

Course Description

Pacific Northwest Trip Leader Course

Features Of This Course

- Trip leader basics
- Travel above and below timberline
- On and off-trail hiking
- Extensive snow travel on early season courses
- Techniques for planning and leading backpacking trips
- Average Group Size: 10 Students / 2 Instructors
- Typical Male/Female Ratio: 6/4
- Recommend that participants have basic first aid

The Expedition

Washington's Pasayten Wilderness is an ideal location for focusing on wilderness skills development. The Pasayten sits in the rain shadow of the North Cascades crest, which creates a drier climate more like the Rocky Mountains than the coastal rainforests of the Northwest. However, early season courses will still encounter rain or snow. Here you will travel through vast stands of Lodgepole Pine that give way to high mountain lakes as you gain altitude. For eight or nine days, this will be your classroom. You'll work hard traveling over steep, rocky terrain with all your gear on your back. And you will learn the skills to supervise travel in the mountains long after the end of your course.

These skills begin with the basics—camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques, and sanitation—skills that are the foundation for leading backpacking trips of your own. We will progress from these topics to such skills as off-trail travel, peak ascent and stream crossing. Depending on the snow conditions, ice axe use may be covered. In all these activities, tips and techniques on how to lead a group will be emphasized. Interpretive natural history including such topics as wildflowers, trees, mammals and weather will be covered in trailside "teachable moments," as time permits.

The Trip Leader Course prepares participants to lead backpacking trips. Technical rock climbing will not be covered. This course is not meant to be a certification nor a guide training course, but rather an opportunity for trip leaders with backcountry experience to come together to learn and share information about leading trips. Participants typically have diverse backgrounds and experience levels.

First aid training is necessary for outdoor leaders. We request that participants come to this course having prior certification of at least a basic first aid course. This background knowledge allows us to make the best use of our time in the backcountry, focusing on topics that are best learned there. Students should expect some opportunity to travel and navigate without instructors; prior first aid training is appropriate background for such travel.

Weather And Other Challenges

Mountain weather is fickle. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to T-shirt conditions. Courses may experience snow and rain or long stretches of sun and blue skies. Whether the Pacific Ocean is experiencing an El Nino or El Nina condition can be cause for large swings in weather patterns in the Pacific Northwest.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. You'll find yourself bushwhacking through thick forests or scrambling around refrigerator-sized boulders. Rivers are icy cold from snowmelt and can be hard or impossible to cross. Early season courses may camp and travel on snow for several days. You will traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock or grass, and trudge up high-mountain passes. Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes or hanging your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization; consequently, telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.

Identifying and managing mountain hazards—falling rock, weather, animals, moving water and steep terrain (risks that could result in injury or death)—will be a constant theme in our instruction. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition to these wild and beautiful 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, or satellite phones on NOLS Alaska 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.

Behavior On The Expedition

Each person's values, beliefs and actions affect those of the rest of the group -- balancing these is an important part of "expedition behavior". We want you to have a positive and safe learning environment. Therefore we expect all students to respect the values and beliefs of other members of the expedition. The best expedition members have positive attitudes, apply new skills and ideas at the first opportunity and come motivated to work hard with people they have never seen before. They care about others, put the welfare of the group up with their own, and understand that an expedition succeeds when all its members complete each day safely. To help ensure a safe and healthy environment for all, we ask that people not use tobacco products and NOLS will not tolerate harassment or the use of drugs and alcohol on any course. If you feel NOLS' staff or students are not respecting your values or beliefs, it is essential that you speak up so the issues are addressed.

Student Independence

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, usually 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 hike 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.

On all NOLS courses students will be independent (that is unaccompanied by instructors) at various times. This includes 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.

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 five areas:

Risk Management and Judgment

NOLS teaches backcountry leaders to practice responsible habits that promote the health and well being of self and others. We expect each student to:

- Consistently demonstrate awareness of the hazards in a mountain environment and know their own limits
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid hazards
- Formulate an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Use experience and developing judgment to implement sound decisions and follows them through to completion

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. We expect each student to:

- Work effectively as a member of a team, displaying a positive attitude despite hardship
- Effectively communicate ideas and concerns on an individual and group level
- Accurately identify personal strengths and areas for growth in developing outdoor leadership
- Take responsibility for learning through setting and attaining personal goals
- Take initiative in leadership roles with peers
- Respond to problem situations using decision-making and planning skills



- Display an awareness of group strengths and limitations

Outdoor Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal well-being and care of the environment. We expect each student to:

- Consistently minimize impact upon the environment while camping and traveling
- Live comfortably in a mountain environment by learning to camp, cook and dress for a variety of conditions.
- Travel competently in mountainous terrain using on and off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, backpacking, bushwhacking, and stream crossing techniques
- Participate in non-technical peak ascent(s)
- Display basic natural history observation and interpretive skills
- Demonstrate understanding of the fundamental preparations for a backcountry trip including: route planning, equipment outfitting and food rationing.

Environmental Ethics

One of the goals of this seminar is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. We expect each student to:

- Use basic observational and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding and respect for the course environment
- Reflect on the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life

