

# Course Description

## Wyoming Backpacking Adventure

### For 14 & 15 Year Olds

#### Features Of This Course:

- Ages: 14-15 only
- On and off-trail hiking
- Travel near or above tree line
- Introduction to rock climbing
- Peak ascents
- Average pack weight: 50 pounds
- Hiking route: ~ 75 miles
- Elevations of 7,000' - 13,000'
- Many boulder fields to negotiate
- Good fishing
- Average group size: 8 students / 2 instructors - *or* - 12 students / 3 instructors
- Course length: 30 days

#### The Expedition

The Big Horn, Beartooth, and Wind River mountains are the sites for the Wyoming Backpacking Adventure courses for 14-15 year olds. For 28 days, you'll backpack through these mountains surrounded by steep granite walls, towering peaks, glittering alpine lakes, and perennial snow. All three ranges are known for their fishing, wildflowers, and dramatic scenery. You may see deer, elk, moose, bighorn sheep, or even bears. You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain with all of your gear on your back, but you will play hard as well. And, you will learn the skills you need to travel through the mountains long after the end of your expedition.

You'll spend the first week of the course getting used to your pack, the elevation, and all the new skills you'll be learning. We start with the basics of camping, cooking, sanitation, stove use, *Leave No Trace* techniques, and map reading. Later, when you are ready, we move into more advanced topics: fly fishing, compass use, rock climbing, basic mountaineering, first aid, expedition behavior, and leadership. You may even find yourself talking about constellations and astronomy as you lay out under a sky crowded with stars.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a "cook group" during the course. These small groups help disperse our impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn these new skills. Before you know it, you'll be savoring homemade pizza and cinnamon rolls—gourmet delicacies that you made from scratch on a single-burner stove. On Adventure courses, tent groups will be single gender, but cook groups might be co-ed.

You will also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor, but later — once you know the intricacies of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation—students often travel on their own. NOLS courses are designed for you to learn through experience. Your instructors are there to train, supervise, and provide feedback and advice. Ultimately, however, what you take away from the course depends on what you practice.

NOLS takes great pride in providing quality experiential education on all courses. Expeditions, unlike traditional classrooms, are influenced by weather, terrain, and the characteristics of the individuals involved. Accordingly, NOLS courses are not fully scripted and this quality is the key ingredient in experiential education. Given the variables that affect all NOLS courses, the depth of topic coverage will vary from course to course.



Adventure course students often hike three out of every four days. Backpacking in small hiking groups lets you learn to lead and travel while moving through beautiful wilderness. Hiking days usually begin early when you start your stove, cook breakfast, organize and pack your pack, and enjoy breakfast. You're usually traveling by mid-morning. Lunch on the trail might be bread you baked the day before, cheese, crackers, or a trail mix of nuts and dried fruits. You may stop for a short class on natural history, or to learn how to cross a river, travel over boulders or snow, or traverse a high pass. When you arrive at your new camp location, you'll first spend time choosing a Leave No Trace site and organizing camp, then you'll prepare a well-deserved dinner. If the day was long, a short evening meeting may wrap it up. If the hike was short, there may be a class or discussion after dinner.

The difficulty of any given day is hard to predict. Long miles on trail may be physically easier than high mountain passes or a day hiking through boulders and fallen timber in a wilderness without trails. Your pack may be lighter than usual as you approach a food re-supply day, or you may be carrying extra gear to lighten the load of a course mate who is not feeling well. The wilderness has a knack for finding challenges for all.

You'll occasionally have a layover day to rest, enjoy a beautiful location, attend a class, do some top-rope climbing, fish, or climb a peak. A highlight of many Bighorn trips is an ascent of Bomber Mountain to check out the remains of a B17 Flying Fortress that crashed during World War II, or an attempt at Cloud Peak, the highest peak in the Bighorns. In the Wind's, students often highlight climbing Raid Peak or fishing in the high mountain streams. After breakfast and camp organization, there may be a class or an expedition to go climbing or fishing. Lunch may be something you cook—layover days are great times to bake for the next day's travel. The evening plan may include a class, a discussion, or an organizational meeting.

Expedition behavior and leadership will be an important part of the course curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bring a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other members, and a willingness to work hard. As your group gains leadership skills and experience working together, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for leading yourself and your peers.

These courses have an effective instructor to student ratio (5:1 or less) to provide coaching and supervision. You should expect ongoing verbal feedback and advice throughout the course, with written performance summaries at course end.

### **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 or ends.

### **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 will include an instructor who teaches travel skills and leadership. Gradually, as you and your course mates 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 believe it is an effective educational tool. Independent student travel 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.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. If your instructors think your group is ready after sufficient practice with independent daily travel, they will help you divide 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 four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp throughout their separate expeditions. During this time, 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**

Mountain weather is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and can be violent. You may experience snow, hail, and rain, as well as long stretches of sunny, blue skies.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Early season courses may spend most of their time camping on snow and using snowshoes to travel. Other times, you'll bushwhack through thick forests or scramble around boulders the size of refrigerators. Rivers are icy from snowmelt and can be difficult or impossible to cross. You'll traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock, or grass, and grunt up high-mountain passes. There will be times when you will wish you were somewhere else, but the hard work is worth it. There's nothing quite like taking your pack off at the top of a pass, feeling the wind dry the sweat off your back, and looking down at miles of new country opening up before you. It's exhilarating!

Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes and using an electrified bear fence or hanging your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.

Bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling may be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. Bear avoidance tactics include protecting food from bears, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence.

Identifying and managing mountain hazards — falling rock, weather, animals, moving water, and steep terrain will be a constant theme in our instruction. Managing risks and being responsible 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. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices including personal tracking devices (e.g. SPOT), while in the field. Additionally, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc). Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone) 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 with these variables, it is our intent to accomplish the following outcomes.

## **Risk Management and Judgment**

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

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a mountain environment, e.g., rockfall, weather, river crossings, etc.
- Consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Demonstrate the first aid skills necessary to support a patient until help arrives
- Demonstrate the ability to develop an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self-limits



## **Leadership and Expedition Behavior**

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, a positive attitude, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

- Actively participate in the decision-making process
- Take responsibility for the health and well being of self and others
- Demonstrate sound expedition behavior, including commitment to group decisions and a positive attitude
- Effectively communicate and problem solve on interpersonal and group levels
- Show initiative in leadership/teaching roles with peers
- Employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role
- Work effectively as a team member
- Take responsibility for learning; set and attain personal goals
- Assist in planning and participate in a student-led, multi-day small group expedition

## **Outdoor Skills**

At NOLS, our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal well being and care for the environment. Each student 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
- Use basic spin and fly fishing techniques
- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope handling techniques
- Move through technical terrain with strength and agility

## **Environmental Studies**

Students develop an awareness of how to apply *Leave No Trace* ideas to their lives beyond the course. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently perform sound *Leave No Trace* living and travel skills and be able to apply this knowledge to new environments
- Show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area
- Discuss the history of and potential solutions to pertinent environmental problems
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and discuss means to be involved in issues of interest

**As a result of this course, we expect our students to be competent and responsible wilderness travelers and leaders.**

