

Plans & Preparation

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Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions

conveys to parents the group leader's sense of how well the Trekker did in the Gulch program, from level of respect to any emerging interests. Our hope is that these letters provide important feedback to families about what their Trekkers accomplished during the summer and what are some continuing areas of improvement. These letters have served as letters of recommendation for various school or universities over the years.

Trekkers Returning Home

Departure day, especially for the longer Prairie Trek, Turquoise Trail and Mountain Desert Trek groups, can be a draining experience. Often the conclusion of the expedition is intense, with sweat ceremonies and final campfires helping Trekkers process all they have done over the past weeks. There are seldom many dry eyes when the group arrives at the Albuquerque Airport. Some adjustments are customary for Trekkers returning home. Frequent phone calls or instant messaging can help with leaving behind close friends. Doing laundry and taking hot showers can feel great, but some Trekkers find it difficult to leave the simpler lifestyle of the Gulch behind. In short, it can take a few weeks or so for Trekkers to get back into the swing of life at home. We hope that doing the dishes at home may help ease the adjustment!

Something that all Trekkers look forward to is the arrival of the Log, the expedition's group journal. Expedition members contribute writings, drawings, photographs, and other projects to this group journal every day of the expedition. After they leave, the group instructors produce the final log books and the Gulch office, after it moves back to Albuquerque in September, prints and mails a copy to each Trekker. Included in the Log is the final roster with contact information on everyone who was at the Gulch that summer.

The arrival of the Log is a good reminder to think about another expedition the following year. December 1st is the Gulch's traditional early sign-up deadline, which includes a discount on tuition in addition to that given to returning Trekkers. Those who sign up at this time often form the core of the following summer's group, becoming detail leaders, and QMs and CAs.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE EXPEDITION IS TO

- Explore isolated and significant lands of the Southwest
- Do scientific field work and share knowledge about the region's environment and history
- Establish life-long friendships
- Seek out new adventures

THE PLAN IS TO

- Live in the wilderness while minimizing our impacts there
- Design and complete projects of our own interest in the natural and cultural histories of the Southwest
- Establish a standard of personal and group responsibility that will be a satisfaction to ourselves and a model for others

The Gulch expeditions are an experience unto themselves and Trekkers in these groups, from the 1926 Prairie Trek to today's Outfit Expedition, have prepared for their summers in equally special ways. The information contained here stems from these many years of experience and is intended to help current Trekkers and families prepare for their expeditions this coming summer.

Base Camp Office Hours

We work hard to maintain balance between office time and time spent actively engaging with our Trekkers. Our base camp office hours are the best time to reach us. If we do not answer, please leave a detailed message. We check our messages regularly and will get back to you as soon as we can.

Office hours (MST)

Monday - Friday 2pm - 5 pm

Saturday - Sunday 8 am - noon
2 pm - 5 pm

To contact Mike Sullivan, call the Base Camp office at (505) 862-7503 or email him at mike@cottonwoodgulch.org. Weather related surges over a wide area can temporarily interrupt email access at Base Camp, so please be patient if it takes a day or so for Mike to get your email.

Communications to Expect from the Gulch

Cottonwood Gulch will be in touch with parents a few times over the course of any expedition, in addition to whenever a phone call is warranted. Here is when parents can expect to hear from the Gulch:

- A few days before the expedition's start date, the group leader will call to confirm travel arrangements and answer any last minute questions you may have. Given the short time frame, sometimes we do not reach every family in person but will always leave a message with information and how to call the Gulch back.
- On the first day of the expedition, the Gulch office will call you when your Trekker has arrived and joined the expedition. **We usually wait until all the Trekkers have arrived before we contact parents.**
- At the midway point of the longer expeditions (PT, TT, MDT), the group leader will drop parents a brief note in the mail telling you how the group and your Trekker are doing.
- At the conclusion of the expedition the group leaders compose a full letter to parents. This letter details where the expedition went and what they did. The letter also

1. Before the Expedition Begins

Making Travel Plans

Families arrange for Trekkers to arrive at the Albuquerque Airport or at the Gulch base camp on the expedition's first day and then to depart on its last day. With time to plan and with good communication, we can help make this process easier. We have picked up Trekkers traveling by train, plane, and automobile over the years. **Once you have finalized your arrangements, fill out the *Travel Form* and return it to the Gulch office.**

