

# HANDCART TREK

## LEADER'S GUIDE

EXPERIENCES • SKILLS • ACTIVITIES • PLANNING • LOGISTICS

*Real Locations.  
Meaningful Experiences.  
Turnkey Solutions.*

*Helping Leaders  
Create Journeys*

*That Change  
Lives*

**PHILLIPS  
HANDCART  
— COMPANY —**



**SIGNATURE  
EXPERIENCES**



**TRAILSIDE  
ENCOUNTERS**



**PIONEER  
SKILLS**



**FESTIVAL &  
GAMES**



**EVENING  
PROGRAMS**



**SPIRITUAL &  
REFLECTION**



**PLANNING &  
LOGISTICS**

## FOREWORD

### Why We Created This Handbook

Over the years, we've had the opportunity to work with Trek leaders across Utah, Idaho, Arizona, Nevada, Wyoming, Colorado, Montana, Oregon, Washington, California, Texas, New Mexico, Texas and other parts of the country & world including Africa, South America, Australia, Europe, and Asia.

We've watched leaders spend countless hours trying to answer the same questions:

- Where should we Trek?
- How many handcarts do we need?
- How do we organize families?
- What activities should we do?
- How do we keep youth engaged?
- How do we create meaningful experiences?
- How do we handle all the logistics?

Many leaders are planning a Trek for the first time.

Others have years of experience but are looking for new ideas.

This handbook was created to help both.

Our goal is not to tell you exactly how to run your Trek.

Our goal is to provide ideas, principles, and proven experiences that can help you build a Trek that fits your group.

Some activities may be perfect for your Trek.

Others may not.

Use what works.

Adapt what doesn't.

Most importantly, remember that meaningful Treks are not created by perfect schedules.

They are created by people who care.

We hope this handbook saves you time, reduces stress, and helps create experiences your participants will remember for years.

— Phillips Handcart Company

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## HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is not intended to be followed from beginning to end like a script.

Instead, think of it as a toolbox.

Use the chapters that apply to your Trek.

Skip the ones that don't.

Combine ideas.

Modify activities.

Adapt everything to fit:

- Your youth
- Your leaders
- Your location
- Your schedule
- Your goals

The most successful Treks are rarely the most elaborate.

They are simply the most intentional.

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## THE 12-MONTH TREK PLANNING TIMELINE

### 12 Months Before Trek

- Select Trek dates
- Identify leadership team
- Determine Trek size
- Begin location research
- Reserve handcarts if dates are known

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#### 10–11 Months Before Trek

- Visit potential Trek locations
- Discuss transportation needs
- Begin budget planning
- Confirm stake support
- Evaluate camping locations

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#### 8–9 Months Before Trek

- Reserve handcarts
- Secure permits if required
- Begin family structure planning
- Discuss water and restroom needs

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#### 6 Months Before Trek

- Finalize route
- Assign major leadership positions
- Begin activity planning
- Review emergency procedures

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#### 4 Months Before Trek

- Confirm participant estimates
  - Finalize camps
  - Finalize transportation plan
  - Begin collecting activity supplies
-

### 3 Months Before Trek

- Confirm handcart quantities
  - Confirm trailer needs
  - Finalize food planning
  - Begin volunteer recruitment
- 

### 2 Months Before Trek

- Conduct leadership training
  - Confirm emergency contacts
  - Finalize activity schedule
  - Confirm water and restroom logistics
- 

### 1 Month Before Trek

- Final route inspection
  - Confirm all equipment
  - Final safety review
  - Confirm transportation assignments
- 

### Trek Week

- Focus on participants
  - Adapt as needed
  - Stay flexible
  - Enjoy the experience
-

## THE TREK LEADER'S CHECKLIST

Before leaving for Trek, confirm:

### Equipment

- ☐ Handcarts reserved
  - ☐ Trailers reserved
  - ☐ Ropes available
  - ☐ Single trees available
  - ☐ Spare parts available
  - ☐ Repair tools available
- 

### Transportation

- ☐ Tow vehicles assigned
  - ☐ Drivers assigned
  - ☐ Parking locations confirmed
  - ☐ Bus access confirmed
  - ☐ Trailer access confirmed
- 

### Camp Logistics

- ☐ Camps selected
- ☐ Water arranged
- ☐ Restrooms arranged
- ☐ Fire restrictions checked

- ☐ Emergency access confirmed
- 

### Activities

- ☐ Women's Pull location selected
  - ☐ Festival activities prepared
  - ☐ Campfire plans completed
  - ☐ Pony Express letters collected
  - ☐ Reflection activities prepared
- 

### Safety

- ☐ Medical team assigned
  - ☐ First aid supplies available
  - ☐ Emergency communication plan completed
  - ☐ Weather plan established
  - ☐ Alternate routes identified
- 

### TREK LEADER'S RULE OF THUMB

If you remember nothing else from this handbook, remember these five principles:

#### 1. Less Is More

Don't schedule every minute.

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## 2. Harder Is Not Better

Difficulty does not automatically create meaning.

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## 3. Feed People

Hungry youth struggle.

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## 4. Protect the Fun

Fun and spirituality are not enemies.

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## 5. Leave Room For Reflection

Many of the best moments happen naturally.

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## PHILLIPS HANDCART COMPANY CONSULTING SERVICES

Many leaders enjoy planning every detail themselves.

Others appreciate guidance.

We are happy to help with:

### Location Selection

- Utah
- Idaho
- Arizona
- Nevada
- California
- Texas

and many other Trek locations.

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### Handcart Planning

- Handcart quantities
  - Family assignments
  - Loading recommendations
  - Route considerations
- 

### Logistics Planning

- Transportation
  - Camps
  - Water
  - Restrooms
  - Staging
  - Access
-

## Activity Development

- Women's Pull planning
  - Festival design
  - Trailside experiences
  - Campfire programs
  - Family activities
- 

## Turnkey Trek Support

For groups wanting additional assistance, Phillips Handcart Company can help coordinate:

- Handcart delivery
- Handcart pickup
- Equipment staging
- Water coordination
- Restroom coordination
- Logistics consulting
- Trek planning assistance

allowing leaders to focus more directly on youth and less on logistics.

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## ABOUT PHILLIPS HANDCART COMPANY

Phillips Handcart Company exists for one purpose:

Helping Trek leaders create successful Trek experiences.

Over the years we've worked with groups ranging from small wards to large multi-stake Treks across numerous western states.

Whether you need:

- Handcarts
- Trailers
- Planning assistance
- Location ideas
- Logistics support
- Turnkey services

we're happy to help.

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## FINAL MESSAGE TO TREK LEADERS

Remember:

Youth will not remember every activity.

They won't remember every schedule item.

They won't remember every meeting.

What they will remember are moments.

A letter.

A campfire.

A hill.

A conversation.

A laugh.

A sunrise.

A handcart.

Focus on creating meaningful moments. The rest tends to take care of itself.

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# CHAPTER 1

## Signature Trek Experiences

### Creating Moments Youth Remember for Years

One of the biggest mistakes Trek planners make is assuming that memorable experiences require elaborate production.

In our experience, the opposite is often true.

Some of the most meaningful Trek moments are surprisingly simple. A quiet hill. A handwritten letter. A pair of handmade moccasins. A moment of service. A few minutes of silence.

When planned thoughtfully, these experiences become the stories participants tell years later.

This chapter contains some of the most powerful experiences we have seen used successfully on Trek. They can be adapted to groups of all sizes and should be adjusted to fit the needs, maturity, and goals of your participants.

Remember that less is often more. A handful of meaningful experiences will usually create greater impact than a schedule packed with constant activities.

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## The Moccasin Experience

### Overview

The Moccasin Experience is one of the most memorable activities we have ever used.

The concept is simple.

During camp, one or more Trek families create inexpensive moccasins using basic leather kits. The following day, a family member wears those moccasins during the Women's Pull.

The experience creates a direct physical connection to pioneer reality.

Participants quickly discover that rocky roads, ruts, gravel, and uneven terrain feel very different through a thin leather sole.

Many youth remember this experience years later because it moves beyond hearing history and allows them to feel a small portion of it.

