources. All these sales are best investigated for needed items (e.g., socks, underwear, backpacker’s towel, etc.) that you’re unlikely to borrow, that are rarely offered elsewhere (like on ebay or craigslist), or that otherwise rarely go on sale.

7) Non-Traditional Sources - Dick’s, Sears, Wal-Mart, etc. - Sale prices are usually competitive with traditional camping outfitters. Selections are “limited.” Quality is “questionable.”

8) Everyday items that can be used as camping gear - Remember the comments made in the Foreword concerning the total length of a Philmont trek and its associated shakedown events - 20 days. This enables you to use some semi-disposable, everyday items as substitutes for much more expensive camping items. Some standard examples:

Gym shorts (the really thin, lightweight nylon ones) for camping shorts

Gym T-shirts (ditto) for camping T-shirts

Lightweight “marathon flats” (running sneakers) or water shoes for camp shoes

Kitchen size draw-string trashbags to line and “waterproof” nylon stuff-sacks (instead of Sil-Nyl stuff-sacks)

Wide-mouth water bottles for canteens

Contractor weight trash-bag for a nylon or Sil-Nyl pack cover (will need to be cut to fit (easily done); not recommended for treks starting later than July 15th, when rain is more likely).

Newspaper bags for nylon or Sil-Nyl clothing stuff sacks

Zip-Lock Bags (assorted sizes) for nylon or Sil-Nyl “ditty bags”

Tyvek or plastic sheeting for ground cloths (tent footprints)

Large nylon laundry bags for bear bags

Pie tins for 2-gallon pot covers

Aluminum gutter nails for tent stakes

Small binder clips as clothes-pins

And so on....

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