If traveling by car

If you plan to drop your Trekker off, there are two options. First, you can drive to the Gulch base camp and drop off or pick up your Trekker on the arrival or departure days for the expedition. Second, you can meet the Gulch instructors at the Albuquerque Airport for a drop off or pick up. Driving directions to Base Camp are in this booklet and online. If you are dropping your Trekker off at the airport, the groups will be gathering underneath the biplane at the center of the ticket counter level of the airport. Please call or email ahead of time to confirm when you will be dropping off your Trekker. Please make sure that you connect with a staff member when you drop your Trekker off.

If traveling by airplane

Arrange for Trekkers to arrive and depart at the Albuquerque International Airport (airport code ABQ) **between 10 AM and 2 PM** on the dates listed for each expedition. The time window is necessary to allow for the two-hour drive to or from Base Camp. Flight times outside of this range will require special travel arrangements, such as a 5 AM drive to the airport without the rest of the group. It may not be the best airfare for the ticket, but your Trekker will thank you for being able to go to the airport and say goodbyes with the rest of the group. If you have questions about flight times, please call the Gulch office to discuss options with the director. Remember to abide by all security restrictions to ensure a smooth journey (pocketknives in your checked bag, properly packaged liquids, etc.).

Phone Calls from Trekkers

Trekkers do not have regular access to a phone during the summer, which is part of the experience of being on the expedition. The phone number for Cottonwood Gulch's Base Camp office is **(505) 862-7503**. This phone is used primarily for emergency purposes and is located across the road from Base Camp, about ½ mile from where Trekkers live. In the case of an emergency, you can always leave a message at this number if someone does not answer the phone, as messages are checked regularly. We can relay messages to Trekkers but they will only have use of the phone in case of an emergency.

Trekkers do make visits to “civilization” in the form of town-stops about once every two weeks. During these visits, they have some free time and can choose to use a pay phone to make phone calls home – some families have found sending a pre-paid phone card helpful.

Communicating with the Gulch

Given the personal nature of being in an expedition, the Gulch's preference is to keep an open line of communication with parents and families. We also know that Trekkers setting off on this adventure can be toughest on those left at home. The director welcomes parents to share their side of the Gulch experience, whether through stories, questions, concerns, or news from home during the summer.

Since Trekkers are encouraged to solve problems immediately and directly with those around them, it is usually best for parents to contact the director first with any doubts or questions, as Trekkers can lose confidence if they sense a parent is quick to help them too much with a problem. The director respects the privacy of each Trekker and can talk candidly with parents about how the summer is going. There may be some bumps in the road along the way and we know how helpful it is for our instructors to work in concert with parents. Sometimes just sharing information leads to talking through how to motivate, calm, or otherwise help each Trekker.

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How the “Unaccompanied Minor” tickets work

Most of the Trekkers fly as unaccompanied minors. All airlines have their own specific policies for who qualifies as an unaccompanied minor – children under a certain age traveling without an adult. They all will allow Trekkers to fly, but may require that you pay an additional charge (\$50-75) for this service. As an unaccompanied minor, each Trekker stays with the flight crew from the time he gets on the first plane until he is picked up by the director in Albuquerque.

When you check your Trekker in, you will be asked to write down who will be picking up him in Albuquerque. (You may also have to supply this information when you book the ticket.) For this you should write down “Michael Sullivan, Director”, who will be at the airport on the travel days. You will then be asked to escort your Trekker to his departure gate and watch him get on the plane. If there is a transfer to another flight, the airline attendants will escort your Trekker to the new gate and hand him over to the next flight’s crew. When that flight arrives in Albuquerque, the Trekker will exit the plane with the flight crew and will be delivered only to Michael Sullivan, who will sign for each Trekker. On the return leg of the trip, when we check your Trekker at the airport, we will need to specify who will be picking up your Trekker at the final destination.

