

Philmont Scout Ranch: How Light Can You Go?

by Doug Prosser on June 23, 2009 Wilderness Travel Skills

Doug Prosser weighing his pack prior to leaving basecamp. Weight was less than 15 pounds!!



Introduction

Have you ever been challenged, pushed a bit out of your comfort zone? Where the mind and body both start feeling a bit uncomfortable; where fear starts to raise its ugly head? Lightweight backpacking is all about dealing with your fears and pushing yourself out of your comfort zones, both mentally and physically, only to make you more comfortable in the long run!

Freedom. You are ready and willing to try anything to push yourself even further than you thought possible. You are having a blast, because fear is the furthest thing from your mind. You are stretching yourself well beyond what you thought possible just a few short months ago (from your nice couch).

I saw some of these changes within myself in 2008 while planning another Philmont Scout Ranch trek for that August. I've gone a number of times and am very familiar with what to expect there and figured this would be much the same. However, in late spring, Backpacking Light announced a new series of Wilderness Trekking School courses. I signed up for the *Wilderness Trekking I (WTS-I)* in the desert southwest during October. I was interested in learning new skills, since I had never hiked with other lightweight backpackers, and I wanted to see how Don Wilson and Andrew Skurka taught the course.

Don Wilson was our primary instructor for the pre-hike planning via email, during which time I was also planning my Philmont gear list. Through a series of emails, I accepted a challenge from Don to go as light as I could at Philmont, which required me to scrap everything I was planning and to look again at every single gear choice. I got out my scale and weighed each piece of gear I was even remotely thinking of taking, then put all the weights into a spreadsheet. I then began comparing that spreadsheet to the gear lists of others, such as our other WTS-I instructor, [Andrew Skurka](#) and ones posted on [BackpackingLight.com](#).

I started looking at areas where others were much lighter than I, such as sleep systems, tents, rain gear, clothing, and what I call 'doodads' – those miscellaneous items that are really cool, but not quite necessary, that somehow find their way into a lot of packs. In short, almost everything! I was forced to change my thought processes and to face a number of my fears. Would I have enough food and water? Would I get wet? Be warm enough? Be too hot hiking? Be comfortable enough to sleep at night? With Don's help, I pushed myself out of my comfort zone of known gear items to make some big changes in my gear and clothing.

When we came off trail, our crew went directly to the Philmont scale to weigh our packs. There was a gal in front of us weighing her pack prior to going out. It was 55 pounds. She was dumbfounded by my cheering crew when my pack weighed in at 8.5 pounds. Yes, that is correct: 8.5 pounds! Only three of our ten crew members had pack weights over 20 pounds (21, 25, and 30 pounds).

Thanks to the people that shared their ideas about Philmont gear choices and my WTS-I instructors and classmates for their help in forming and executing the ideas shared here.

Various Black Diamond, Sierra Designs, and Mountain Laurel Designs tents for our crew. The biggest and lightest one in the back is the MLD.



A Classic, Revisited

On both my trips to Philmont Scout Ranch in 2007 and 2008, I came across a number of people who had read my original Philmont article ([Boy Scout Gear List: Philmont Scout Ranch, New Mexico, Summer](#)) and lightened their packs.

Unfortunately, I also came across a number of people who were having physical problems, and a few that were being shipped back to basecamp because they could not continue due to injuries. Prior to going out on the trail, our crew watched Scouts weighing their packs prior to boarding their bus to the trailhead. The heaviest pack we saw was 77 pounds! Wish I could have seen THAT gear list.

The gear on the list below was selected specifically to meet the requirements of Philmont Scout Ranch while being as light as possible. Although the list was compiled for Boy Scouts and Scout Leaders attending Philmont, it will work equally well for others interested in a lighter pack.

Seasons: Summer – temps range from mid-30s to 90s F, short afternoon showers common, but every now and then it dumps for a lot longer

Length: Ten days of hiking with two to five days between resupply

Where: Philmont Scout Ranch, Sangre de Cristo mountains, New Mexico

One of the easiest ways to get a lighter pack is to buy a [digital scale](#) and weigh all of your gear, then put the weights into a spreadsheet. You will be amazed at the differences in weights between similar items. Your choices become really easy and, before you know it, you'll be saving pounds. There are even pre-made gear spreadsheets at [BackpackingLight](#) (search "spreadsheet").

