

Course Description

Brooks Range Backpacking

- 23 and Over -

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route of approximately 50-60 miles
- Some layover days and day hikes
- Brown bear territory
- Elevations from near sea level to 7,000 feet
- Minimum age 23
- Average age 35
- Average group size: 10 students / 2 instructors
- Packs often weigh 50-60 pounds, depending on body weight
- Road and/or bush plane access
- Long periods of daylight
- Remote travel above the Arctic Circle

The Expedition

Alaska's Brooks Range—the classroom for this expedition—is one of the wildest mountain ranges in North America. Stretched across the tundra north of the Arctic Circle, this range is defined by big open river bottoms, steep mountain slopes, and expansive tundra: elevations range from sea level to over 7,000 feet. The mountains are spectacular and rugged and rivers flow through wilderness for hundreds of miles. It's possible that you will see Dall sheep, moose, caribou, wolves, black and grizzly bear, and lynx as you travel.

For 12 days, you'll backpack through these mountains surrounded by steep shale slopes, towering peaks and wide-open tundra. This expedition is by no means a vacation or a guided tour. It is a course, throughout which the instructors hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects that will enable you to travel in a mountain environment long after your course ends.

These skills begin with the basics—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques and sanitation—which are the foundation for backpacking anywhere.

As the course progresses, more advanced instruction will include wilderness navigation, map reading, first aid, plant and animal identification, fishing, natural history, geology, weather, environmental issues, and leadership. Expect to learn about a landscape shaped by Arctic influences, still largely untouched by humanity.

During your course, you'll live with two or three other participants in a “cook” group. These small groups help you disperse your impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. Travel days will be interspersed with rest days, providing time for exploration and wildlife observation. Those interested in fishing may have an opportunity to catch grayling and Arctic char.

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. Instructors may allow students to travel away from camp. Students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.



Independent Student Group Travel

An emphasis of this course is the development of skills that permit you to be self-sufficient in remote backcountry areas. Our teaching progression for accomplishing this is carefully planned and executed. Initially, travel groups of four to six students will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you gain proficiency, the instructor will allow you to take on more responsibility and make more of the decisions. When you have demonstrated the necessary competency to the instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for a day at a time as you go from camp to camp. We call this daily independent student travel and it is an effective educational tool. It allows you to practice travel skills and leadership and gives you responsibility for the outcome while still having indirect supervision by instructors and the benefit of the NOLS support systems.

Weather and Other Challenges

Summers above the Arctic Circle can defy everything you've ever assumed about "summer." The weather is as likely to be wet and cold as it is to be fair and pleasantly warm. Storms are not uncommon, for days at a time, and it can snow any time of the year. Poor weather may ground aircraft for several days, delaying access to and from this remote backcountry and perhaps jeopardizing scheduled travel plans.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. You'll hike cross-country with a heavy pack through a rugged but incomparable wilderness. You'll traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock and tundra, and grunt up high-mountain passes. The often marshy, uneven surface of the tundra can make hiking a real challenge. Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes. You'll practice bear camping techniques, which can mean having very little time to yourself, for this is grizzly country. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.

Bear avoidance techniques while camping and hiking will be integrated into your daily routine. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. To minimize risk, group size in brown bear country is generally four persons. You will live, travel and take care of personal necessities always with a group of your peers nearby. This is one the most challenging aspects of living in brown bear country. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence when moving through areas where visibility is poor.

Identifying and managing mountain hazards—rock fall, weather, animals, moving water and steep terrain—will be a constant theme in our instruction. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues, will help make your expedition in these wild mountains healthy and fun.

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 be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone and a ground-to-air or marine band radio) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

Fitness Recommendations

Almost continual daylight provides for long, busy days; your fitness goals should focus on being able to sustain a moderate level of exertion for hours on end rather than "quick sprint" fitness.

Focus on a well-rounded routine that emphasizes stamina, endurance, flexibility and strength. Finally, don't ignore the need for balance; this will serve you well in the moraine and boulder fields where the ability to quickly find your center of balance as you move from one step to the next will enable you to dance, rather than stumble your way through. For more information, please see the Physical Conditioning page of your enrollment packet.



Special Considerations

Please be aware that chronic knee and ankle ailments have been a source of problems in the past for some students. Opportunities for evacuation in this remote area are severely limited and may not be readily available. If you have a history of such problems, please contact us for an evaluation.

Course Objectives

Each course is unique, due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent that each participant accomplishes the following outcomes:

Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-making

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. Each participant is expected to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a mountain environment: e.g. river crossings, rock fall, and weather.
- Consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazards.
- Demonstrate first aid skills necessary to support a patient until help arrives.
- Demonstrate the ability to develop a contingency plan for a group in the outdoors.
- 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

At NOLS, our participants learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal health and care of the environment. Each participant is expected to:

- Dress appropriately for a variety of conditions; be punctual and organized.
- Cook nutritious meals using a camp stove or fire.
- Demonstrate appropriate campsite selection and shelter set-up.
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and/or compass skills.
- Utilize off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques to mitigate hazards.
- Employ sound bear camping techniques.
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of different river crossing techniques.
- Take responsibility for the care and organization of personal and group equipment.



Environmental Studies

An integral part of every course is to raise participants' awareness of their influence on ecosystems and their relationship with the world and others. Each participant is expected to:

- Consistently perform sound minimum-impact living and travel skills by following the Leave No Trace principles; be able to extrapolate this knowledge to new environments.
- Show an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area.
- Develop basic natural history observation and interpretive skills.
- Demonstrate basic knowledge and respect for local and regional native cultures.
- Discuss the history of and potential solutions to pertinent environmental problems.
- Demonstrate knowledge of public land management and discuss issues.
- Facilitate the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life.

Transfer of College Credit

NOLS cannot guarantee that credits from courses are transferable. Transfer of credits is at the discretion of the receiving school and depends on the comparability of curricula and accreditation.