## **Why It Works**

Many Trek experiences engage the mind.

The Moccasin Experience engages the body.

Instead of imagining hardship, participants experience discomfort, inconvenience, and vulnerability in a small but memorable way.

Because the experience is physical, it often becomes one of the most discussed moments of the entire Trek.

## **Setup**

The evening before the Women's Pull:

- Select one or more Trek families.
- Provide simple moccasin kits.
- Allow families to assemble the moccasins together.
- Encourage teamwork and conversation during construction.

The following day:

- One participant wears the moccasins during the Women's Pull.
- No special announcement is necessary.
- Allow the experience to unfold naturally.

## **Materials**

- Simple leather moccasin kits
- Rawhide or leather lacing
- Camp tables or work area

## Leader Notes

Do not oversell the experience beforehand.

Part of the impact comes from discovery.

Let participants draw their own conclusions rather than explaining every lesson in advance.

## Debrief Questions

- What surprised you?
  - What did you notice about the trail?
  - What became more difficult?
  - What did this help you understand?
- 

# Pony Express Letters

## Overview

The Pony Express Letter Experience consistently ranks among the most meaningful Trek memories for youth.

Before Trek, members of the ward or stake secretly "adopt" individual participants and write letters specifically for them.

During Trek, those letters are delivered unexpectedly by a Pony Express rider.

The surprise alone creates excitement.

The personal nature of the letters creates the lasting impact.

## Why It Works

Teenagers often underestimate how many people care about them.

Receiving a thoughtful letter from someone they may barely know can be deeply meaningful.

The experience also strengthens the connection between Trek and the broader ward or stake community.

## Setup

Several weeks before Trek:

- Create a participant list.
- Assign youth to volunteers.
- Ask volunteers to write encouraging letters.

During Trek:

- Arrange delivery by horseback rider if possible.
- Deliver letters unexpectedly along the trail.

## Materials

- Letters
- Envelopes
- Pony Express rider (optional)
- Mailbag

## Leader Notes

Authentic letters work best.

Encourage writers to focus on encouragement, testimony, confidence, and support rather than lengthy sermons.

## Common Mistake

Waiting until the last minute.

Letter collection usually takes longer than leaders expect.

---

# Mormon Battalion Silent Support

## Overview

This experience is often paired with the Women's Pull.

Selected young men portray members of the Mormon Battalion and receive specific instructions before the pull begins.

They may:

- Walk beside the carts
- Clear rocks from the trail
- Offer water
- Wipe sweat from participants

They may not:

- Push carts
- Pull carts
- Touch the handcart
- Speak

The inability to physically solve the problem creates emotional tension and empathy.

## **Why It Works**

The experience allows young men to participate meaningfully without becoming the focus.

It creates service opportunities while preserving the purpose of the Women's Pull.

Many young men later describe this as one of their strongest Trek memories because helping without fixing is surprisingly difficult.

## **Setup**

Prior to the Women's Pull:

- Select participants.
- Explain expectations clearly.
- Assign service responsibilities.

## **Leader Notes**

The power comes from restraint.

Avoid turning the experience into a performance.

Simple and sincere works best.

---

# Women's Pull

## Overview

Few Trek experiences are as well known as the Women's Pull.

When conducted thoughtfully, it becomes a powerful moment of unity, sacrifice, determination, and reflection.

The specific format may vary between groups, but the principles remain similar.

Participants should feel supported, respected, and safe.

## Why It Works

The Women's Pull creates a shared challenge.

It gives participants an opportunity to experience effort, teamwork, and perseverance together.

The experience becomes even more meaningful when it is not rushed.

## Planning Considerations

Consider:

- Terrain
- Distance
- Safety
- Participant age
- Weather
- Accessibility

A shorter meaningful experience is usually better than an unnecessarily difficult one.

## Common Mistake

Assuming harder equals better.

Meaningful experiences do not require extreme physical difficulty.

---

# Summit Reflection Experience

## Overview

One of the simplest and most powerful Trek moments can happen after the climb.

When participants reach the summit, resist the temptation to immediately begin speaking.

Allow them to sit.

Allow them to breathe.

Allow them to observe.

After several quiet minutes, a short reading, journal entry, or reflection can be shared.

## Why It Works

The climb has already done most of the teaching.

Leaders often feel pressure to fill silence.

In reality, silence is frequently what participants remember.

## Leader Note

Sometimes the summit itself is the lesson.

Not every moment requires explanation.

---

# Pioneer Grave Experience

## Overview

A small symbolic grave can be used to represent the reality of loss on the trail.

Stories may involve:

- Infant loss
- Family separation
- Illness
- Sacrifice

The goal is remembrance rather than dramatization.

## **Why It Works**

It personalizes history.

Participants begin to see pioneers as real people rather than distant historical figures.

## **Leader Note**

Avoid excessive theatrics.

Simple storytelling usually carries more emotional weight.

---

# **Rocky Ridge Memorial Reading**

## **Overview**

This experience uses actual pioneer journals and historical accounts to help participants understand hardship, sacrifice, and endurance.

A short reading followed by quiet reflection is often all that is needed.

## **Leader Note**

Less is more.

A powerful paragraph is usually more effective than a twenty-minute presentation.

---

# Rescue Company Encounter

## Overview

At an unexpected point along the trail, participants encounter individuals portraying rescue company members.

The encounter symbolizes relief, hope, and assistance during difficult circumstances.

This experience works particularly well after challenging terrain.

## Why It Works

The contrast between struggle and relief creates emotional impact.

Participants often remember how they felt when help appeared unexpectedly.

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# Mail From Home

## Overview

Parents prepare personal letters before Trek.

At a designated point, those letters are delivered to participants.

Unlike Pony Express letters, these messages come directly from family.

Many youth keep these letters for years.

## Leader Note

Encourage parents to write sincerely and personally.

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# Lantern Reflection Walk

## Overview

Families walk quietly carrying lanterns during evening hours.

The walk may include:

- Reflection
- Gratitude
- Scripture
- Silence

The simplicity of the experience is what makes it memorable.

## Why It Works

Lantern light naturally slows the pace and encourages thoughtful reflection.

## Final Thought

Signature experiences do not need to be elaborate.

They simply need to be meaningful.

When planned thoughtfully and given room to breathe, these moments often become the stories participants share long after Trek is over.

## **CHAPTER 2**

# **Trailside Vignettes & Historical Encounters**

### **Bringing the Trail to Life**

One of the challenges every Trek leader faces is maintaining engagement during long stretches of trail.

The solution is not constant entertainment.

The solution is purposeful encounters.

Small, well-placed experiences can transform a simple walk into a living story.

A five-minute encounter often has greater impact than a thirty-minute lecture.

The goal is not theatrical performance.

The goal is helping youth connect emotionally and intellectually with the realities of pioneer life.

When using trailside vignettes, keep them:

- Short
- Authentic
- Meaningful
- Well-spaced

Participants should feel like they are discovering something rather than attending a series of presentations.

---

# Pioneer Mother Encounter

## Overview

A woman portraying a pioneer mother briefly shares concerns about her children, food supplies, illness, weather, or uncertainty ahead.

The encounter should feel conversational and personal.

Participants often connect strongly with stories involving family relationships.

## Why It Works

History becomes more relatable when viewed through the eyes of a parent rather than through statistics and dates.

Youth often remember emotions more than facts.

## Setup

Place the encounter along a relatively easy portion of trail.

Allow participants to stop briefly and listen.

Five minutes is usually sufficient.

## Leader Note

Avoid long monologues.

Authenticity is more powerful than performance.

---

# Teamster Encounter

## Overview

A traveler or teamster pauses to discuss trail conditions, weather, livestock concerns, road conditions, or challenges ahead.

This creates realism and variety while helping participants imagine the daily realities of overland travel.

## **Why It Works**

Participants begin seeing the trail as a transportation route rather than simply a hiking path.

## **Optional Props**

- Hat
  - Whip
  - Wagon gear
  - Trail map
- 

# **Widow Story**

## **Overview**

A short account shares the story of a woman facing the loss of a spouse while continuing forward.

The focus should remain on perseverance rather than tragedy.