Rationale for Selected Gear

At Philmont, the gear you carry is broken into five sections:

Personal Equipment: Clothing, Personal Equipment: Gear, Personal Equipment: Sleep Systems, Crew Equipment Issued at Philmont, and Crew Equipment Provided by Your Crew.

The Pilot to Bombardier outhouse: Two seats back-to-back with some of the best views anywhere, though conversation is usually minimal.

Personal Equipment: Clothing

Philmont sets some standards that influence your clothing choices, requiring completely separate sleep clothing, full rain suits (no ponchos), and long pants for various activities.

Even within these parameters, one can still go fairly lightweight while remembering the following: NO COTTON

and WEIGH EVERYTHING. There can be a wide range of weights between manufacturers of the same item.

Long pants are required for spar pole climbing, horseback riding, and conservation projects. These activities could possibly be done in your rain pants, which I tried during my 2002 trek, but then my rain pants required numerous pieces of duct tape to cover the holes. For those who prefer to hike in shorts, a better solution would be pants with zip-off legs. My long-term (has served well for several years now) personal choice is the *Ex-Officio Amphi Convertible Pant*. In addition to zip-off legs, it has a built-in brief, so you don't need to bring underwear, which saves even more weight. There are a number of manufacturers of zip-off or long hiking pants and hiking underwear, such as REI, EMS, Mountain Hardwear, Ex-Officio, Golite, The North Face, or Patagonia. If you prefer undies, you will only need one pair for the whole hike.

For a shirt, I recommend one with an SPF-15+ rating. Since our troop prefers to make silk-screened troop shirts for Philmont, we have purchased hiking shirts for the last few treks, either short or long sleeve, depending on individual preference, from REI when we could find them on sale for less than \$20 each. There are a number of other manufacturers that could also be used. Some weigh more than others, so pay attention.

Insects have been so rare at Philmont that I bring no DEET, but I always bring my head net. To prevent any bug/tick problems, I treat my hiking, sleep clothing, and head net with Permethrin.

All you need is the one pair of pants and one hiking shirt for the whole trek. Yes, just one of each – not five or even ten of each, as I have seen some people do. Maybe that's how you get a 77-pound pack... When you get a chance to shower



at one of the staff camps, wash your shirt, pants, and socks; put them back on and they should dry in less than an hour. I take two pairs of socks, one to wear hiking and the other pair for sleeping. I rotate them throughout the hike.

Boots are not necessary, since almost all hiking is done on well-worn trails, and your pack weight should be below 25 pounds. Running shoes with good tread will do fine, especially if they are trail runners. Make sure they are broken in a bit before going. Most running shoes may only have a useful life of around 500 miles, so replace old shoes prior to Philmont even if they still look good. I learned the advantages of gaiters from Andrew Skurka, and I am looking forward to trying a [simBLISSity LevaGaiter](#).



Hats generate a lot of different preferences: wide brim, waterproof, baseball cap, etc. In 2008, I used a waterproof *Mountain Hardwear Stimulus hat*, since I was bringing a rain jacket that did not have a hood.

Part of the crew cooking and waiting out a drizzle under the dining fly. Note the Dri-Ducks and Frogg Toggs rainwear.

I'm pleased to announce that over the past two years I have seen many Frogg Togg rain suits at Philmont. The people I've talked to really like them. With Don Wilson's challenge in mind, I wanted to find something even lighter than the 16-ounce Frogg Toggs, and what I settled on was a *Mountain Hardwear Stimulus Jacket (no hood)* at 6.9 ounces, the [ULA Rain Wrap](#) (rain skirt) at 3.1 ounces, and the *Mountain Hardwear Stimulus Rain Hat* at 2.5 ounces, for a total of 12.5

ounces. I had some doubts (fears) about this set-up.

