



# COTTONWOOD GULCH FOUNDATION

Mission Statement: *The Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions sponsors educational wilderness expeditions and outdoor programs in the American Southwest that promote personal growth, scientific, historic, and cultural discovery as well as a knowledgeable environmental ethic among all those who participate.*

Dear Teacher Chaperones:

Thank-you, thank-you for being so dedicated to education that you are willing to join us for an outdoor adventure.

Cottonwood Gulch is an educational, non-profit 501(c)(3) organization based out of Thoreau, New Mexico. Since its founding in 1926 by Hillis Howie, himself an independent school headmaster, Cottonwood Gulch has been a pioneer in experiential education and hands-on learning in the Southwest.

Today, Cottonwood Gulch is both a custom Outdoor School and a Wilderness Expedition program for schools and summer groups. We are thrilled that your school has joined many across the country to partake in this memorable experience.

To prepare you for a successful trip, it's essential that you understand our expectations and qualifications.

## Our Goals

**To Have Fun.** 70% of our students – and instructors, too – return to Cottonwood Gulch for another expedition because, above all else, the experience is tremendously fun.

**To Balance Adventure and Education.** Students are often surprised with how much they take away from a Cottonwood Gulch experience. Rock climbing, backpacking, and living in the wilderness are always exciting challenges. Along the journey, students discover as much about themselves as they do about their surroundings.

**To Explore Safely.** Our staff have shown competence and been trained in risk management. While there are inherent risks in any activity from riding a car to climbing a tree, our staff team is very intentional about striking a balance between perceived risks that will encourage challenges and mitigating actual risks.

**To Break Through Barriers.** Students on a Gulch Expedition often find that they can do more, speak more freely, and trust themselves further than they could in their everyday lives. On school trips, this means students see their peers in a new light, gain more independence from pop culture, and learn to rely on healthier living habits and body images.

**To Define an Environmental Ethic.** Active stewardship of the environment comes alive at Cottonwood Gulch – and impacts all that we do. Science is our essential guide, along with our personal sensibilities, in developing core ethics of conservation, wise use, and shared responsibility.

You can help us meet these goals. We're excited that you are about to see your students behave and interact in a way that you perhaps haven't seen in the classroom. We often find that the students who have difficulties within walls excel here... while it isn't generally okay to run around and scream inside, it is here. And that allows those students the chance to learn on "their turf". If you have any questions during your trip, please feel free to ask. Open communication is the best way to make sure everyone is satisfied, so we hope that you will feel comfortable talking to us with any questions or concerns during the trip. At the same time, we will communicate with you about anything that arises. We may need you to step in on occasion for behavioral or medical issues, but 90% of the time our staff will have it covered.

Thank-you again for your dedication and your time. We truly could not do this without you!

*~ Your Cottonwood Gulch Team*



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Dear Parent Chaperones:

Thank-you for giving up your busy lives for a few days to attend Cottonwood Gulch with your children. Please know that we do not take your sacrifice lightly! However, for your child(ren) to be most successful and engage in the same way as students without their parents on trek, there are a few things we'd like you to know.

First, know that the itinerary has been carefully planned ahead of time between the teachers and Cottonwood Gulch staff. The teachers have expressed the goals that they want the students to achieve and we have built the itinerary around their needs.

Secondly, rest assured that our staff are carefully selected and trained for their skills. Not all of our staff might be experts on trees, for example, but we are all held under the same expectations for driving. Everyone holds a Wilderness First Aid certification or better.

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This experience is a wonderful opportunity for your child(ren) to start making some independent decisions away from home – if you are chaperoning on a 5th or 6th grade trip, for example, the students will be heading off to Middle School next year and this is a perfect place for them to start experiencing some of that independence. It's important that you permit them the chance to face new challenges in their own way. Take this opportunity to enrich the lives of the other children around, and get to know *them*. You've poured such time and energy into raising your children to make good decisions – this is a wonderful place for them to begin exercising that skill.

Thank-you again for your time chaperoning this trip. We really could not do this without you!

*~ Your Cottonwood Gulch Team*