## **Why It Works**

Stories of resilience often resonate more deeply than stories of suffering alone.

## **Leader Note**

Keep emotional experiences balanced throughout the day.

Not every stop should be heavy.

---

# Orphan Story

## Overview

Participants hear about children who traveled under difficult circumstances or without traditional family support.

These stories often resonate because youth can imagine themselves in similar situations.

## Why It Works

Young people naturally connect with stories involving other young people.

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# Trail Doctor Encounter

## Overview

A historical "doctor" discusses common illnesses and injuries faced by pioneers.

Topics may include:

- Cholera
- Fever
- Infection
- Exhaustion
- Limited medical resources

## Why It Works

Participants quickly realize how vulnerable pioneer travelers often were.

## Optional Props

- Medical bag
- Herbs
- Bandages
- Historical remedies

---

# Mail Station Encounter

## Overview

Participants discover a temporary mail stop along the route.

The stop may include:

- News from ahead
- Historical information
- Letters
- Trail updates

This experience pairs naturally with Pony Express activities.

## Why It Works

Unexpected communication always creates interest.

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# Frontier Scout Encounter

## Overview

A scout or guide explains upcoming terrain, weather concerns, or route choices.

The encounter introduces decision-making and uncertainty.

## Why It Works

Participants begin understanding that pioneers rarely had complete information.

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# Faith Through Difficulty Story

## Overview

A journal account shares how an individual maintained hope despite challenges.

These stories should focus on endurance rather than perfection.

## Leader Note

Real stories are often more powerful than inspirational speeches.

---

# Hunger & Scarcity Reflection

## Overview

Participants learn about food shortages, rationing, and difficult decisions faced by pioneer families.

The purpose is awareness, not discomfort.

## Why It Works

Food is something every participant understands.

The topic creates immediate perspective.

## Safety Note

Never compromise participant nutrition or hydration.

---

# Water Scarcity Reflection

## Overview

At an appropriate location, leaders discuss the importance of water and the challenges of obtaining it on the trail.

This experience works particularly well before a water refill stop.

## **Why It Works**

Participants quickly gain appreciation for something they usually take for granted.

---

# **Family Sacrifice Story**

## **Overview**

A brief account highlights sacrifice made for family, faith, or community.

Stories involving ordinary people often create the strongest connection.

## **Why It Works**

Participants can see themselves in the story.

---

# **Children's Trail Stories**

## **Overview**

Share humorous, inspiring, or difficult stories involving pioneer children.

Examples may include:

- Games
- Friendships
- Responsibilities
- Daily life

## **Why It Works**

Youth naturally identify with young people from history.

---

## Trail Humor Stop

### Overview

Not every vignette should be emotional.

Occasionally share humorous pioneer stories, travel mishaps, or lighthearted historical accounts.

### Why It Works

Good Trek pacing requires emotional variety.

Humor provides relief and balance.

### Pacing Note

Follow heavier experiences with lighter moments whenever possible.

---

## Crossroads Decision Stop

### Overview

At a trail junction or symbolic decision point, ask participants:

- What would you choose?
- What information would you want?
- What risks would concern you?

This creates engagement rather than passive listening.

### Why It Works

Participants become part of the story.

---

## **Burden Rock Experience**

### **Overview**

Participants select a rock representing:

- Fear
- Worry
- Gratitude
- Responsibility
- Personal challenge

The rock is carried during part of Trek.

Later it may be discussed, kept, or set aside.

### **Why It Works**

Simple symbolism often creates lasting memory.

---

## **Shared Burden Exercise**

### **Overview**

Families temporarily share responsibilities or loads with another family.

This may include:

- Water
- Equipment
- Handcart weight
- Trail assistance

## Why It Works

Participants experience service instead of merely discussing it.

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# River Crossing Reflection

## Overview

At a crossing or symbolic location, discuss trust, planning, risk, and cooperation.

The experience works even when the crossing itself is small.

## Why It Works

Water crossings naturally create memorable imagery.

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# Broken Wheel Demonstration

## Overview

A damaged wheel or repair scenario becomes a teaching moment.

Participants consider:

- Dependence
- Preparation
- Teamwork
- Resourcefulness

## Why It Works

Mechanical problems feel real and relatable.

---

# Trail Prayer Circle

## Overview

Participants gather briefly for prayer or reflection.

Keep the experience short and sincere.

## Leader Note

Outdoor settings often provide all the atmosphere needed.

---

# Gratitude Stop

## Overview

Ask participants to identify:

- One blessing
- One lesson
- One observation

This creates perspective without requiring lengthy discussion.

---

# Quiet Observation Stop

## Overview

Sometimes the best stop involves no lesson at all.

Allow participants to:

- Sit
- Observe

- Listen
- Rest

## **Why It Works**

Not every meaningful experience requires explanation.

---

# **Wilderness Reflection**

## **Overview**

Discuss the realities of uncertainty, isolation, and dependence while surrounded by open country.

## **Why It Works**

The environment reinforces the message naturally.

---

# **Service Challenge**

## **Overview**

Quietly assign participants a service opportunity without public recognition.

Examples include:

- Carrying water
- Helping another family
- Encouraging a participant

## **Why It Works**

Service becomes personal rather than performative.

---

# Commitment Stop

## Overview

Invite participants to consider:

- Goals
- Priorities
- Personal growth
- Lessons learned

This works particularly well near the end of Trek.

## Final Thought

Trailside experiences are most effective when they feel discovered rather than scheduled.

A handful of meaningful encounters placed thoughtfully throughout the route will almost always outperform a trail packed with constant activities.

Give experiences room to breathe.

Let the trail help tell the story.

# CHAPTER 3

## The Women's Pull Library

### One of Trek's Most Meaningful Experiences

Few Trek experiences carry as much anticipation, emotion, and discussion as the Women's Pull.

For many participants, it becomes one of the defining moments of Trek.

For leaders, however, it can also be one of the most misunderstood.

Over the years, we've learned that the Women's Pull is not powerful because of the hill.

It is powerful because of what participants experience together while climbing it.

The goal is not exhaustion.

The goal is not emotional manipulation.

The goal is not recreating suffering.

The goal is creating an opportunity for reflection, teamwork, service, gratitude, and perspective.

Handled thoughtfully, the Women's Pull often becomes one of the most meaningful experiences of Trek.

Handled poorly, it can become uncomfortable, confusing, or unnecessarily difficult.

This chapter explores multiple approaches that can be adapted to fit different groups and Trek goals.

---

# Principles Before Planning

Before discussing specific formats, it helps to understand a few principles.

## Harder Is Not Better

One of the biggest mistakes leaders make is assuming a steeper hill automatically creates a better experience.

We've found exactly the opposite.

The most meaningful pulls are usually:

- Safe
- Well planned
- Manageable
- Emotionally focused

Participants should remember what they learned—not simply how exhausted they became.

---

## Simplicity Usually Wins

Many leaders feel pressure to create a dramatic production.

In reality, the most powerful pulls are often surprisingly simple.

A hill.

A handcart.

Silence.

Shared effort.

That is usually enough.

---

## Give the Experience Room

Another common mistake is talking too much.

The hill often teaches more than the leaders do.

Allow participants time to think, breathe, and process.

Not every moment requires narration.

---

# Traditional Women's Pull

## Overview

The traditional Women's Pull is the format most participants recognize.

Young women pull the handcarts while young men step away from direct assistance.

The emphasis is placed on:

- determination
- teamwork
- perseverance
- support

This format remains effective because it is straightforward and familiar.

## Planning Considerations

Consider:

- Length of pull
- Steepness
- Surface conditions
- Weather
- Participant fitness levels

A shorter meaningful experience is usually preferable to a longer difficult one.

## Leader Note

The objective is meaningful effort, not physical punishment.

---

# Silent Women's Pull

## Overview

In this variation, no one speaks.

No cheering.

No narration.

No instruction.

No music.

Only:

- footsteps
- wheels
- breathing
- wind

The silence often creates a surprisingly powerful atmosphere.

## Why It Works

Without outside noise, participants become more aware of:

- effort
- emotion
- teamwork
- personal reflection

Many leaders report that silence creates more impact than any speech.

## Leader Note

Leaders must model the silence.