First, could a jacket this light and thin keep me dry? Second, would a rain skirt work adequately or did I really need rain pants? Third, would a waterproof hat breathe well enough during regular hiking? My doubts and fears were disproved in both hard rain and in some rather warm conditions. The jacket and hat breathed so well that I wore the jacket a number of times as a wind jacket while hiking, and I did not wet out from the inside. I still think my regular hiking hat, the Tilly Airflow, breathes a bit better than the Stimulus hat, but I really did not have an issue with the difference (plus the Stimulus was an ounce lighter). The Rain Wrap kept my rear and legs dry and cool when hiking. Two things to note: you can prevent rain from running off your jacket and down your backside by pulling the elastic waist of the wrap higher (rain on the backside is a particularly unpleasant feeling), and you can look as though you are wearing a kilt when using the wrap with shorts. One boy wondered aloud if I were wearing anything underneath.

You also need to bring a warm insulation layer. Since I'm from southern California, anything below 75F is chilly, and I run cold anyway. You may not need as much insulation as do. I use the *Backpacking Light Cocoon UL 60 Pullover*, size large (9.3 ounces, discontinued) and the [Backpacking Light Cocoon UL 60 Pants](#) (7.8 ounces). In addition to these two Cocoon items, I used a Patagonia R1 Hoody pullover shirt (13.5 ounces). The *Backpacking Light Cocoon* jacket and pants worked really well, but the addition of the Patagonia R1 Hoody dramatically improved the warmth of my insulation. The Hoody has a couple of features that I love, which allow you to leave some other items at home.

The crew on top of Mount Baldy, 12,415 feet.

The first feature is a hood that zippers up high over your mouth, thus allowing you to leave home your beanie hat or balaclava. The zipper is designed such that it actually zips up over your cheek, so that it does not bother your mouth or nose. The second feature are thumb loops that allow the fleece to cover a good portion of your hand, thus allowing you to leave your gloves at home. *Backpacking Light* has now produced their own hoody, very similar to the Patagonia version, but made from merino wool. The [Backpacking Light](#)



[version](#) is a bit lighter (8 ounces) so it will be what I take in 2010 when I make my next Philmont trek.

In past years, I've used a Marmot DriClima Jacket or PossumDown sweater with a Patagonia Micro Puff vest, and folks are welcome to use fleece, synthetic, wool or down vests and/or jackets. Two things to keep in mind when thinking about your insulation layers: one, if you are using a down sleeping bag, consider using either fleece or synthetic insulated jackets/vest in case everything gets wet. Two, weigh all your options, because you may be very surprised by how much some of these things weigh.

Personal Equipment: Gear

In 2008, I used the same Gossamer Gear G5 pack (2,800 ci body, 3,800 ci maximum, silnylon version) that I used in 2005. It is really hard to argue with a pack that weighs less than 8 ounces. In 2008, the three people that had packs weighing over 20 pounds were either carrying a *GoLite Gust* (4,500+ cubic inches) or large *Osprey packs* (4,000+ cubic inches). I believe their increased weight was related to one very important point: they had increased volume in their packs, which allowed them to add a number of items, like a Tom Clancy novel and a chair to sit on while reading, as well as extra clothing. An important lesson is that you should not bring a larger pack than is necessary. People have taken one look at my G5 and decided "No way am I going to take that 'sack' – there is no way it will hold up," though my G5 has been to Philmont twice, and on many hikes over the last four years, including the WTS-I course. Plus, it was pretty fun to blow my Philmont crew away the first night: we have to put our packs under the dining fly at night. I put mine out stuffed in a one-gallon Zip-loc bag to keep it dry and mud-free.

Some more 'mainstream' examples of packs that could work well for *Philmont: GoLite Jam²* (six out of twelve people on the WTS-I course carried this), Quest, Pinnacle (maybe a little large for Philmont), Granite Gear Virga, Vapor Trail, Meridian Vapor, Latitude Vapor, Nimbus Ozone; Gregory Z 55; Gossamer Gear G5, Mariposa, Mariposa Plus; Osprey Atmos 50, REI UL Cruise 60, Quick UL 45... lots to choose from. Remember to make sure that each ounce or pound of pack weight really makes a profound difference for you. My original pack was a Dana Design Terraplane that weighed close to 9 pounds empty, which is more than my pack, clothing, and gear now weigh all together.

The author (right) and patrol leader waiting for dinner. The author is wearing a Patagonia R1 Hoody under Backpacking Light Cocoon UL 60 Pants and Jacket.