On the day of travel

If there is some unexpected change in your travel, such as a missed or cancelled flight, do not panic. **There is someone at the Gulch phone all day on travel days, so call 1-800-2-Go-Trek (800-246-8735)** and we can help solve problems and relay information. Each Trekker should have this toll-free number on them when they travel. The director and the group leaders will meet all arriving flights at the gates in Albuquerque. All Gulch personnel will be wearing Cottonwood Gulch t-shirts (usually brightly colored, and always with the bison skull logo on the front) and will know each Trekker’s name and flight number.

When everyone has arrived and the expeditions are underway, the Gulch will call you to tell you that your Trekker has arrived

Keeping in Touch – Mail on the Expedition

All of our Trekkers are engaged in a wilderness setting full time and therefore communication with them is more limited than some people are usually accustomed to. The most reliable means of regular communication remains the United States Postal Service. We send and receive mail at base camp **everyday** except Sunday and this is the best way for Trekkers to stay in touch with their family and friends. Groups “on the road” return to base camp every 10 days or so, when they will pick up and send mail. If a group is away from Base Camp for an extended period of time, letters will be forwarded to the group on the road. Please note we cannot forward packages to Trekkers on the road and these will remain at Base Camp until the group returns.

Address mail to Trekkers as follows:

Cottonwood Gulch
Trekker’s Name and Group
HC 62 Box 2200
Thoreau, NM 87323

Care Packages Are Strongly Discouraged

The contents of care packages often spoil appetites, detract from group morale, and attract rodents into cabins and tents. Please do not send care packages. Any candy or other food sent from home will be held in the group leader’s care, since it needs to be kept safely away from where Trekkers sleep. We celebrate all summer birthdays, and other important events, in Gulch style and special gifts from home are best held until Trekkers return home.

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Filling Out All The Forms

Be sure to fill out all the forms – a checklist is included in the initial mailing. It is critical that the Gulch office have these completed forms by **May 15**, in order to finalize our own preparations. Some of these forms are legal in nature, some are medical, and others are personal. Each one helps us tailor the expeditions for the individual members, based on good prior knowledge.

The May 15 deadline is also important because the Gulch office moves, from Albuquerque to Base Camp, between May 15 and the start of the expeditions. Mail is forwarded, but it is often delayed between post offices. If we do not have all the completed paperwork, Trekkers cannot participate.

If you need another copy of any of the forms, they are available for downloading, in Adobe PDF format, online at <http://www.cottonwoodgulch.org/forms> (along with directions on how to obtain the Adobe PDF Reader, if needed). We can also fax or mail you hard copies from the Gulch office. As always, contact the director with specific questions.

Healthy Trekkers

Healthy and happy Trekker summers start with the medical history that you send us on the *Health History Form* and the *Medication Policy Form*. This is not the time to feel shy about including too much information – the more the better. We pride ourselves on being prepared in the backcountry. This means that we want to know everything we can: from possible allergies to when she broke her arm when she was 8 to how she handles herself under stress. It is imperative that we have the full background on all Trekkers to meet their needs while they are with us.

The **front** of the *Health History Form* is for parents to fill out and sign. If you think of something that does not fit on the page or into one of the categories, please tell us about this, either by phone, by email, or by note with the form. Concealing or glossing over elements in the health history, even if they seem small, makes our job of ensuring all Trekkers have a safe and successful summer much harder.

The **back** of the form is for a doctor to fill out and sign. If the Trekker has had a health exam in the last year and you cannot

Respect on the Expedition

The agreement continues:

And, most importantly, because of the Expedition's goals, the applicant agrees to cooperate fully with the Group Leader and his or her staff, and with other members of the group, to ensure a smooth-running and safe group. I agree to abide by all of the above conditions.

The success of the group, including both Trekkers and instructors, depends on each person maintaining a high degree of respect for everything around us, including every person in the group and everything in the environment where we live. At times, this respect simply means completing the tasks you are asked to do for the group, from washing dishes to carrying weight for a fellow hiker. Sometimes an individual's wishes may conflict with the expedition as a whole, whether in regard to personal food or choice of clothing or manner of communications with others. In these times, Trekkers are to respect the wishes of the Gulch and the group, as embodied by the instructors and their decisions. Trekkers who repeatedly refuse to respect their group staff and/or their group members will be sent home on the next available flight, at their family's expense.