---

# Music-Only Women's Pull

## Overview

This format removes speaking while allowing music.

Options include:

- Hymns
- Violin
- Fiddle
- Instrumental music
- Quiet group singing

Music can provide emotional support while preserving reverence.

## Why It Works

Music helps unify the group while maintaining focus.

## Common Mistake

Avoid turning the experience into a performance.

The music should support the moment rather than dominate it.

---

# The Mormon Battalion Support Format

## Overview

This is one of the most memorable variations we have used.

Prior to the pull, selected young men receive instruction portraying Mormon Battalion support.

They may:

- Walk beside the trail
- Clear rocks
- Offer water
- Provide quiet service

They may not:

- Touch the carts
- Push
- Pull
- Speak

## Why It Works

Helping without fixing creates empathy.

Many young men later describe this as one of their strongest Trek memories.

## Leader Note

The experience works best when the focus remains on service rather than reenactment.

---

# The Moccasin Variation

## Overview

The evening before the pull, selected families create simple moccasins.

The following day, one participant wears them during the Women's Pull.

The experience creates a physical connection to the realities of travel on rough terrain.

## Why It Works

History becomes tangible.

Participants are no longer imagining discomfort.

They are experiencing a small piece of it themselves.

## Leader Note

Do not over-explain beforehand.

Discovery is part of the lesson.

---

# Summit Reflection Format

## Overview

This variation focuses heavily on what happens after the climb.

Once participants reach the summit:

- Sit down.
- Rest.
- Observe.
- Breathe.

Only after several minutes should any reading or message begin.

## Why It Works

Many leaders rush to fill silence.

We've found silence is often where the learning happens.

## Less Is More

A short journal excerpt is usually more effective than a lengthy devotional.

---

# Journal Reading Format

## Overview

A carefully selected journal entry is shared immediately before or after the pull.

The reading should be:

- Brief
- Authentic

- Relevant

The goal is helping participants connect their experience to a real person from history.

## **Recommended Length**

One to three minutes.

That's usually enough.

---

# **Letter Reflection Format**

## **Overview**

Participants receive:

- Pony Express letters
- Family letters
- Historical letters

before beginning the pull.

The emotional tone created by the letters often carries naturally into the experience.

## **Why It Works**

The pull becomes personal rather than simply physical.

---

# **Dawn Pull Format**

## **Overview**

A shorter pull conducted in early morning light.

The atmosphere alone creates a different experience.

Cool temperatures, quiet surroundings, and sunrise often create natural reflection.

## **Safety Note**

Ensure adequate visibility and safe footing.

---

# **Family Prayer Circle Format**

## **Overview**

Before beginning, each family gathers briefly for prayer and preparation.

This creates unity and helps participants focus.

## **Why It Works**

Families often remember the preparation as much as the pull itself.

---

# **Parallel Reflection for Young Men**

## **Overview**

While the pull occurs, young men participate in guided reflection or service activities.

This prevents them from becoming spectators.

Instead, they remain emotionally invested in the experience.

## **Possible Activities**

- Reflection questions
- Journal writing
- Service assignments
- Historical readings

---

# Service Assignment Format

## Overview

Young men receive quiet service responsibilities throughout the pull.

Examples include:

- Water support
- Trail clearing
- Participant assistance
- Safety observation

No recognition is given.

The service itself is the lesson.

---

# Summit Gratitude Circle

## Overview

At the summit, families share:

- Gratitude
- Lessons learned
- Observations

Keep responses brief.

The setting already provides much of the impact.

---

# The Quiet Descent

## Overview

One of the most overlooked parts of the Women's Pull is what happens afterward.

Rather than immediately returning to normal conversation, invite participants to descend quietly.

This allows:

- Reflection
- Emotional processing
- Personal thought

Many participants appreciate this transition.

---

## Debriefing the Experience

### When to Debrief

Not immediately.

Allow participants time first.

The best conversations often occur later that evening.

### Useful Questions

- What surprised you?
- What felt difficult?
- What stayed with you?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What did you notice about others?

Avoid leading participants toward predetermined answers.

Let them describe their own experience.

---

## Common Mistakes

## **Making the Hill Too Difficult**

The goal is meaning, not misery.

## **Overexplaining**

Trust participants to draw conclusions.

## **Rushing the Summit**

Reflection takes time.

## **Turning It Into a Performance**

The experience should feel authentic rather than staged.

## **Forgetting Safety**

Meaningful experiences should never come at the expense of participant well-being.

---

# **Final Thoughts**

The Women's Pull is not about recreating suffering.

It is about creating understanding.

It is about shared effort.

Shared service.

Shared reflection.

And perhaps most importantly, shared memory.

When leaders focus on those objectives, the Women's Pull often becomes one of the most meaningful experiences of the entire Trek.

# CHAPTER 4

## Pioneer Skills & Hands-On Learning

### Letting Youth Experience History Instead of Hearing About It

One of the biggest opportunities on Trek is allowing participants to experience pioneer life rather than simply learning about it.

A lecture about pioneer chores is informative.

Actually hauling water, baking bread, washing clothing, or making candles is memorable.

Over the years we've found that youth often remember hands-on activities long after they have forgotten talks, presentations, or historical facts.

The key is participation.

Whenever possible, allow youth to:

- Build
- Create
- Cook
- Carry
- Repair
- Solve problems

The goal is not perfect historical accuracy.

The goal is helping participants better understand the realities of daily pioneer life.

# Building a Successful Skills Program

Before discussing individual activities, it helps to understand a few principles.

## Keep It Hands-On

Youth learn more by doing than watching.

Whenever possible:

- Reduce lecture time
- Increase participation
- Keep lines moving
- Keep everyone involved

A participant holding a churn learns more than a participant watching someone else churn butter.

---

## Rotate Stations

Large groups work best when divided into rotating stations.

Benefits include:

- Better participation
- Less waiting
- More engagement
- Easier supervision

Most stations work well in 15–30 minute rotations.

---

## Simple Beats Complicated

Many leaders overbuild pioneer skills activities.

Simple projects usually produce better results.

A successful station should be:

- Easy to understand
- Easy to supervise
- Easy to complete

Success creates enthusiasm.

---

# Butter Churn Experience

## Overview

This remains one of the most popular Trek activities.

Participants churn cream into butter using hand churns or simple jars.

Once completed, they can enjoy the finished product with bread or crackers.

## Why It Works

Participants immediately understand:

- The labor involved
- The time required
- The value of simple food

The activity also produces a tangible reward.

## Setup

Provide:

- Heavy cream
- Churns or jars
- Bread or crackers

## Leader Note

Allow youth to do the work.

The effort is part of the lesson.

---

# Bread & Biscuit Making

## Overview

Few activities connect participants to pioneer life more naturally than baking bread.

Youth participate in:

- Mixing
- Kneading
- Preparing
- Baking

The smell alone often becomes part of the memory.

## Why It Works

Food preparation is something everyone understands.

Participants gain appreciation for daily labor.

## Variations

- Dutch oven biscuits
- Simple rolls
- Flatbread
- Campfire bread

---

# The Butter & Bread Station

## Overview

Combining butter making and bread baking creates one of the strongest skill stations available.

Participants experience the entire process.

From preparation to eating.

## **Why It Works**

The activity connects multiple pioneer skills together into one complete experience.

---

# **Candle Making**

## **Overview**

Participants create simple candles using dipping or molding methods.

The finished candle becomes a keepsake they can take home.

## **Why It Works**

Youth quickly realize how important artificial light was before electricity.

## **Materials**

- Wax
  - Wicks
  - Containers or dipping setup
- 

# **Washboard Laundry**

## **Overview**

This station introduces participants to one of the least glamorous but most important pioneer chores.

Youth wash cloth items using:

- Washboards
- Basins

- Water
- Soap

## Why It Works

Participants gain appreciation for the effort required to maintain cleanliness.

## Leader Note

This station often works best when paired with humor.

Youth tend to enjoy it more than expected.

---

# Water Hauling Challenge

## Overview

Families transport water using buckets or carrying devices.

The challenge can be incorporated into:

- Relays
- Skill stations
- Team competitions

## Why It Works

Water quickly becomes more valuable when participants have to move it themselves.