Water: How much to take and how to carry it. This is one of the areas I have tried to work on the last few years, and Philmont is a perfect proving ground. In the past, I carried a 100-ounce Camelback hydration system. I made sure it was filled before I left camp each morning. That is nearly seven pounds of water and container, so I have been working on managing the amount of water I carry. For most of my last Philmont trek, I drank approximately two liters of water in the morning before leaving camp, then carried only a 500 ml bottle after leaving camp in the morning. Granted, I had to stop a number of times to relieve myself of the two liters during the hike, but I was only carrying one pound of water for the day. I carried water containers to hold 5.5 liters of water to fill on the approach to dry camps. Water is plentiful around Philmont and carrying a small amount is easy and saves a lot of pack weight. One other suggestion when going into a dry camp: eat your dinner for lunch near a water source, since dinners require water, whereas lunches and breakfasts are usually dry.

I have modified some of the following items based on the WTS-I course. Be careful with these items, because a lot of weight can suddenly show up with these "doodads."

- [Derma-Safe Folding Utility Knife](#) instead of my pocket knife.
- [ACR Emergency whistle](#).
- Two Photon lights (one white and one red) on a reflective Kelty Triptease lanyard so I know where everything is when I need it.
- I did not carry much in the way of a first aid kit, except a small roll of duct tape, [Tincture of Benzoin ampules](#), and a small role of [Leukotape P sports tape](#), since I seldom blister, and we had a group first aid kit. The tincture of benzoin

allows tape to stick better to the skin. The Leukotape P sticks better to the skin than duct tape. If I were hiking somewhere other than Philmont, I would bring additional items.

- [Fischer space pen](#) and [Rite-In-The-Rain All weather Mini notebook](#) for journaling.
- [Hydropel Sports Ointment](#) to prevent blisters if hiking in wet weather or with wet feet. Hydropel will even help the person that sweats a lot on their feet and gets blisters as a result. Apply in the night to bottoms of dry feet. Start applying a couple days prior to your hiking or anticipated wetness. Do not carry the whole tube, but put enough in a [small container](#) to last the trek.

Typical trail sunset – though you never do get used to them.

Some other items are personal medicines, sunglasses, and a "stash" of coffee, if you are a big coffee drinker. If you really need your caffeine, Trader Joe's chocolate-coated espresso beans (150 calories/ounce) were really popular on our treks. Remember to bring a cotton bandana for cooking and personal needs.

Personal Equipment: Sleep Systems

Philmont requires separate sleeping clothes from what you wear during the day, because your hiking clothes could become contaminated with spilled food, thus leaving odors on your clothing that bears might be attracted to while you sleep. Philmont is very serious about bear avoidance. They spend a lot of time teaching crews the "Philmont" way to prevent bear attraction. Please do not challenge them on these issues, just go with the flow. They have been very successful in preventing most bear attacks with thousands of Scouts going through the Ranch, always camping in the same fixed locations.

Your sleep clothing choices depend on a) whether you sleep warm or cold, and b) the rest of your sleep system. Night temperatures are rarely colder than the mid-30s. I sleep cold and wore the insulation layers mentioned above, as well as my Mountain Hardwear Stimulus jacket over top. If it was warm, I did not wear the Cocoon Pullover; if it was in the low 40s or 30s, I wore everything. I was very cozy, much warmer than previous Philmont treks. I attribute this to the R1 Hoody and wearing the rain jacket – two changes for 2008 that kept me toasty during the cold nights.



Crew awaiting dinner. Please hurry!

Philmont requires a tent; no tarps or bivies are allowed. They do not require that a tent have an integrated floor, so many lightweight options are available. The Scouts in 2002 and 2005 used the Mountain Hardwear Kiva, which holds up to four Scouts. In recent years, we have left the Kiva at home and used Black Diamond tents. I have used the Black Diamond Betamid, Beta Light, and Mega Light over the last number of years. These tents work great and are reasonably priced. Some people use the Black Diamond bathtub-type floors that are designed for their respective tents, though these are very heavy. A flat ground sheet will work fine, if you pay attention to keep from setting up in areas where water pools. Since I was under Don Wilson's challenge to go as light as possible, I

picked up a tent from Mountain Laurel Designs (MLD) Spinntex MID for 2008. This is a slightly larger version of the Black Diamond Mega Light with more tie-outs and a lighter fabric; our Scoutmaster loves having lots of space in his tent, and with just the two of us it was a palace. The MLD Spinntex MID weighed just less than 24 ounces with stakes, guylines, seam sealing, and stuff sack. We always use our trekking poles instead of carrying a separate tent pole.

