



## **NOLS ALUMNI COURSE DESCRIPTION ALL WOMEN'S DENALI MOUNTAINEERING**

### **Features Of This Course:**

- Travel on the highest mountain in North America
- West Buttress route on Denali's south side
- Exposure to snow camping skills
- One of the most physically demanding NOLS courses
- Limited opportunities for student leadership
- Travel by snowshoe, crampon and foot
- Snow and ice mountaineering skills development
- Exposure to glacier travel
- Potential altitude gain of 13,000 feet
- Potential for severe weather
- Living on glaciers for 100% of the course
- Living and traveling in close quarters

### **The Expedition**

Towering over the Alaskan tundra at an impressive 20,320 feet, Denali truly lives up to its reputation as "The Great One." For 24-days, this famous rampart will be your classroom as we attempt to climb its West Buttress route. The climb's preparations begin at the NOLS Alaska headquarters in Palmer. Once equipment and food is organized, you'll travel two hours by bus to Talkeetna where a flight will take you to base camp at 7,200'. Landmarks on the route include the Kahiltna Glacier, Kahiltna Pass, Windy Corner, high camps at 14,280' and 17,200'. You'll descend via the same route.

You'll be on snow and ice for the entire course. We'll review the core components of glacier travel and climbing curriculum. Knots, rope handling, climbing movement, and belaying will all be covered. As your experience builds, you'll move into more advanced mountaineering skills. Glacier living requires roped travel and probed camp perimeters. The travel distances covered daily will be short at first, giving everyone a chance to get used to their packs, snowshoes, and roped team travel. The importance of student adaptability and learning on the go cannot be stressed enough. Practice time is minimal.

The extreme conditions and technical terrain of this course severely limit the opportunity for student leadership. Your learning is based primarily on participation in the expedition, which is different from the typical progression of leadership in other NOLS courses. We'll focus on route finding, hazard evaluation, high altitude topics, expedition behavior, and getting to the summit.



## **Student Independence**

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This will include time in and around camp such as while cooking or performing camp chores. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.

## **Weather and Other Challenges**

It is important to emphasize the challenging nature of this Alaskan mountaineering experience. Remoteness is what makes Alaskan mountains so challenging. You'll be living in a winter environment where severe snowstorms and prolonged sub-freezing temperatures are common. We learn to be humble regarding the weather; the actual amount of climbing and technical skill development we achieve will always be contingent upon it. Yet, almost continual daylight provides for long, busy days.

Prudent route selection and continual adherence to risk management practices—a constant theme in our instruction—minimizes the exposure to the inherent dangers of crevasses, falling and rolling rock, falls on steep terrain, avalanches, and harsh weather. Consistent practice of risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your expedition in these wild mountains healthy and enjoyable.

For up to 24-days we'll be living and working in a close group situation. Whether it's moving roped-up 75 feet from one another, or camped in a 100-foot-diameter probed campsite, living and working situations are tight, necessitating the utmost in cooperation. Good expedition behavior qualities are essential to creating a great expedition experience.

Weather on Denali is magnificent and challenging. It can be crystal clear with 100-mile visibility or there can be a howling blizzard where you can't see the tent next to you. Prevention of hypothermia and frostbite requires proper equipment, learning how to use that equipment, eating adequately, maintaining fluid intake and conserving energy. We teach these techniques on the NOLS Denali expedition but it is up to all expedition members to practice them consistently and be responsible for both themselves and each other.

Physical strength is an important element in the selection of expedition members. Be aware that this course is more demanding than other NOLS courses and members are expected to arrive in top physical condition. Students in the past have been surprised by the magnitude of the physical challenge. This is a very hard course, especially if the weather is foul. In addition, desire is critical. A positive outlook and willingness to work with others is as important as one's physical condition. The chances for a great expedition are enhanced if students come ready and eager to climb.



The Denali mountaineering course is a demanding experience, both physically and mentally. The altitude will challenge us. We will climb slowly to allow time to acclimatize, but the best techniques are no guarantee against altitude illness. The climb is difficult and the weather on the mountain is unpredictable and extreme. There is no guarantee that your team will summit. Denali demands respect. Come prepared for long days, harsh weather, heavy loads, and the experience of a lifetime.

### **Fitness Recommendations**

Being physically fit enables you to take full advantage of this opportunity; it will also enhance the strength of the group as a whole, contributing to the ultimate success of the expedition, regardless of whether the summit is attained.

It is essential that participants arrive in very good physical condition and health. High altitude mountain travel is demanding, no matter how fit you are. We strongly encourage you to consider your physical condition now and to design appropriate fitness goals for yourself. For more information, please see the physical conditioning information below.

### **Personal Electronics**

A key element to a NOLS education is time spent in wilderness. The benefits of this include being closer to nature, time away from society and civilization, and being in an environment where natural forces predominate and students have the opportunity to develop good judgment and practice self-reliance. For this reason, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc.), cell phones, satellite tracking devices or satellite phones on NOLS courses. Instructors will carry sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone and a ground-to-air) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

### **Special Considerations**

Please be aware that chronic knee or ankle ailments have been a source of problems in the past. If you have a history of such problems, please contact us to discuss it. Medication: It is important that you have a current diphtheria-tetanus immunization. We need to know if you have had an adverse reaction to Erythromycin, Vicodin, Keflex, Ibuprofen, or aspirin—commonly used medications can have unfavorable effects at high altitudes. If you plan to take any medication during the climb, please be sure you are aware of possible side effects and discuss it with your expedition leaders.



## Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels and environmental conditions. Working within this context, it is our intent to accomplish the following objectives in four basic areas.

