



Plans & Preparation

Cottonwood Gulch Expeditions - Plans & Preparation

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Our Mission

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.

Plans and Preparation

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.

1. Before the Expedition Begins

Making Travel Plans

Families arrange for Trekkers to arrive at the Albuquerque Airport or at the Gulch Basecamp 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* on the Forms Dashboard of your CampMinder account. If you are having trouble uploading it, you may return it to us by mail.

If traveling by car

If you plan to drop your child off, there are two options. One option is to drive to the Gulch Basecamp (in Thoreau, NM) and drop off there on the arrival day for the expedition. Driving directions to Basecamp are in this booklet and online. Alternatively, you can meet the Gulch staff at the Albuquerque Airport for drop off. 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 and where you will be dropping off your Trekker. Please make sure that you connect with a staff member before you depart.

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 Basecamp. 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 our staff.

How the “Unaccompanied Minor” tickets work

Many 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 (\$50-150) for this service. As an unaccompanied minor, each Trekker stays with the flight crew from the time they get on the first plane until they are picked up by Gulch staff 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 the name of your child’s group leader, 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 as they 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 them 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 Gulch staff, who will sign for each Trekker.

On the day of travel

If there is some unexpected change in your travel, such as a missed or canceled flight, do not panic. **There is someone at the Gulch phone all day on travel days, so call 505-862-7503** and we can help solve problems and relay information. Each Trekker should have this number on them when they travel. The director and the group leaders will meet all arriving flights at the gates in Albuquerque. All Gulch staff 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. Upon arrival in Albuquerque, Gulch staff will ensure that Trekkers call their families to let them know about their safe arrival.

Filling Out All The Forms

Be sure to fill out all the forms. 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; however, they are all critical to the success of the expedition.

The May 15 deadline is also important because the Gulch office moves, from Albuquerque to Basecamp, 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 may not be able to participate.

If you are having difficulty with the forms on your CampMinder account, please reach out to the Gulch office at 505-248-0563.

Healthy Trekkers

Healthy and happy Trekker summers start with the medical history that you send us on the *Health History* 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 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.

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.

Medications, prescription or over-the-counter, are safeguarded by Gulch staff on each expedition. The *Medications* section of the *Health History* form details how to arrange for your Trekker to continue prescribed medications while he or she is on the expedition. Staff 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 art they wish to purchase. In order to keep this spending money safe, the staff will hold all trekker spending money. Trekkers will have access to their money when the group has an appropriate opportunity arises. 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. If this is a financial hardship for your family, please talk with us about options.

We have found that \$75 to \$150 is more than sufficient for the Prairie Trek, Turquoise Trail, and Mountain Desert Trek groups and \$50 to \$100 is plenty for the Outfit Expedition, Wild Country Trek, Paleo Trek, Art Trek, and Music Trek. 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 from their travels.

Many Trekkers travel with some emergency spending money in cash on the arrival days. When they arrive, they will deposit this cash in their Gulch account with their group staff. 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 account will be given to the Trekker in cash for the travel home. Please keep in mind when choosing an amount that unless your child is flying Southwest, they will likely have baggage fees to cover for the return flight.

Spending money can be added through your CampMinder account. If after the trek has started you wish to send additional funds, please get in touch with our office.

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. Trekkers and families 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 screens. We have an unplugged policy and therefore do not allow personal electronic devices of any sort (music players, games, cell phones, etc.). We understand that many families want Trekkers to have their cell phones while traveling; therefore, upon arrival, we store the devices and return them to Trekkers upon their departure. Cameras, though they are electronic, are allowed, however; charging opportunities can be few and far between.

Additionally, food, candy, or gum attract animals to our cabins and campsites and we ask that these items be omitted as well. For footwear, note that sandals or other open-toed shoes 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, any Trekker who possesses any illegal or legal drugs (including tobacco), alcohol, firearms or other weapons will may be sent home. Fireworks are also illegal for minors in New Mexico.

How to Pack

If you are going on a trek that goes backpacking, you will need a large backpack (see the packing list for your trek to determine an appropriate size). All Trekkers will need a daypack to store items needed during the day (raingear, hat, sunglasses, journal, camera, etc.). Additionally, a duffel bag to store extra items while backpacking or while out on the road proves useful.

Most Trekkers find that for airline travel, checking the large backpack with most items and using the daypack as a carry on works well. Occasionally, the sleeping bag and sleeping pad need to be packed separately for travel.

2. While on the Expedition

You've made travel arrangements, filled out forms, 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 this 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 *User Group Agreement* from the application. A violation of this contract between the Trekker and Cottonwood Gulch, as indicated on the application, may result in the Trekker being sent home on the next available flight.

Respect on the Expedition

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.

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.

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 Basecamp **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 Basecamp every 10 days or so, when they will pick up and send mail. If a group is away from Basecamp 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 Basecamp until the group returns. Please send your Trekker with pre-addressed and stamped postcards or envelopes so that they can write home.

Address mail to Trekkers as follows: Cottonwood Gulch **Trekker's**

Name and Group

659 Highway 612

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 containing food. 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.

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 Basecamp office is **(505) 862-7503**. This phone is used primarily for emergency purposes and is located across the road from Basecamp, 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.

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. Gulch staff welcome 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 staff to work in concert with parents. Sometimes just sharing information leads to talking through how to motivate, calm, or otherwise help each Trekker.

To contact the Basecamp office, call (505) 862-7503.

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. 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.
- 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 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 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. Phone calls 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 15th is the Gulch's early sign-up deadline, which includes a discount on tuition in addition to that given to returning Trekkers.

Directions to Cottonwood Gulch Basecamp

From Thoreau, NM (exit 53 on Interstate 40), travel south on State Highway 612 approximately 6.5 miles. Basecamp 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 right outside the fence.

Contact Information

Before June 1, we can be reached in Albuquerque:

Cottonwood Gulch
9223 4th St. NW
Albuquerque, NM 87114

Phone: (505) 248-0563

After June 1, we can be reached at Basecamp:

Cottonwood Gulch
659 Highway 612
Thoreau, NM 87323

Phone: (505)

862-7503

Hillis Vassilas Howie., our Enrollment Coordinator, can be reached via email at enrollment@cottonwoodgulch.org and more information can be found online at www.cottonwoodgulch.org.