Again, with Don's challenge ringing in my ears, I made the hardest change in my gear. I left my Big Agnes pad at home and used a Therm-a-Rest Ridge Rest 3/4 length closed cell pad, cut down to fit in my G5. Now, I have to say, it was much better than I originally thought or remembered. Initially, I did wake up more often, but after a few of nights, I slept really well. I certainly didn't miss inflating and deflating the Big Agnes, nor did I mind the lack of padding beneath my lower legs.



In a tent, a 30- to 40-degree bag will work well when combined with some of your insulation layers. I have used a (sadly discontinued) Bozeman Mountain Works Pertex Quantum Arc X down bag the last couple of years. I highly recommend down bags for Philmont because they are light and compact into a small space. Fear of wet down can be alleviated by lining my pack with a [pack liner](#), into which I stuff my sleeping bag and extra clothes. I have never had a problem with wet clothes in fifteen-plus years of backpacking.

There are lots of manufacturers of bags under 2.5 pounds, such as REI, EMS, Campmor, Montbell, Western Mountaineering, GoLite, Nunatak, Big Agnes, Jacks 'R' Better, Marmot, Gossamer Gear, Backpacking Light, Feathered Friends, Mountain Hardwear, The North Face, Lafuma, Sierra Designs, and Kelty. One of the cheapest and lightest options for scouts would be the Campmor brand bags, such as the [Goose Down 20 Degree Mummy](#) regular sleeping bag (2 pounds 4 ounces) for \$119.99. You may be able to find some of the manufacturer's sleeping bags on sale somewhere on the web.



Author on the trail with his Gossamer Gear G5 silnylon backpack and Backpacking Light STIX carbon fiber trekking poles.

One other topic that concerns people at night is bugs. We really never had problems with bugs. Very rarely have I needed my headnet, though I did use it in 2008 when I inhaled one too many black flies one day.

Crew Equipment Issued at Philmont

Philmont will issue gear to your crew if you do not bring your own. The Philmont gear is heavy and designed to take the constant abuse that Scouts can deliver. If you plan well, you will not have to take much or any of Philmont's heavy gear. Below is a discussion of the gear listed in "*Philmont 2008 Guidebook to Adventure*."

The first item is a nylon dining fly (12 x 12 feet) weighing about 4 pounds. Its two collapsible poles weigh about 1 pound. Instead, have your crew take a silnylon tarp that's at least 8 x 10 feet, along with extra titanium stakes and lightweight line. In place of the dining fly poles, our crew used two hiking poles tied together to give them added height, just single poles if we wanted to keep the tarp low.

Do not use the Philmont tents, since they weigh about 5.5 pounds for two people. There are many current lightweight options under 2 pounds per Scout, like the Black Diamond Beta Light, Mega Light as well as the GoLite Shangri-La 2 or 3 Tarp/Shelter. Others are Sierra Designs Origami 2 Ultralight 2-person, Gossamer Gear Squall Classic tent, and the Tarptent Rainshadow 2.

Sunset from Mount Philips, 11,711 feet.

The cook kits Philmont provides range in weight from 4 to 6 pounds per cook group, and cutlery kits weigh 0.5 pound. Our crew cooks as one group, and we use a 6-liter pot (4 liters is a bit small), and a 2-liter pot for some desserts. Another option for desserts is to mix them in plastic bags. Replace the pot lids with heavy duty tin foil lids, which will be lighter, and tape off the sides of the pots and spray the bottoms with black high temp stove paint. The black-bottomed pots will boil water much faster, conserving fuel and speeding up the food prep process. Also, all stoves should be used with some sort of foil wind screen, even if it is not windy. Leave the frying pan at home. The only cutlery item you need is a large spoon and a serving cup with a handle. Leave the spatula at home. A large number of crews have used the [turkey bag cooking method](#) while at Philmont because cleanup is a snap.