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards encountered in a mountain environment.
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Describe an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors.
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic emergency procedures to support a patient until help arrives.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions, and follow them through to completion.
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self-limits.

## Leadership

At NOLS, we define leadership as “timely, appropriate actions that guide and support your group to set and achieve realistic goals. Great leaders create an environment that inspires individuals and groups to achieve their full potential.” On this course, the emphasis will be on gaining competence as a foundation for leading in the backcountry. We expect each student’s leadership ability to grow by accomplishing the following:

- Gain an understanding of the four types of leadership: self-leadership, active followership, designated leadership and peer leadership.
- Demonstrate a willingness to grow in each of NOLS’ seven leadership skills:
  1. Gain outdoor skills competence and thus be a better leader in the outdoors.
  2. Demonstrate positive expedition behavior, by serving the goals of the group.
  3. Tolerate adversity and uncertainty with a positive attitude.
  4. Actively cultivate your self-awareness as an outdoors person and a leader.
  5. Work to understand the leader’s vision and when appropriate develop your vision as a leader. Follow through with appropriate action to help the group achieve its potential.
  6. Improve your judgment and decision-making skills, learning the pros and cons of various decision-making styles on the continuum between directive and consensus.
  7. Practice effective communication skills from active listening to public speaking.
- Gain understanding of your own signature style of leadership.



## **Outdoor Skills**

NOLS students learn to live and travel in mountains within a framework of personal health and care of the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain environment, learn to camp, cook, and dress for a variety of conditions.
- Travel competently in mountain terrain using map and compass skills, off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, and route-finding techniques..
- Master knots and rope handling techniques.
- Display basic mountaineering skills in ice, snow, glacier travel and crevasse rescue.
- Consistently minimize impact upon the environment while camping and traveling by following Leave No Trace principles.
- Accurately assess skills, strengths and endurance in self and others and conservatively apply those limits to given situations.

## **Authorized Concessioner**

NOLS is an "Authorized Concessioner of the National Park Service in Denali National Park, Department of the Interior."

## **Next Steps**

Contact the NOLS Alumni Relations Department in Lander (alumni@nols.edu or 800.332.4280) with questions, to complete your enrollment, or if your travel to this course is interrupted. A completed mountaineering skills questionnaire is required for this expedition.

## **Fitness - Preparing for Your Course**

Proper prior preparation prevents poor performance! NOLS instructors live by this mantra, and you should, too. Follow our advice on physical conditioning and gear selection and you'll be well prepared for a fun and successful NOLS experience.

## **Physical Conditioning**

Conditioning before your course is important for avoiding injury and staying healthy. It will add to your enjoyment and ability to participate on your course.

## **Start Your Conditioning Program Now**

If you are already in good shape, keep it up. If not, consult with your physician and get started as soon as possible. You don't need to be a superb athlete to enjoy the wilderness. Regardless of what course you're taking, increasing your muscle strength, flexibility, and aerobic fitness enables you to focus on the curriculum and activities of the course. For NOLS courses, an exercise routine should develop aerobic endurance, muscle strength, and flexibility.



## **The FITT Principle of Training**

The FITT principle provides a basis for how to benefit from a physical conditioning program. FITT stands for Frequency, Intensity, Time, and Type.

**Frequency:** Exercise should be done five to six times per week. Remember, your course is active seven days per week and exercising just a few times per week is not an adequate representation of what you'll be doing.

**Intensity:** Exercise at about 60 percent of maximum effort. Use the "talk test." If you are breathing so hard that you can't converse with a partner, you're working too hard—slow down a little. If your fitness is already high, you can exercise at a higher intensity. For a more in depth explanation on this and the rest of the FITT principle, go to [www.sport-fitness-advisor.com/fitt-principle.html](http://www.sport-fitness-advisor.com/fitt-principle.html).

**Time:** For a low-fitness individual, 20–30 minutes (not counting time for warm up and cool down) is sufficient to start, but as fitness improves increase to 45–60 minutes.

**Type:** Aerobic exercises should be "total-body"—involving the large muscle groups—and should be rhythmical and continuous in nature. Examples include running, walking, swimming, cycling, aerobics classes, and circuit training. Resistance exercises can include lifting weights, resistance bands, or exercises using body weight resistance.

## **Develop Aerobic Endurance**

A base of aerobic endurance is beneficial for all NOLS courses. For mountain courses, where hiking is the method of travel, endurance should be achieved with exercises using the lower body. One guideline is to be able to run 1.5 miles in 11 minutes or 5 miles in 40–55 minutes.

## **Improving Muscle Strength**

Strength conditioning focusing on the core muscles (muscles running the length of the torso) is beneficial for lifting and carrying backpacks and for generally withstanding the rigors of backcountry living. These muscles stabilize the spine, pelvis, and shoulder and provide a solid foundation for movement in the extremities. Core strengthening is achieved through body weight resistance exercises such as sit ups, push ups, pull ups; exercises using equipment such as medicine balls, balance balls, or balance boards; or using weights.

## **Flexibility**

Flexibility is also important and should involve stretching of all muscle groups. Stretch easy; don't bounce or over stretch. Maintain each stretch for 10–20 seconds and don't hold your breath or strain. You should feel tension, not pain.

## **Get Inspired**

Commit to being physically prepared for your course. Schedule a time for exercise and don't let it take second place to other activities or demands. We want to encourage, not intimidate you. NOLS courses are strenuous, but they are within the limits of a person in good physical condition. Being in shape will not guarantee you an easy time on your course, but it allows you to perform at your optimum level, recover from the physical stress faster, and allows you to focus on learning skills, gaining experience and enjoying the natural beauty of the wilderness and companionship of your fellow expedition members.