## Safety Note

Avoid excessive loads.

The goal is understanding, not strain.

---

# Fire Building Skills

## Overview

Participants learn:

- Tinder selection
- Kindling placement
- Fuel management
- Fire safety

## Why It Works

Fire is central to pioneer life.

Youth enjoy practical survival skills.

## Safety Note

Always comply with local regulations and fire restrictions.

---

# Dutch Oven Cooking

## Overview

Dutch ovens offer opportunities to teach:

- Meal preparation
- Patience
- Cooperation

Participants often enjoy seeing simple ingredients become a complete meal.

## Why It Works

Cooking naturally creates teamwork.

---

# Rope & Knot Skills

## Overview

Participants learn useful rope skills and simple knots.

Possible topics include:

- Square knot
- Bowline
- Clove hitch
- Basic lashing

## Why It Works

The skills are practical and immediately applicable.

---

# Leatherwork Station

## Overview

Participants create simple projects such as:

- Bracelets
- Key fobs
- Pouches
- Decorative pieces

## Why It Works

Participants enjoy creating something they can keep.

---

# Sewing & Repair Skills

## Overview

Participants learn:

- Basic stitching
- Patching
- Repair techniques

This station introduces self-reliance and resourcefulness.

## Why It Works

Many youth have never repaired anything by hand.

---

# Soap Making Demonstration

## Overview

A simple demonstration introduces pioneer approaches to hygiene and household management.

## Why It Works

Participants often find the process surprisingly interesting.

## Leader Note

Demonstration stations usually work best for larger groups.

---

# Corn Grinding Experience

## Overview

Participants grind grain using hand-powered tools.

The repetitive effort creates appreciation for food preparation.

## Why It Works

Simple tasks quickly become memorable when participants must perform them personally.

---

# Pioneer Kitchen Rotation

## Overview

Families rotate through kitchen responsibilities including:

- Preparation
- Cooking
- Serving
- Cleanup

## Why It Works

The activity teaches responsibility and cooperation.

---

# Camp Chore Rotation

## Overview

Assign rotating camp responsibilities such as:

- Water
- Wood
- Cleanup
- Setup

- Kitchen support

## Why It Works

Participants take greater ownership when everyone contributes.

---

# Quilt Square Project

## Overview

Families create quilt squares representing:

- Family identity
- Gratitude
- Trek themes

Squares may later be assembled into a larger display.

## Why It Works

The project creates both creativity and collaboration.

---

# Herbal Remedies & Pioneer Medicine

## Overview

Introduce participants to simple historical remedies used by pioneer families.

Topics may include:

- Herbs
- Poultices
- Household treatments

## Why It Works

Participants gain perspective regarding limited medical resources.

---

## **Pioneer Toys & Children's Games**

### **Overview**

Participants explore activities enjoyed by pioneer children.

Examples include:

- Hoops
- Marbles
- String games
- Simple toys

### **Why It Works**

The activity reminds participants that pioneer children were still children.

---

## **Woodcraft Projects**

### **Overview**

Simple woodworking projects create opportunities for:

- Creativity
- Problem solving
- Skill development

### **Why It Works**

Participants enjoy building something tangible.

---

# The Moccasin Workshop

## Overview

Families construct simple moccasins during evening camp.

This station works well independently and also prepares participants for the Moccasin Experience described in Chapter 1.

## Why It Works

Participants create something meaningful while preparing for a later Trek experience.

---

# Building a Living History Camp

The most successful Trek camps usually combine multiple stations.

Rather than one activity, participants rotate through experiences that allow them to:

- Cook
- Create
- Build
- Serve
- Learn

The result is not simply entertainment.

The result is understanding.

When youth participate directly, history becomes personal.

And when history becomes personal, it becomes memorable.

---

## Final Thoughts

Pioneer skills activities should never feel like school.

They should feel like discovery.

The best stations are often the simplest ones.

Give participants opportunities to work with their hands.

Allow them to create something.

Allow them to contribute.

Those experiences often become some of the strongest memories of Trek.

## **CHAPTER 5**

# **Festival, Pioneer Olympics & Afternoon Games**

### **Creating Energy, Community & Fun**

One of the most common mistakes Trek planners make is assuming every meaningful experience must be serious.

It doesn't.

Some of the strongest Trek memories come from laughter.

They come from friendly competition.

They come from shared experiences where youth simply enjoy being together.

A successful Trek needs balance.

After difficult trail miles, emotional experiences, and reflective moments, participants often need opportunities to relax, play, and reconnect.

This is where a well-planned festival becomes incredibly valuable.

The goal is not entertainment for entertainment's sake.

The goal is creating community.

# Planning a Successful Festival

## Keep Everyone Moving

Long lines kill energy.

Whenever possible:

- Create multiple stations
- Rotate groups
- Keep activities simple
- Minimize waiting

The more participation, the better the experience.

---

## Mix Physical and Non-Physical Activities

Not every youth enjoys athletic competition.

Provide variety.

Include:

- Skill-based stations
- Creative stations
- Team competitions
- Demonstrations
- Family challenges

A successful festival has something for everyone.

---

## Focus on Participation

The objective is not determining who is best.

The objective is helping participants engage.

Reward participation more than performance.

---

# The Pioneer Olympics

## Overview

Rather than individual games, consider creating a larger Pioneer Olympics event.

Families earn points by completing a variety of activities throughout the afternoon.

This creates:

- Excitement
- Teamwork
- Family identity
- Friendly competition

## Why It Works

Participants become invested in helping their family succeed.

Even simple games become more meaningful.

## Suggested Categories

- Frontier skills
- Relays
- Team challenges
- Knowledge activities
- Service competitions

---

# Tomahawk Toss

## Overview

One of the most popular festival activities.

Participants learn basic throwing technique and attempt to hit designated targets.

## **Why It Works**

Many youth have never tried anything similar.

The novelty alone creates excitement.

## **Safety Considerations**

This station requires:

- Controlled throwing lanes
- Trained supervision
- Clear safety boundaries

Safety should always take priority over participation numbers.

---

# **Archery Range**

## **Overview**

Archery consistently attracts participants of all ages.

Simple target shooting works best.

The activity teaches:

- Focus
- Patience
- Coordination

## **Why It Works**

Participants naturally enjoy measuring improvement with each shot.

## **Leader Note**

Keep instructions simple.

The goal is confidence, not mastery.

---

# **Bull Whip Demonstration**

## **Overview**

A skilled bull whip demonstration often becomes one of the most talked-about festival events.

Participants enjoy both:

- Watching
- Learning

## **Why It Works**

The activity feels unique and memorable.

## **Safety Considerations**

Only experienced instructors should conduct demonstrations.

---

# **Horseshoes**

## **Overview**

Simple.

Classic.

Reliable.

Horseshoes remains one of the easiest activities to implement successfully.

## **Why It Works**

Nearly everyone can participate regardless of age or athletic ability.

---

## **Stick Pull**

### **Overview**

Two participants sit facing each other while pulling on a shared stick.

The first person to pull the stick free wins.

### **Why It Works**

The game is surprisingly competitive and almost always produces laughter.

---

## **Tug-of-War**

### **Overview**

A Trek favorite.

Families compete together using teamwork rather than individual strength.

### **Why It Works**

Success depends on cooperation.

Not just power.

### **Leader Note**

Family versus family formats often work best.

---

# Sack Races

## Overview

Simple races create energy and laughter.

Participants quickly discover that what appears easy is often more difficult than expected.

## Why It Works

Low preparation.

High participation.

Consistent fun.

---

# Three-Legged Races

## Overview

Partners race while tied together.

The challenge becomes communication rather than speed.

## Why It Works

Participants learn quickly that cooperation matters.

---

# Water Carry Relay

## Overview

Teams transport water through a course while minimizing spills.

## Why It Works

The activity reinforces the value of water while creating competition.

## Variations

- Bucket relay
  - Yoke carry
  - Team water challenge
- 

# Family Relay Challenge

## Overview

A series of mini-events combined into one larger relay.