We have always taken two stoves when, in theory, we could get by with only one. The option I am thinking about for my next trek is to take a MSR Simmerlite stove and one 22-ounce fuel bottle with pump, and, as a backup, take a [Bushbuddy stove](#). I'll only use this option if we are allowed to have fires. In 2008, Philmont started to carry a number of butane/propane canisters at the trading posts/ commissaries. I received a number of comments recommending the MSR WindPro canister stove. The reports I have from crews at Philmont in 2008 was that the MSR WindPro worked much better than the white gas stoves. The canister usage for the whole trek was reported to be approximately three 8-ounce

canisters per stove when using two stoves per crew. With all these great reports on the canister stoves, it sounds as though they represent a more ideal solution than the white gas stoves we have used in the past – especially with the ability to purchase canisters at the backcountry commissaries and with the staffed camps willing to take the empty canisters as trash.

The next item from the Philmont cook kit is hot-pot tongs (two pairs), weighing about 0.5 pound. I never saw a use for these, since we bring a cooking bandana (our only cotton item) that works well for grabbing hot items.

The camp shovel, weighing about 1 pound, is a relic of early days when latrines were dug at each camp (as I did during my 1970 trek). Today, every campsite has an outhouse, so we leave this behind.

Also provided are plastic trash bags, salt, and pepper. The plastic packets in which you carry your food provide sufficient space to stuff your trash, but trash bags may come in handy as emergency rain wear, if a Scout's rain gear gets lost. Salt and pepper in individual little packets generate a lot of small pieces of trash. A better option is to bring a small container of each, along with some additional spices for your trail meals.

Philmont provides scrub pads, toilet paper, and small containers of both dish soap and hand sanitizer that we take. We also bring an additional hand sanitizer bottle with us so that we have them readily available when cooking, eating, or returning from the outhouse. We think this is one of the most important aspects of avoiding sickness on the trail.

Philmont also provides Katadyn Micropur water purification tablets and we make sure everyone is carrying at least one strip of ten tablets.

The Ranch uses a plastic strainer to filter food particles out of wash water and drain it into an underground sump. A spatula is used to scoop the larger food particles from the strainer to be thrown in your trash. We have not taken either strainer or spatula the last two years. Instead, we purchase two 1-gallon paint strainer bags (for spray painting) from Home Depot. Use one bag for five days, trash it, then use the other for the remaining days. It worked great and is very light.



Crew heading down the trail. Some folks apparently enjoy being pack-mules.

Philmont provides bear bags and bear ropes. We have always taken their bear bags and ropes, but after our 2007 trek, I received information on a new alternative for the bear ropes. I met Paul Mergens on my 2007 trek. He recognized me from my article and shared what he is doing and had confirmed by Doug Palmer, the Head Philmont Ranger. He used ropes similar to the [AirCore Pro URSA Dyneema Bear Bag Hanging Ropes](#). He ordered [Amsteel Blue Ropes](#) 2.5 millimeter (7/64 inch) with a tensile strength of 1400 pounds and weighing less than 0.5 pounds/150 feet. He stated costs were approximately 14 cents/foot, and that the ropes performed

well with no wear. Because of the small diameter, the Scouts needed to use a small stick with the rope wrapped around to haul the heavy bear bags up. Different lengths have been recommended, but I would do the main rope at 150 feet and "oops" rope at 100 feet. A number of crews, including ours, used these ropes in 2008 with great success.

Equipment Provided by Your Crew

This section addresses those miscellaneous gear items that your crew may bring with them that will not be supplied by Philmont.

- Philmont recommends a sewing kit with heavy thread and needle. During our past treks, we brought a "hotel" sewing kit, but we never used it for anything other than draining blisters.
- Bring enough tent stakes to put up all your tents, plus the dining fly (in windy conditions) instead of the recommended ten per person.
- Two to three collapsible water containers, 2.5 gallons each, are recommended so that when you go to dry camps, your crew can bring extra water. In 2002, a number of us brought extra Platypus 2.5-liter containers and in 2005, a few of the crew brought 2.5-gallon containers that they could inflate and use as pillows at night. Either way works, but it is convenient having some larger containers. In 2008, I brought two 1.5-liter and one 2-liter containers, beside the 500-ml one in my pocket, for a total of 5.5 liters carrying capacity. I also recommend that you have the crew fill

all their water containers and purify them prior to going to bed so you can hit the trail immediately in the morning. You usually need to remind the Scouts to make sure this happens.

