

Course Description

Patagonia Mountaineering

FEATURES OF THIS COURSE:

- Extreme and unpredictable weather
- Infrequently-traveled course routes
- Self-contained expedition
- Remote terrain; Evacuation difficult; up to more than a week's travel from medical facilities
- Thick bushwhacking and river crossings
- Emphasis on student leadership and responsibility
- Incredibly pristine high mountain areas
- Focus on mountain travel, technical climbing (skills covered are dependent on weather conditions) glacier travel and heavy weather camping skills
- Minimum Age: 18
- Average Group Size: 13 Students / 3 Instructors
- Strenuous off-trail travel with a heavy pack
- A diversity of potential expedition areas within the Patagonian Andes

The Expedition

This five-week mountaineering expedition travels in a remote mountain region of the Patagonia Andes and ice fields. Patagonia's northern and southern ice fields extend for hundreds of kilometers along the Patagonian Andes. They are the largest contiguous ice fields outside of Antarctica and Greenland. Within this immense stretch of remote, rugged mountains you'll embark on your mountaineering expedition in Patagonia. Here you'll travel for more than four weeks surrounded by steep mountains, snow, ice, expansive rivers and dense coastal forests. You'll learn the techniques of alpine and big-glacier mountaineering, off-trail travel, and heavy-weather camping—all the skills needed to carry out remote expeditions and explore rugged and little-known mountain terrain. This course will offer you the challenges of unknown terrain and fierce alpine weather, preparing you for travel in any mountain area in the world.

The region's remoteness and extreme weather keep most mountaineers away and leave many little-known glaciers and peaks for us to explore. However, exploration does not come without its price; few people have even been to our course areas. There are no established routes to follow, no guidebooks to read, and no predictable weather patterns to plan around. Given this inherent uncertainty, you must approach the expedition with a flexible attitude. Expect to be frustrated when debating decisions or confronting an unexpected challenge blocking your path, but also plan to gain appreciation for the importance of working together to overcome difficulties.

The Patagonia Mountaineering Expedition is an expedition in the truest sense. Once we depart from the NOLS base we will be self-sufficient until we leave the mountains some four and a half weeks later. We occasionally receive re-supplies from local "pobladores", or "gauchos" (locals who live in the backcountry in Patagonia), but the course generally has no re-supplies and many moves may require multiple carries (called "shuttling") of the same loads to transport our supplies and gear.

Our initial focus will be on mastering basic skills such as moving with a heavy pack, staying warm, cooking, securing a campsite, river crossings, bushwhacking and route finding. Outdoor living, travel, and expeditioning skills are practiced with an emphasis on minimizing environmental and cultural impact. During your course you'll live with two or three other students in a "cook" group. These small groups help disperse the impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living.

On the glaciers you'll learn to choose routes around crevasses and use rope systems to safeguard against hazards. Camping on snow-covered glaciers involves probing and marking a "safe zone" in which to un-rope, melting snow for water and cooking, and constructing snow walls to protect tents from strong winds. Some storms have been fierce enough to force the expedition to shelter in snow caves for many days at a time.



We'll also introduce basic mountaineering skills—rope handling, basic knots, belaying, ice axe use, rope teams, and glacier travel—as well as develop the judgment and experience required to travel in remote mountains where outside assistance is far away. More advanced skills such as crampon use, snow and ice protection placement, climbing techniques for snow and ice, and crevasse rescue may be practiced according to the progress of the student group, route considerations, and weather conditions. Successful expeditions often fail to reach their destination, or summit. It is what we learn and share throughout the expedition that will ultimately be important to our success.

On the final days of the expedition we will return to the valley bottoms and hone our route finding, river crossings, and bushwhacking. At the end of our expedition we will return to the NOLS Patagonia headquarters. The final day will be spent cleaning and repairing equipment and enjoying an *Asado*, which is the traditional barbecue.

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 by themselves depending on the terrain and the skill of the students. Away from the field, students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course starts.

