

Course Description

Rocky Mountain Outdoor Educator – Backpacking & Rock Climbing

Features Of This Course:

- Designed for aspiring outdoor educators
- On and off-trail hiking
- Trip duration: 23 days
- Backpacking for 17 days
- Rock climbing for 4 days
- Minimum age: 18
- Average age: 29
- Excellent opportunity for wildlife and natural history study
- Hiking route: ~ 70 miles
- Elevations of 9,000' - 12,000'
- Average pack weight: 60 pounds
- Grizzly bear habitat
- Average group size: 12-15 students / 3 instructors

The Expedition

The rugged Northern Rockies are the classroom for this expedition. They will be your home for 23 days. The traveling portion is a self-reliant expedition that backpacks in remote wilderness areas of Montana's Beartooth Range, Wyoming's Wind River Range, or Wyoming's Absaroka Mountain Range for 17 days. The remaining four days are spent rock climbing in either the Beartooths or the Wind River Range.

The same volcanic activity that formed Yellowstone's geyser basins and hot springs created the Absarokas. Deeply carved canyons snake through these mountains. The Beartooth and Wind River Mountains are glacier-carved ranges of granite peaks and broad valleys, punctuated by numerous lakes and rivers. Elevations range from 8,000 to greater than 12,000 feet, with timberline at about 11,000 feet. No roads and few developed trails exist. These ranges support lush vegetation and large populations of elk, deer, moose, bighorn sheep, and are home to black and grizzly bears.

You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain with all of your gear on your back, crossing rivers, and keeping yourself and others warm and well fed. You'll also enjoy learning to fly fish, identifying plants and wildlife, climbing a peak, and taking in the spectacular vistas of this mountain wilderness. You'll learn the skills you need to travel in the mountains long after your course ends. Your 4-day climbing section will introduce the skills necessary for setting up and managing a top rope site competently and effectively.

Your course will begin with basic camping and travel techniques: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, *Leave No Trace* techniques, and practices for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat. Once you gain comfort and confidence, you'll move on to more advanced instruction on topics that range from first aid to trout fishing and from rock climbing to expedition behavior. Additionally, you will be encouraged to observe and discuss different teaching styles and techniques, and should expect to teach a class yourself.

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.

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.



Backpacking in small groups lets us learn to lead and travel as we move through beautiful wilderness. The day begins early when you start your stove, cook breakfast, organize and pack your pack, and enjoy breakfast. We're usually hiking by mid-morning. Lunch on the trail might be bread you baked the day before, summer sausage, 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 across boulders or snow, or move across a high pass. When you arrive at your new camp location, you'll first spend time choosing a Leave No Trace site, organizing camp, then preparing and enjoying dinner. If the day was long, a short evening meeting may wrap up the day. If the hike was short, a class or discussion may be on the agenda. Between wilderness backpacking, classes, discussions, and the climbing camp, educator's courses can be very busy.

The difficulty of the 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 of finding challenges for all.

You'll occasionally have a layover day to rest, enjoy a beautiful location, teach a class, or climb a peak. After breakfast and camp organization, there may be a class or a fishing expedition. 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 for the next day's travel.

You will travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. 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 learn depends on what you practice.

Expedition Behavior and leadership are an integral part of our 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. 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. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback during the course, with written performance evaluations at the 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 between sections or semesters.

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, 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 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.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition, however given the relatively short nature of the hiking section this is not always a component of this course. If deemed appropriate and time allows, the Student Expedition will come after successful practice with daily independent student travel. If your instructors think your group is ready, 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 three days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each Student Expedition group will carry an emergency communication device that will allow students to initiate an emergency response in the event of a serious



emergency. In most cases students will have a personal locator beacon, but in some situations they will have a satellite phone, cell phone, radio or possibly another type of device. The instructors with a satellite phone, or additional 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.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the student expedition (or optional solo if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities the students may chose to fast during the student expedition (or optional solo). Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

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 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 hiking will be integrated into your daily routine. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. To minimize risk, group size in bear country is generally four persons. You will live and travel in a group. This is a challenging aspect of living in grizzly bear country. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence when moving through areas where visibility is poor.

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

We expect Outdoor Educator Course graduates to be competent and responsible wilderness leaders and travelers familiar with NOLS' outdoor education techniques and philosophies. They should be able to supervise novices during a basic wilderness experience. 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 that each student 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
- 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
- Provide effective oral and written feedback

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
- Understand and execute techniques for hiking and camping in bear habitat
- Demonstrate a thorough understanding of elementary climbing systems including knots, rope handling, and belaying
- Competently build simple top-rope and rappel anchors
- Understand the principles and management of competent top-rope and rappel site selection

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 pertinent environmental problems and offer potential solutions
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and discuss the means involved in issues of interest

Climbing Skills

Your 4-day climbing section will introduce basic skills needed to help manage a top-rope climbing site. Activities and classes may include:

- Top-rope belay technique, communication, and basic safety techniques
- Placing artificial protection
- Building natural and gear top rope anchors
- Rappelling
- 3rd and 4th class terrain management
- Practices for managing novices in the top rope crag environment

