

Course Description

Lightweight Backpacking

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: 80-100 miles
- Average hiking day 10-12 miles
- Average group size: 8-12 students / 2 instructors
- Average pack weight: 25-30 lbs. (includes food, water, fuel, group and personal gear)
- Minimum age: 23
- Average age: 35
- On and off-trail hiking
- Field days: 13
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Elevations of 8,000'- 12,000'

The Expedition

Partnering with **GoLite**, NOLS offers the first authentic lightweight backpacking course in the world of outdoor education. The goal of this course is to responsibly camp and travel in a mountain environment with the lightest backpack possible while hiking significant mileage. NOLS is a school, and we will be teaching the essentials of lightweight camping. As mentioned in your equipment list, this adventure will start in the equipment room as you and your instructors examine, select and fit your lightweight gear and prepare your food for the expedition. Then the real fun begins—"shaving" the ounces. How light can you go?

Please be aware this is a specialized expedition focusing on a unique type of wilderness travel. By necessity, we will scrutinize *every* item that goes into the backpack. The goal is to carry a backpack weighing less than 25-30 pounds (this includes food, water, fuel, personal and group gear).

The expedition will travel in Wyoming's Wind River, Absaroka, or Bighorn Mountains. These areas are renowned for their sheer granite walls and breathtaking scenery. For 13 days, you'll backpack through these mountains surrounded by towering peaks, glistening alpine lakes, wild flowers and perennial snow. You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain both on and off-trail, but you'll play hard as well. You'll learn essential skills like cooking one-pot meals, backcountry navigation and staying warm and dry with a minimum amount of gear. Ultimately, you'll learn the skills you need to travel light and efficiently in the mountains long after your course ends.

This course begins with the basics: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Eventually, the curriculum will move on to more advanced topics that range from ecological concepts to environmental issues and plant and animal identification. You'll be divided into groups of two to four people for cooking and camping, receiving valuable coaching from your instructors while learning new skills.

You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. Later in the course, your group may travel on it's own. NOLS courses are designed for learning to take place through experience. This is not a guided tour or a vacation from responsibility.

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. Tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for others, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to both individual and group success.

You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the expedition, with written performance evaluations at course 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. Away from the field, students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after 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 extreme. You may experience snow, hail, and rain, as well as long stretches of sunny, blue skies.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Sometimes 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 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, such as maintaining cleanliness at cooking sites, isolating food and other attractants, and making loud noises while hiking will be integrated into this course. Note that precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for individual solitude and privacy.

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 course mates 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:

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; model effective teamwork
- Employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role
- Take responsibility for learning; set and attain personal goals

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
- Pack only the essentials for light and efficient backcountry travel
- Cook nutritious single-pot 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
- Be able to assemble and use fly fishing gear

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 varied settings
- Show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; identify characteristic flora and fauna of the area
- Discuss the history of pertinent environmental problems and offer potential solutions
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and discuss the means to be involved in issues of interest