Staying in the Group or Not

Ultimately, if the health, safety, or success of the group is endangered by any group member's actions or a Trekker violates the Member Agreement, the director, after discussions with the group instructors, may decide that that Trekker needs to be removed from the expedition. This is a rare occurrence. In the unfortunate event that a Trekker is sent home, the family will be contacted and asked to arrange for travel home within 24 hours, at their own expense. Now is the time to clear up any questions concerning what is expected of a Trekker and you should raise your questions with the director before the expedition begins.

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arrange for a current exam, doctors can **sign the Gulch form** and attach their report from the last visit.

Medications, prescription or over-the-counter, are safeguarded by Gulch instructors on each expedition. The *Medications Policy Form* details how to arrange for your Trekker to continue prescribed medications while he or she is on the expedition. The instructors also carry full first aid kits, which include over-the-counter medications like ibuprofen or antihistamines. It is not necessary to send us basic over-the-counter medications that you expect your Trekker to need, although you should tell us on the form about when and why your Trekker has used these medications in the past. If your Trekker does not need any special medications, please indicate that on the form as well.

Spending Money

All common expenses come out of the group fund and Trekkers will only need spending money for small luxuries, incidentals, souvenirs and any Native American art they intend to collect. We do ask that each Trekker start with some money in his or her 'Gulch Account'. We consider learning how to budget one's resources, including spending money, as a part of the experience of the Expedition. There are no ATMs at our campsites, of course, so Trekkers withdraw cash by writing custom Gulch checks after consulting with their expedition instructors. The Gulch Bank acts in confidence with each Trekker and balances are kept private.

It is our policy for all Trekkers to have roughly the same amount of spending money. \$75 to \$125 is suggested for the Prairie Trek, Turquoise Trail, and Mountain Desert Trek groups and \$50 for the Outfit Expedition, Wild Country Trek, and Trek Institute. This is more than enough to cover extra batteries, replacement toiletries, and a lunch or dessert if the group stops in town. This is also enough for Trekkers to bring home souvenirs or Native American art, which is of particularly high quality where the expeditions will be traveling.

Many Trekkers travel with some emergency spending money in cash on the arrival days. When they arrive, they will have the opportunity to deposit this cash in their Gulch account. This allows parents to provide for any incidental travel expenses (lunch at a layover, etc.), while preventing the loss of that money in the backcountry. At the end of the expedition, any balance in a Trekker's

2. While on the Expedition

You've made travel arrangements, completed the questionnaire, packed the bag and broken the boots in. Now here's what Trekkers – and parents – need to know about what will happen on the expedition.

Expectations for all Trekkers

Picture the best team you have ever been on and that is a sense of how your expedition should function this summer. As you learn the way things are done at the Gulch – how to set up the tent or break camp in the morning – you will find ways to make everything fun. You will learn to trust the people around you and count on them stepping up when you need a hand or a laugh or a shoulder to lean on. Everyone will pull their fair share. Every person's individual goals become group accomplishments. These are hallmarks of Gulch expeditions, but they only happen when all the expedition members remember a few things and arrive ready for the experience.

Drugs and Other Illegal Substances

There is also no place in the Foundation's program for any sort of drugs, tobacco, fireworks, firearms or weapons of any kind and the use or possession of these items will violate the Trekker's signature on the *Member Agreement* from the application. This agreement reads in part:

Because the Expedition travels as a tightly knit unit, we must be certain that all expedition participants understand and agree to some basic rules constituted for the safety and well-being of each individual and the Foundation as a whole. Drugs (other than those prescribed by a physician and used accordingly), tobacco and alcohol (including beer and wine) are prohibited during all Foundation expeditions. Possession or use of these items on an Expedition is cause for immediate dismissal.

For the sake of every member of the group, the Gulch enforces this zero tolerance policy. A violation of this contract between the Trekker and the Foundation, as indicated on the application, will result in the Trekker being sent home on the next available flight.

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account will be given to the Trekker in cash for the travel home, unless parents have left other instructions.

Before May 15, please send a check made out to Cottonwood Gulch to the director for your Trekker's spending money, along with any special instructions. For the sake of fairness and group morale, it is important that Trekkers not have extra cash in their pockets on the expedition. Parents and grandparents are urged to cooperate fully in this matter and not send cash to their Trekkers while on the expedition.

