

Course Description

Gannett Peak Mountaineering

National Outdoor Leadership School

Course Features

- Hiking route: ~ 60 miles; elevations of 9,000 to 13,800 ft.
- Travel both on and off- trail, above tree-line and on glacial moraines
- Snow and ice climbing
- A traverse of the Wind River Range
- Average pack weight: 45-60 lbs.

The Expedition

Imagine yourself standing atop the highest point in Wyoming, Gannett Peak. With ice axe in hand, you pose for a triumphal summit photograph. Waves of snow-capped peaks, glittering alpine lakes, and miles of wide-open sky surround you. This is the goal of the Gannett Peak expedition: to get you on top of a big mountain.

Gannett Peak stands 13,804 feet above sea level. Here the air is rarified, the snows perennial, and the views stupendous. To get to Gannett, you'll hike some 27 miles in three to four days, carrying your camping and personal gear along with some climbing equipment. During this approach, you'll fine-tune the camping and travel practices you learned at NOLS previously, and begin to work together with this new group as a team. These basic skills—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, *Leave No Trace* techniques, and sanitation—are the foundation for the more advanced mountaineering to come.

As on most NOLS courses, you'll live with two or three other students in a “cook” group throughout the course. These small groups help disperse our impacts on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living.

Near your high camp, horse packers will bring food and most of the climbing gear into your course. The next few days will focus on practicing climbing techniques. The climbing curriculum begins with knots, rope handling, climbing movement, and belaying. Snow and ice work—everything from ice axe technique and self-arrests, to step cutting and crampon use—will be addressed and practiced as well.

When you are ready and the mountain is in good condition, a summit attempt will be made. This may happen in small groups or in one large group. Summit day will be very challenging. You'll leave before dawn and travel over moraines and glaciers, then up snow and ice slopes to the sharp summit ridge of the peak. Ropes and belays will be used when necessary. Anticipate working non-stop for 12 or more hours with only a few breaks and (hopefully) 30 minutes or so to enjoy the view from the top of Wyoming!

After the summit attempt, you will finish your traverse of the Wind River Range by hiking out down spectacular western slope. Packs will be heavier going out due to the extra climbing gear.



Student Independence

On all NOLS courses, students will be independent (that is, unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp, such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp independently to do things such as fish or swim. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.

Weather and Other Challenges

Mountain weather is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and can be quite violent. Courses may experience snow and rain, or long stretches of sun and blue skies.

NOLS takes great pride in providing quality experiential education on all courses. Expeditions, unlike traditional classrooms, are influenced by weather, terrain, and the characteristics of the individuals involved. Accordingly, NOLS courses are not fully scripted and this quality is the key ingredient in experiential education. Given the variables that affect all NOLS courses, the depth of topic coverage will vary from course to course.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. You may be off-trail bushwhacking through thick forests or scrambling around refrigerator-sized boulders. Rivers are icy from snowmelt and can be hard or impossible to cross. You will traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock, or grass, and grunt up high mountain passes. But the hard work is worth it. There's nothing quite like taking your pack off at the top of the peak, feeling the wind dry the sweat off your back, and looking down at miles of new country opening up before you. It's exhilarating!

Bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling will be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. This course will protect all food and attractants from bears. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence.

Identifying and managing mountain hazards—falling rock, weather, animals, moving water, and steep terrain will be a constant theme in our instruction. Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes or pesky critters. You should expect to hang your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. Remember, once you leave the bus, you'll be miles from telephones, hospitals, and any form of transportation besides your feet, so it is important to stay healthy and safe in order to have a fun, successful expedition.

Course Objectives

- Have an enjoyable, educational mountain experience.
- Learn general mountaineering techniques.
- Work together as a productive expedition team.
- Learn to assess mountain hazards.
- Reinforce Leave No Trace camping techniques.
- Enjoy the surroundings and the friendship of participants.
- Have a successful ascent of Gannett Peak.