Independent Student Group Travel

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. If your instructors think your group is ready and you have successfully completed some days of independent student travel, you may be divided into student expedition groups (usually three to six students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi-day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to five days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. The instructors with emergency communication capability may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Weather and Other Challenges

This is a demanding expedition. The Patagonian Andes and ice fields are known for their fierce alpine weather and steep, rugged terrain. You may be tent-bound or in a snow cave for days while storms rage around you. Conversely, you may also have to search for shade from a relentless sun reflecting off the glittering ice and snow. These varied conditions teach you to camp effectively in the most extreme conditions. Physical challenges will be compounded by the psychological challenge of working with a diverse group of people. In a close and potentially stressful living situation, it is important for each expedition member to contribute to positive group relations.

Given the isolated nature of this area, evacuation to medical facilities can take many days. We do carry advanced field communication technology; students should be aware that an evacuation from the backcountry can take up to at least a week, because weather, terrain, distance and other factors may impede or prevent communication and hamper transportation efforts. These factors make it a very real possibility that many days would pass before being able to reach medical facilities. During the course you'll learn how this remoteness affects your activities and how to deal with emergencies far from the help of civilization.

Preparing for a major expedition can be as exciting as the trip itself. You'll get the most out of your NOLS experience, and be able to give the most to others, if you begin your commitment now. This may take the form of reading books on Patagonia and mountaineering, taking Spanish lessons, studying maps to acquaint yourself with the area, or talking to others familiar with South America. Reading about other expeditions can provide insight into the challenges of extended trips to remote areas.

Our experience suggests that enthusiasm and commitment are the best defenses against the rigors of alpine travel. Arrive in good physical condition. Expect to push yourself and be ready to lend a hand to others. Come with an open mind ready to grasp educational opportunities that are distinct from your previous conceptions. Venturing into a little known region with the confidence and commitment to manage risks through sound judgment is one of the joys of remote mountain travel. If you are interested in learning skills and developing the judgment needed to organize and carry out your own expeditions, this expedition will be an exceptional experience for you.



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 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.

Patagonia Mountaineering Expedition 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.

Risk Management, Judgment and Decision-Making

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

- Actively participate as a group expedition member, always being attentive to the mountaineering hazards encountered by the expedition, including severe weather, travel through heavily vegetated valley systems, river crossings, heavily crevassed glaciers, rock and ice fall, steep terrain (ice, snow, rock, and vegetation), and avalanches
- Consistently demonstrate an awareness of personal limits in a mountain environment, with particular regard for the remoteness of the expedition
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid mountaineering hazards
- Demonstrate an ability to perform basic first aid procedures to support and possibly evacuate a patient
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow 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. Each student is expected to learn:

- **Expedition Behavior:** Demonstrate teamwork, respect for others and commitment to group decisions.
- **Vision and Action:** Demonstrate the ability to plan and implement course activities.
- **Communication:** Effectively communicate on interpersonal and group levels.
- **Judgment and Decision-Making:** Demonstrate good judgment and decision-making skills.
- **Self-Awareness:** Understand personal tendencies, strengths and weakness as a leader.
- **Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty:** Maintain a positive attitude and tolerance for adverse and uncertain conditions.
- **Competence:** Develop capacity in the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

Outdoor Skills

NOLS students learn to live and travel in mountains within a framework of personal responsibility and care for the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently minimize impact upon the environment while camping and traveling
- Live comfortably in a mountain environment, including the ability to camp, cook and dress for varied conditions with minimum impact
- Travel competently in mountain terrain; carry a pack of up to 70 lbs. while bushwhacking, crossing rivers, traveling on glaciers, and traversing steep terrain
- Learn technical mountaineering: display the basic skills in mountain travel, river crossings, snow camping, glacier travel, and crevasse rescue

Environmental Studies

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on and place in the natural world. Each student is expected to:

- Display basic natural history observational and interpretive skills specific to a mountain environment
- Demonstrate a basic knowledge and respect for local cultures
- Reflect on the transference of wilderness ethics and practices into daily personal and professional life

