

# Course Description

## Rocky Mountain Outdoor Educator

### - Backpacking & Wilderness First Responder (WFR) -

#### Features Of This Course:

- Designed for aspiring outdoor educators
- On and off-trail hiking
- Trip duration: 30 days
- Minimum age: 18
- Average age: 29
- Excellent wildlife viewing and natural history opportunities
- WFR certification
- Hiking route: ~ 70 miles
- Elevations of 9,000' – 12,000'
- Backpacking: 27 days
- 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 30 days. The hiking portion is a self-reliant expedition that backpacks in remote wilderness areas of Wyoming's Wind River or Absaroka Mountain Ranges.

The same volcanic activity that formed Yellowstone's geyser basins and hot springs created the Absarokas. Deeply carved canyons snake through these mountains. The Wind River Mountains are a glacier-carved range of granite peaks and broad valleys, punctuated by numerous lakes and rivers. Altitudes range from 8,000 feet to greater than 12,000 feet, with timberline being near 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 both 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 course will begin at our Noble Hotel in Lander, Wyoming in order to cover the basics of the Wilderness First Responder medical curriculum. You will then move to the wilderness classroom and begin with the basics of wilderness living and travel: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, practices for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat, and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Once you gain comfort and confidence, you'll move on to more advanced instruction on topics that range from leadership 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 light your stove, cook and enjoy breakfast, and then organize and pack your pack. Following a class, 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 will be on the agenda. Between wilderness backpacking, classes, discussions, and WFR curriculum, 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 for finding challenges for all. You'll occasionally have a layover day to rest, enjoy a beautiful location, teach a class, or climb a peak.

You will travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor, but once you know the intricacies of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, student groups 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 also expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback during the expedition, with written performance summaries at course end. Integrating this curriculum with the Wilderness First Responder creates a unique blend of wilderness skills, leadership and medicine, as well as a busy academic schedule. You should expect several hours of classes or medical scenarios daily as you travel through the wilderness.

### **Wilderness First Responder**

Your course will include Wilderness First Responder certification, a nationally recognized program that trains participants to respond to emergencies in remote settings. It's the required certification for NOLS instructors and many other outdoor leaders and guides.

The 80-hour curriculum taught by the Wilderness Medicine Institute of NOLS includes patient assessment, basic life support, and the recognition, prevention and management of traumatic, medical and environmental emergencies. The wilderness medical theme will include topics such as wound management and infection, realigning fractures and dislocations, improvised splinting techniques, patient monitoring and long-term management problems and up-to-date information on all environmental emergencies. Emphasis is placed on prevention and decision-making, not the memorization of lists.

This curriculum is designed specifically to provide you with the tools to make critical medical and evacuation decisions in remote locations. Half of your time will be spent completing practical skills, case studies and scenarios designed to challenge your decision-making abilities. The first three days of the course will be in town or a base camp setting so we can focus on essential WFR skills. The remainder of the curriculum is taught in the field as class and practical exercises throughout the backpacking trip. Adult and Child CPR is included in the course.

### **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.



## **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 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 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. If deemed appropriate by your instructors, the Student Expedition will come after successful practice with daily independent student travel and after covering an array of curriculum including navigation, risk management, first aid, and Emergency Procedures. If your instructors think your group is ready, they will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually four to seven 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. 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. 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. Note that precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. To minimize risk, group size in bear country is four persons and you will always camp 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, and hiking with bear spray.

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 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 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

### **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

