

Course Description

Patagonia Backpacking & Fly Fishing

Features Of This Course:

- Backpacking in the Aysen Region of southern Patagonia, Chile
- Course duration: 14 days
- Hiking route of 40-60 km (25 to 35 miles)
- Both on- and off-trail travel along stream and river corridor routes
- Cross-country travel will experience a wide range of Patagonian vegetation types and habitats
- Dry fly, nymph and streamer fishing techniques will target brown and rainbow trout
- Maximum group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Average pack weight: approx. 45% of body weight, most packs between 45 – 65 lbs.
- The course is likely to have some horse support for group gear on selected moving days.
- There will be opportunities to interact with local, Spanish-speaking ranchers (a.k.a. “Pobladores.”)

The Expedition

You'll spend close to two weeks hiking and fly fishing in a series of remote valleys and water systems in southern Chile's Aysen Region. Because we're foot-powered, this wilderness hiking course takes advantage of small stream and large river trout fisheries that are impossible to reach by lodge-based fishing. Approximately half of the days will be travel days, continually establishing new camps adjacent to fresh sections of trout-rich, clear-water, freestone streams. At times, we'll spend travel days fishing "on the go." Hiking days will vary between two and ten kilometers of distance up and down river valleys. Layover days provide time for classes that range through the NOLS core curriculum of basic outdoor living and travel skills; leadership, expedition behavior, hazard awareness and risk management, environmental and cultural awareness discussions as well as plenty of fishing instruction and practice.

During the course you'll live with two to four other students in a “cook group.” These small groups help disperse our impact on the land and enable you to develop the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six people, again to disperse impact, to lessen fishing pressures on the water, and to enhance learning opportunities.

Further educational focus will address the full range of fly-fishing skills and experience appropriate to the fish habitat and behavior we encounter on our route. We'll customize our fishing progression based on individual students' skill base and previous experience. Classes will range from introductory topics such as equipment selection and set-up, knots, casting technique, and playing and landing fish, to advanced classes on fish habitat and behavior, aquatic and terrestrial food sources for trout, fish anatomy, surface and subsurface fishing techniques, and catch and release ethics.

Participants will also learn and practice a range of backpacking and hiking techniques. Skills such as map reading, river crossing, camp set-up, backcountry cooking trail techniques, and leadership will balance our fishing time. Our route traverses trails, steep hillsides, open steppe, thick vegetation, and river bottoms.

This is Chile— so we'll also infuse as much local culture as we can. There will be several chances to practice Spanish with local ranching families as we visit their homes, share hot drinks and connect with them as horse packers.

This expedition is by no means a vacation or a guided tour. It is an educational experience focusing on two broad curriculum elements: fly fishing and backpacking. Throughout the course the instructors will hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects applicable to your experience. The interests, strengths and composition of your group will also add a unique element to the course. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback, with written performance evaluations at the end.

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. Before their course starts and afterwards, students often have independent unsupervised time in town..

Environment, Weather and Other Considerations

The course route has been chosen to take advantage of the rain-shadow effect of the eastern side of the southern Andes mountain range. The land is typically broad, sparsely vegetated, desert steppe, the fiefdoms of huge, traditional sheep-ranching *estancias*. As we move away from a little traveled spur of the *Carretera Austral* (the Southern Patagonian Highway) we'll leave behind many signs of human habitation heading into the old-growth forest and thick under-story vegetation of the mountain foothills.

Late March in this part of the world is late summer—analogous to the end of August in North America. Daylight hours are long at the 45th parallel of latitude. Temperatures should be mild, ranging from nighttime 40F's to daytime 70F's. This part of the world, even in late summer, is known for wildly variable weather - expect and be prepared for, everything from days of intense sunshine to wet/windy storms that can last for several days.

While scouting efforts have found abundant populations of brown and rainbow trout and the course instructors are passionate and experienced anglers, this will be, at the end, a remote backpacking and fishing expedition. As on other courses in Patagonia, a positive, open and hard-working attitude on the part of all members of the expedition will be the key to success as we encounter the inevitable uncertainties, adversity and unexpected changes in plan. We can't guarantee that you'll catch huge trout, but we can promise that we'll provide the instruction and opportunity to catch some amazing fish.

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.

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.

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 hazards encountered by the expedition, including severe weather, travel through heavily vegetated valley systems, river crossings, and wading in strong current
- Consistently demonstrate an awareness of personal limits in a mountain river environment, with particular regard for the remoteness of the expedition
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid hazards
- Demonstrate an 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

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:

- **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:** Master the wilderness living and travel skills of this course.

Outdoor Living Skills

NOLS students learn to live and travel in mountains within a framework of personal well-being 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 river environment, including the ability to camp, cook and dress for varied conditions with minimum impact
- Travel competently in mountain terrain; carry a pack of approximately 45-65 lbs. while bushwhacking, crossing rivers, and traversing steep terrain
- Learn fly fishing techniques and skills: display the basic skills in assembling the equipment, casting, reading the water, and catching and releasing fish

Environmental Ethics

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 river 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