Possible stations include:

- Water carry
- Rope skills
- Obstacle challenge
- Puzzle station
- Frontier task

## Why It Works

Every participant can contribute something.

---

# Frontier Obstacle Course

## Overview

A course designed around:

- Crawling

- Carrying
- Balance
- Teamwork

## **Why It Works**

Participants enjoy physical challenges when they feel achievable.

---

# **Pioneer Scavenger Hunt**

## **Overview**

Families search for:

- Historical clues
- Objects
- Locations
- Hidden challenges

## **Why It Works**

The activity encourages exploration and problem solving.

---

# **Blindfold Trust Challenge**

## **Overview**

One participant guides another through a simple course.

The activity emphasizes:

- Trust
- Communication
- Patience

## Why It Works

The lesson emerges naturally from the experience.

---

# Log Carry Challenge

## Overview

Families work together to transport a log or pole through a short course.

## Why It Works

The activity reinforces shared effort and teamwork.

## Safety Note

Use manageable weights.

---

# Frontier Skills Rotation

## Overview

Create multiple stations involving:

- Knots
- Roping
- Fire building
- Tracking
- Camp skills

Participants rotate throughout the afternoon.

## Why It Works

Variety keeps energy high.

---

# Family Banner Competition

## Overview

Families design banners representing:

- Identity
- Values
- Trek names
- Family mottos

Banners may later appear during the feast or hoedown.

## Why It Works

The activity strengthens family identity throughout Trek.

---

# Trail Boss Challenge

## Overview

This larger event combines multiple skills into a final team challenge.

Participants solve problems requiring:

- Communication
- Leadership
- Teamwork
- Pioneer skills

## Why It Works

The challenge serves as an excellent festival finale.

---

# Festival Scheduling Suggestions

A successful festival generally includes:

## **Opening Gathering**

10–15 minutes

## **Rotation Stations**

60–120 minutes

## **Group Competition**

20–30 minutes

## **Awards or Recognition**

10–15 minutes

## **Transition to Evening Activities**

Keep things moving.

Keep instructions short.

Keep the focus on participation.

---

# Common Festival Mistakes

## **Too Few Stations**

Long lines reduce enthusiasm.

## **Too Much Competition**

Friendly competition works.

Overly intense competition does not.

### **Overcomplicated Rules**

Simple games usually create the best participation.

### **Trying to Do Everything**

Choose quality over quantity.

---

## **Final Thoughts**

The purpose of a Trek festival is not simply to entertain.

It is to build relationships.

To create laughter.

To strengthen families.

To provide balance.

The most successful festivals leave participants feeling energized, connected, and ready for the next stage of Trek.

When planned thoughtfully, games and competitions become much more than recreation.

They become part of the story participants remember for years.

## **CHAPTER 6**

# **Evening Programs, Feasts, Hoedowns & Campfire Experiences**

### **Where Many Trek Memories Are Made**

While the trail often receives most of the attention, many participants remember camp life just as vividly.

The evening hours create opportunities that simply don't exist during the day.

The pace slows.

The work is finished.

The distractions decrease.

Families gather.

Conversations deepen.

Friendships strengthen.

The most successful Trek evenings balance three things:

- Community
- Reflection
- Fun

A good evening should feel different from the trail.

Participants should leave feeling refreshed rather than exhausted.

---

## **The Purpose of Evening Programs**

One mistake leaders sometimes make is trying to schedule every minute.

We've found that evening programs work best when they provide structure while still leaving room for participants to interact naturally.

Some of the best Trek moments happen between activities.

A conversation around a campfire.

A family laughing together.

A quiet discussion under the stars.

Do not underestimate the value of unstructured connection.

---

## **Feast Night**

### **Overview**

For many participants, Feast Night becomes one of the highlights of Trek.

After days of trail work, families gather for a special meal that feels different from ordinary camp food.

The meal itself matters.

But the atmosphere matters even more.

### **Why It Works**

The feast creates contrast.

Participants move from effort to celebration.

The experience naturally encourages gratitude and community.

## Planning Considerations

A successful feast does not need to be elaborate.

Focus on:

- Presentation
- Atmosphere
- Family seating
- Community

Simple food served well often creates greater impact than complicated menus.

---

## Creating a Meaningful Feast

Consider incorporating:

- Family banners
- Music
- Family introductions
- Pioneer storytelling
- Gratitude moments

Avoid turning the meal into another meeting.

Allow participants time to enjoy one another.

## Leader Note

Good food is appreciated.

Good fellowship is remembered.

---

## The Hoedown

## Overview

The hoedown provides an opportunity for participants to celebrate together.

This is one of the best places on Trek for laughter, energy, and community building.

The goal is not professional dancing.

The goal is participation.

## Why It Works

The hoedown allows participants to relax.

Many youth who appear hesitant initially become some of the most enthusiastic participants.

## Leader Note

The caller matters more than the dance.

Choose someone who creates confidence rather than pressure.

---

# Teaching Dances Before the Hoedown

## Overview

Many participants worry about not knowing what to do.

A brief teaching session beforehand removes much of that anxiety.

## Benefits

Participants:

- Feel more comfortable
- Participate more readily
- Enjoy the event more

Ten to fifteen minutes of instruction is usually sufficient.

---

# Family Introductions

## Overview

Before the feast or hoedown, allow families to introduce themselves.

Possible elements include:

- Family name
- Motto
- Banner
- Fun fact

## Why It Works

Participants quickly develop stronger family identity.

---

# Campfire Storytelling

## Overview

For generations, stories have been told around campfires.

The setting naturally draws attention.

The darkness removes distractions.

The fire creates atmosphere.

## Types of Stories

Consider:

- Pioneer journals
- Personal experiences

- Local history
- Family stories
- Humorous trail accounts

## Leader Note

One excellent story is usually better than five average stories.

---

# Journal Fireside

## Overview

Rather than general storytelling, this evening focuses specifically on pioneer journals.

Choose readings that are:

- Brief
- Authentic
- Personal

Participants connect more easily with individual experiences than broad historical summaries.

---

# Music Around the Fire

## Overview

Music often becomes one of the strongest emotional elements of Trek.

Options include:

- Hymns
- Folk songs
- Acoustic music
- Fiddle tunes
- Family singing

## Why It Works

Music creates shared memory.

Many participants remember songs long after details of the schedule are forgotten.

---

# Family Council Time

## Overview

Families gather separately for discussion.

Topics may include:

- Lessons learned
- Challenges
- Gratitude
- Funny moments
- Personal reflections

## Why It Works

Smaller groups often create more meaningful conversations.

---

# Home Evening Format

## Overview

Some Treks choose to conduct a simple family-home-evening-style gathering.

Possible elements include:

- Song
- Prayer
- Message
- Discussion

- Activity

## Why It Works

The format feels familiar and family-centered.

---

# Gratitude Circle

## Overview

Participants gather and share simple expressions of gratitude.

Examples include:

- Something learned
- Someone appreciated
- A meaningful experience

## Why It Works

Gratitude naturally changes the atmosphere of a group.

## Leader Note

Keep responses short.

Momentum matters.

---

# Memory Sharing Night

## Overview

As Trek progresses, participants accumulate stories.

This evening provides an opportunity to share them.

Topics might include:

- Favorite moments
- Funny experiences
- Unexpected lessons
- Acts of service

## Why It Works

Shared memories strengthen community.

---

# Quiet Reflection Night

## Overview

Not every evening should be high energy.

Some of the most effective evenings are intentionally quiet.

Possible activities include:

- Journaling
- Reflection
- Soft music
- Family conversations
- Lantern walks

## Why It Works

Participants often need space to process what they have experienced.

---

# Lantern Walk

## Overview

Families walk quietly using lanterns during evening hours.

The route may include:

- Silence
- Reflection
- Gratitude
- Scripture
- Personal thought

## **Why It Works**

Lantern light naturally changes the pace and tone of the experience.

## **Safety Considerations**

Plan routes carefully and ensure adequate supervision.

---

# **Star Devotional**

## **Overview**

Few settings invite reflection like a clear night sky.

Participants gather under the stars for:

- Observation
- Reflection
- Gratitude
- Brief messages

## **Leader Note**

Avoid lengthy talks.