Two or three backpacking stoves are recommended. We brought two MSR Simmerlight stoves. Since we had two stoves, we did not bring a stove repair kit, but we did bring two 33-ounce and one 12-ounce fuel containers. We ended up with way too much fuel. I think that a 33-ounce fuel container per stove will provide adequate fuel in between food/fuel pickups. Next Philmont trip, I will most likely bring an MSR WindPro canister stove with a Bushbuddy stove as back-up.

One crew first aid kit is required, but the list of items in the kit Philmont suggests is a bit much. Our first aid kit was not any different than we take on a weekend trek. Every Ranger-staffed camp has extensive first aid supplies, trained first-aid providers, and the ability to transport people out of the backcountry, so you will not need to provide care for multiple days.

A number of our crew brought along duct tape wrapped around each of our hiking poles. I also had Leukotape P on my hiking sticks. The duct tape was used for a number of things during the trek, but the most important was to patch holes and tears in rain suits. The Leukotape P sticks better on skin, so that is used for blisters and first aid. During my WTS-I course, Andrew Skurka pointed out that the extra weight of the tape on my poles creates a bit more work for me as the poles swing back and forth. His solution is to pack small rolls in his pack.

One waterproof ground cloth (5.5 x 7.5 feet) per tent is recommended, but we only brought a thin [Polycryo ground cloth](#) for myself, and my tent mate used an [Adventure Medical Kit Heatsheet Blanket](#). Both of these ground sheets worked well, and for those that think these ground cloths do not last, this was the second Philmont trip for mine.

Three 50-foot lengths of 1/8 inch nylon cord are recommended, but we only brought one 50-foot length of [AirCore Plus Spectra Rope](#). All tents and dining flies were pre-strung with [AirCore Pro Dyneema Guyline Cord Kits](#).

Our crew finishing our trek at basecamp.

Conclusion

The original question was: How light can you really go?

Well, my pack was 8.5 pounds when I came off the trail. I had acquired a few extra items along the trail that I was carrying for the group. When I was doing my planning, I was aiming at a 6-pound pack with just my stuff or a 7.5-pound pack with tent and stakes (see gear list below). I think the pack weight could even be reduced by another pound to 1.5 pounds. Savings of 4.5 ounces (23.9 to 19.4) on a smaller tent (MLB Superfly Spinntex), 3.3 ounces (7.7 to 4.4) using a G6 instead of G5 pack, 9.6 ounces (22.8 to 13.2) switching from the Patagonia R1 hoody and Backpacking Light Cocoon 60 UL Pullover to the Backpacking Light Cocoon 60 Pro Parka, all which saves over 17 ounces. If we really needed to save a bit more, get a sleeping bag less than 16 ounces, lighter eating bowl, forget the eye glass cleaner and the personal toilet paper, and use rocks and logs for some tent tie outs and leave some stakes at home... You see where it becomes an obsession!



Drum roll please: you can have a 5-pound base weight at Philmont, without any shared gear.

Really, can the guy with the 77-pound pack please stand up and show us how on earth you got all that in there? Unless you broke your ankles, in which case we will leave you alone.

About the Author

Doug Prosser is an Assistant Scoutmaster for Troop 257 in the Ventura County Council, California, with 14 years' experience. He lives in Camarillo, which is located on the coast in southern California, and has participated in numerous hikes in the local mountains, planning many treks into the High Sierra for his Troop. He attended Philmont Scout Ranch as a Scout and as a leader, most recently in 2007 and 2008. He started out with a 50-pound-plus pack and continues to lighten his load, always looking for a better way of backpacking. His friends have dubbed his garage "Doug's Camping World." Doug has a strong interest in teaching both kids and adults how to enjoy backpacking. He continues to train and gear up for a John Muir Trail hike in August 2009, with three other graduates of the Backpacking Light Wilderness Trekking School Desert Southwest Course of 2008. Doug is looking forward to his 2010 Philmont trek, which will be the fortieth anniversary of his 1970 trek to Philmont as a scout.