What and How to Pack

One of the keys to a successful expedition is having just the right equipment. We have developed the personal packing lists and refined them over the years. Knowing what to bring can be a daunting job, for Trekkers and parents alike, and the Gulch would like to be as helpful as we can. In addition to the detailed packing list, the Gulch web site has some extensive notes on the items and parents and Trekkers should feel free to call or email with any questions while planning, shopping or packing. Overall, remember less is more when you are traveling daily and often carrying your belongings on your back.

What Not to Pack

We all come to the Gulch to appreciate certain intangibles, such as the absence of cell phones ringing. Do not bring with you any personal electronic devices of any sort (music players, games, cell phones, etc.) food, candy or gum (which attract animals into our campsites). All of these items will be confiscated upon arrival. Electronic devices will be stored securely and returned to Trekkers upon their departure.

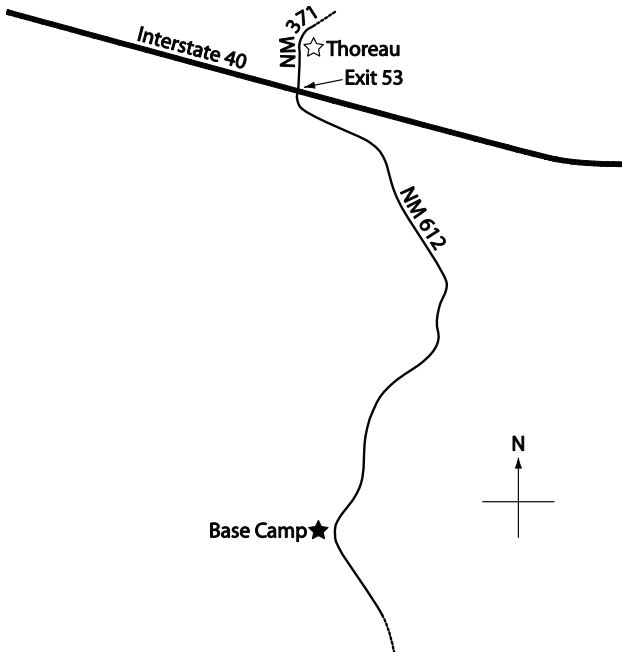
For foot wear, note that sandals are not appropriate footwear on the expedition and for safety reasons Trekkers will not be permitted to wear them, even if they bring them. Also, as noted in the Member Agreement, any Trekker who possesses any illegal or legal drugs (including tobacco), alcohol, firearms or other weapons will be sent home. Fireworks are also illegal for minors in New Mexico.

How to Pack

You should pack all your personal gear into the large backpack, which will be the only bag you will have on the trail, on the road or in base camp. The only possible exception to this is that the sleeping bag and/or sleeping pad may need to be packed separately for airline travel. The daypack is for smaller personal items (water bottles, sunscreen, raingear, journal, camera, etc.) and doubles as a good carry-on bag on the airplane. If your bag is stuffed absolutely full, don't worry. When you arrive at the Gulch and if you need to repack, we will have some extra bags to temporarily store your gear in. This is necessary when we repack to go backpacking, since you don't want to carry every piece of clothing you brought for the summer.

Directions to Cottonwood Gulch Base Camp

From Thoreau, NM (exit 53 on Interstate 40), travel south on State Highway 612 approximately 6.5 miles. Base Camp is located on the right side as the road makes a bend to the left. There is a Cottonwood Gulch sign on the right side of the road. As you enter, please observe our speed limit of 15 miles per hour on the drive to the parking area near the Mess Hall.



Contact Information

Before June 1, we can be reached in Albuquerque:

Cottonwood Gulch
P.O. Box 25106
Albuquerque, NM 87125

Phone: (800) 2-Go-Trek
Fax: (505) 248-3319

After June 1, we can be reached at Base Camp:

Cottonwood Gulch
HC 62 Box 2200
Thoreau, NM 87323

Phone/Fax: (505) 862-7503

Mike Sullivan, our director, can be reached via email at mike@cottonwoodgulch.org and more information can be found online at www.cottonwoodgulch.org.