The sky already provides the atmosphere.

---

# Trail Humor Night

## Overview

A Trek should not be serious all the time.

An evening dedicated to humor can become one of the most enjoyable parts of the experience.

Ideas include:

- Funny trail stories
- Family skits
- Historical humor
- Camp mishaps

## Why It Works

Laughter creates emotional balance.

---

# Family Banner Presentation

## Overview

Families display and explain their banners.

This activity works particularly well before a feast or hoedown.

## Why It Works

It strengthens identity and encourages participation.

---

# Talent Night

## Overview

Participants share talents such as:

- Music
- Storytelling
- Poetry
- Demonstrations

The emphasis should remain on participation rather than performance.

## **Why It Works**

Youth often surprise one another.

---

# **The Final Campfire**

## **Overview**

The final campfire often becomes one of the most meaningful experiences of Trek.

Participants know the journey is nearing its conclusion.

The atmosphere naturally feels different.

## **Suggested Elements**

- Gratitude
- Reflection
- Music
- Stories
- Family time

## **Leader Note**

Resist the temptation to over-program this evening.

The closer Trek comes to ending, the more valuable simple moments become.

---

# Building the Ideal Evening

A successful evening generally includes:

## **Community**

People connecting with people.

## **Reflection**

Time to think and process.

## **Celebration**

Laughter, music, and enjoyment.

## **Rest**

Participants preparing for the next day.

When those elements are present, evenings become much more than camp activities.

They become some of the most memorable parts of Trek.

---

# Final Thoughts

The trail teaches many lessons.

But the evenings often allow those lessons to settle in.

Do not underestimate the power of a campfire.

Do not underestimate the value of music.

Do not underestimate the importance of simply giving people time to be together.

Years later, many participants may not remember exactly what was said.

But they will remember how it felt to sit around a fire with friends and family under a sky full of stars.

# CHAPTER 7

## Spiritual & Reflective Experiences

### Creating Space for Personal Discovery

One of the greatest temptations in Trek planning is feeling responsible for creating spiritual experiences.

In reality, leaders do not create spiritual experiences.

They create opportunities for spiritual experiences.

There is an important difference.

Over the years, we've learned that the most meaningful moments often happen when leaders stop trying to force outcomes and simply create space for participants to think, feel, observe, and reflect.

The purpose of this chapter is not to provide emotional formulas.

It is to provide tools that help participants slow down and connect more deeply with their Trek experience.

---

## Less Can Be More

Before discussing specific activities, it helps to understand one principle:

## **Avoid Emotional Overproduction**

Many leaders feel pressure to make every activity emotional.

This usually weakens the overall Trek experience.

When every activity tries to be profound:

- Nothing stands out.
- Participants become exhausted.
- Reflection becomes difficult.

Meaningful experiences often emerge naturally when participants are given room to process.

---

# **The Burden Rock Experience**

## **Overview**

Participants select a rock representing:

- A challenge
- A fear
- A responsibility
- A concern
- A personal struggle

The rock is carried during part of Trek.

Later, participants may choose to:

- Keep it
- Set it down
- Discuss it
- Reflect upon it

## **Why It Works**

The symbolism is simple.

Participants create their own meaning rather than being given one.

## Setup

Allow participants to quietly select a rock.

Avoid overexplaining.

The symbolism is usually obvious.

## Leader Note

Participants should never be required to disclose what their rock represents.

---

# Shared Burden Carry

## Overview

Families temporarily assist another family by helping carry a shared responsibility.

Examples include:

- Water
- Equipment
- Camp supplies
- Additional trail tasks

## Why It Works

Service becomes tangible.

Participants experience helping rather than discussing helping.

## Leader Note

Keep the focus on kindness rather than recognition.

---

# Sunrise Devotional

## Overview

Few settings invite reflection like early morning.

A simple sunrise gathering may include:

- Prayer
- Scripture
- Reflection
- Silence

## Why It Works

The atmosphere already exists.

Leaders do not need to create it.

## Less Is More

Keep messages brief.

Allow participants to experience the morning.

---

# Trail Prayer Circle

## Overview

At an appropriate point, families gather briefly for prayer.

Possible moments include:

- Before a difficult climb
- After a challenge
- During uncertainty
- At a summit

## Why It Works

The timing often matters more than the words.

---

# Gratitude Stone

## Overview

Participants select a stone representing something for which they are grateful.

The stone becomes a reminder carried throughout the remainder of Trek.

## Why It Works

Simple physical objects often help participants remember lessons long after Trek ends.

---

# Letter to Future Self

## Overview

Participants write a letter to themselves describing:

- Goals
- Lessons learned
- Things they hope to remember
- Personal commitments

The letters may be:

- Mailed later
- Returned months afterward
- Kept privately

## Why It Works

Participants often write more honestly when speaking to their future selves.

---

## Guided Journal Prompts

### Overview

Many youth struggle when simply told to "write your thoughts."

Prompts provide structure.

Examples include:

- What surprised you today?
- What challenged you?
- Who helped you today?
- What did you learn about yourself?
- What do you want to remember?

### Why It Works

Prompts remove the pressure of starting from a blank page.

---

## Service Without Recognition

### Overview

Participants receive a private assignment to help someone else during Trek.

No announcement.

No reward.

No recognition.

Only service.

## Why It Works

The experience remains personal.

The motivation stays focused on helping.

## Leader Note

This is often more impactful than public service projects.

---

# Gratitude Journal Night

## Overview

Instead of discussing experiences, participants spend time writing:

- Gratitudes
- Lessons
- Observations
- Positive experiences

## Why It Works

Writing slows people down.

Reflection often becomes deeper.

---

# Scripture Along the Trail

## Overview

Short scripture readings are placed strategically throughout Trek.

The key word is short.

One verse often works better than ten.

## **Why It Works**

The trail remains the focus while scripture adds context.

## **Common Mistake**

Turning a brief scripture moment into a lengthy lesson.

---

# **Quiet Observation Stop**

## **Overview**

Participants pause and simply observe.

No discussion.

No lesson.

No assignment.

Only observation.

Possible focus:

- Mountains
- Sky
- Wind
- Trees
- Silence

## **Why It Works**

Many participants rarely experience true quiet.

---

# Ancestor Reflection

## Overview

Participants learn about:

- Family pioneers
- Adopted pioneer stories
- Historical individuals

The goal is helping participants connect history to real people.

## Why It Works

History becomes personal.

---

# Family Appreciation Activity

## Overview

Participants write notes or express appreciation to:

- Family members
- Trek parents
- Leaders
- Friends

## Why It Works

Encouragement strengthens relationships.

---

# Forgiveness Reflection

## Overview

Participants are invited to consider:

- Relationships
- Healing
- Letting go
- Personal growth

This experience should never be forced.

## Leader Note

Create space.

Do not create pressure.

---

# Faith & Questions Discussion

## Overview

Small groups discuss questions participants may have about:

- Faith
- History
- Life
- Personal experiences

## Why It Works

Honest conversations build trust.

## Leader Note

Listening is often more important than answering.

---

# Testimony or Witness Circle

## Overview

Participants who desire may share:

- Testimonies
- Impressions
- Lessons learned
- Personal reflections

## Why It Works

Authentic sharing creates connection.

## Important Principle

Participation should always remain voluntary.

---

# Light & Lantern Reflection

## Overview

Lantern light becomes a simple symbol of:

- Hope
- Direction
- Faith
- Encouragement

This activity works particularly well during evening reflection experiences.

---

# Commitment Stop

## Overview

Near the end of Trek, participants consider:

- What they learned
- What they hope to improve
- What they want to remember

## Why It Works

The experience helps convert reflection into action.

---

# Closing Reflection Walk

## Overview

Before departure, participants take a short walk in silence.

No speeches.

No program.

Simply time to think.

## Why It Works

The experience provides emotional closure.

---

# Creating Meaningful Reflection

The most successful reflective experiences usually share several characteristics:

## They Are Simple

Complicated activities rarely create deeper reflection.

### **They Allow Choice**

Participants engage more fully when not forced.

### **They Leave Room for Silence**

Silence often teaches better than explanation.

### **They Respect Individual Experiences**

Different participants will take away different lessons.

That is perfectly acceptable.

---

## **Common Mistakes**

### **Too Many Emotional Activities**

Not every hour should be profound.

### **Too Much Talking**

Participants need time to think.

### **Chasing Outcomes**

Leaders should create opportunities, not attempt to manufacture results.

### **Comparing Experiences**

Every participant's Trek experience will be different.

Allow that difference.

---

## **Final Thoughts**

Spiritual experiences cannot be scheduled.

But opportunities for spiritual experiences can be.

Create space.

Provide opportunities.

Allow reflection.

Trust participants to discover meaning for themselves.

In our experience, those are often the moments that remain long after Trek is over.

## **CHAPTER 8**

# **Trek Flow & Experience Design**

## **The Difference Between a Good Trek and a Great Trek**

Most Trek leaders spend the majority of their planning time focused on individual activities.

Which games should we do?

What should happen at the Women's Pull?

Should we have a hoedown?

What about a Pony Express rider?

Those are important questions.

But after working with Treks across multiple states and many different locations, we've learned something important:

Participants rarely remember individual activities in isolation.

They remember how the entire Trek felt.

That feeling comes from pacing.

It comes from flow.

It comes from how experiences fit together.

The purpose of this chapter is to help leaders think beyond activities and begin designing an entire Trek experience.

---

## Start With the End in Mind

Before planning activities, ask:

### **What do we hope participants remember?**

Not what will they do.

What will they remember?

Possible answers might include:

- Family relationships
- Service
- Faith
- Gratitude
- Pioneer sacrifice
- Teamwork
- Self-reliance
- Community

Once those goals are identified, activities become much easier to select.

---

## Every Trek Needs a Rhythm

One of the easiest ways to create a successful Trek is to establish a predictable rhythm.

Participants generally thrive when they understand the flow of the day.

A typical day might look like:

## **Morning**

- Breakfast
- Devotional
- Breaking camp
- Trail travel

## **Midday**

- Trail experiences
- Lunch
- Trail continuation

## **Afternoon**

- Camp setup
- Skills
- Festival
- Family activities

## **Evening**

- Meal
- Hoedown
- Campfire
- Reflection

## **Night**

- Family time
- Quiet hours
- Rest

The specifics vary.

The rhythm remains.

---

# The Rule of Emotional Spacing

This may be one of the most important concepts in the entire handbook.

## Do Not Stack Emotional Experiences

Many leaders unintentionally create emotional overload.

For example:

Women's Pull

followed immediately by

Pioneer Grave

followed immediately by

Rocky Ridge Reading

followed immediately by

Testimony Meeting

The result?

Participants become emotionally exhausted.

The impact of each experience decreases.

---

## Use Peaks and Valleys

Think of Trek like a mountain range.

Not a single mountain.

Participants need:

- High moments
- Quiet moments
- Fun moments
- Reflective moments

The contrast creates impact.

Example:

## **Morning**

Women's Pull

## **Afternoon**

Festival Games

## **Evening**

Campfire Reflection

The emotional variety strengthens all three experiences.

---

# **Protect the Fun**

This may surprise some leaders.

Fun is not the enemy of spirituality.

Fun often creates the relationships that make spiritual moments possible.

Youth who laugh together:

- Trust each other more
- Serve each other more
- Listen more carefully later

Never feel guilty about allowing Trek to be enjoyable.

---

# **Arrival Day Sets the Tone**

The first few hours matter more than many leaders realize.

Participants arrive wondering:

- Who will be in my family?
- What will Trek be like?
- Will I enjoy this?

Your first goal is not a devotional.

Your first goal is helping people feel welcome.

Focus on:

- Organization
- Clarity
- Energy
- Hospitality

A calm beginning creates confidence.

---

## Build Gradually

A successful Trek typically increases in depth over time.

Think of it as storytelling.

You would not start a movie with the climax.

Likewise, you should not begin Trek with your most emotional experience.

Allow participants time to:

- Settle in
- Build relationships
- Learn expectations
- Become comfortable

Then gradually introduce deeper experiences.

---

## Let the Trail Do Some Teaching

Many leaders feel responsible for explaining everything.

We've found that the trail often teaches best when left alone.

For example:

A difficult climb.

A beautiful overlook.

A long stretch of silence.

Not every moment requires a lesson.

Sometimes observation is enough.

---

## **Camp Energy Matters**

Every camp develops its own atmosphere.

Leaders influence that atmosphere more than they realize.

Ask:

Are participants exhausted?

Hungry?

Bored?

Excited?

Frustrated?

The answer should influence the schedule.

Good Trek leaders adjust.

Great Trek leaders anticipate.

---

## **Match Activities to Energy Levels**

Not every activity belongs at every time of day.

For example:

### **High Energy Activities**

- Hoedown
- Relays
- Festival games
- Competitions

### **Medium Energy Activities**

- Skills stations
- Family activities
- Trailside encounters

### **Low Energy Activities**

- Journaling
- Campfires
- Reflection
- Music

Matching activities to participant energy dramatically improves engagement.

---

## **Terrain Is Part of the Program**

One mistake planners sometimes make is treating the trail as transportation.

The trail itself is one of your greatest resources.

Consider:

- Scenic overlooks
- River crossings
- Hilltops
- Meadows
- Forests

Different locations naturally support different experiences.

Use the landscape intentionally.

---

## Meals Matter More Than You Think

Hungry participants struggle.

Tired participants struggle.

Dehydrated participants struggle.

Sometimes the most spiritual thing a leader can do is make sure lunch happens on time.

Never underestimate the impact of:

- Good food
- Water
- Shade
- Rest

These needs affect every other activity.

---

## The Power of Unscheduled Time

Some of the strongest Trek memories happen when nothing is scheduled.

Participants:

- Talk
- Laugh
- Explore
- Build friendships

Resist the temptation to fill every minute.

Leave room for life to happen.

---

# Building a Three-Day Trek

A common pattern might look like this:

## Day One

Focus:

- Arrival
- Family formation
- Basic trail experiences
- Skills
- Light reflection

Goal:

Build comfort and relationships.

---

## Day Two

Focus:

- Signature experiences
- Women's Pull
- Trail encounters
- Festival activities
- Campfire

Goal:

Create memorable shared experiences.

---

## Day Three

Focus:

- Reflection
- Gratitude
- Closing experiences

- Departure

Goal:

Help participants process and remember.

---

## **Common Planning Mistakes**

### **Too Many Activities**

Participants become overwhelmed.

### **Too Much Talking**

Leaders become the focus.

### **Not Enough Rest**

Energy disappears.

### **Emotional Overload**

Nothing stands out.

### **Ignoring Logistics**

Logistics problems become participant problems.

---

## **The Turnkey Approach**

One thing we've learned over the years is that many Trek leaders are carrying enormous responsibilities.

Planning:

- Handcarts
- Locations
- Transportation
- Water
- Restrooms
- Camps
- Activities
- Safety
- Scheduling

can become overwhelming.

This is one reason many groups choose a Turnkey approach.

Instead of trying to manage every detail alone, leaders receive assistance with planning, logistics, staging, equipment, and support services.

The goal is simple:

Allow leaders to focus more on youth and less on logistics.

---

## Final Thoughts

The best Treks are rarely the most elaborate.

They are the most intentional.

Participants do not remember every activity.

They remember:

How they felt.

Who they served.

Who helped them.

The conversations.

The laughter.

The quiet moments.

The shared effort.

When activities, pacing, leadership, and logistics work together, Trek becomes much more than an event.

It becomes an experience.

And experiences are what people remember.

---

## CONCLUSION

There is no perfect Trek.

Every group is different.

Every location is different.

Every year is different.

Your goal is not perfection.

Your goal is creating opportunities.

Opportunities for service.

Opportunities for growth.

Opportunities for faith.

Opportunities for friendship.

Opportunities for meaningful experiences.

If this handbook helps you create even a few of those moments, then it has accomplished its purpose.

And if you ever need help with handcarts, logistics, location planning, transportation, water, restrooms, camps, staging, activities, or turnkey Trek support, Phillips Handcart Company is always happy to help.

Good luck.

And enjoy the journey.

