

# Course Description

## Rock Climbing

### - 30 Day -

#### Features of this Course:

- Extensive rock climbing curriculum
- Includes basic rescue skills
- Potential to lead and multi-pitch climb
- 12-14 hiking days; 16-18 climbing/base camping days
- Grizzly bear habitat
- Course length: 30 days
- Introduction to wilderness living and travel
- Average group size: 12-15 students / 3-4 instructors
- Average pack weight: 50-65 pounds

#### The Expedition

This 30-day expedition takes place in Wyoming's Wind River Range, blending rock climbing with all the fundamental outdoor skills required to live comfortably and efficiently in the wilderness. The Wind River Range is a rugged, glacier-carved range renowned for its sheer granite and famous for climbing. Surrounded by steep rock walls, towering peaks, and perennial snow, you'll spend 30 days camping and climbing on this course.

You'll begin your course by hiking through the forested foothills into the mountains. During this time, as you get used to your pack, the elevation, and new skills, we'll introduce you to basic wilderness living and traveling skills—cooking, camping, stove use, practices for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat, *Leave No Trace* techniques, and map reading.

Once in the mountains and close to good rock, you'll establish camps from which you'll base your climbing activities for five to six days at a time. Then you'll step into the vertical world. You'll learn about knots, rope handling, belaying, protection placement, anchor building, and rappelling. You'll spend hours on the rock learning to dance up face climbs or jam your way up cracks. There will be climbs that you'll find easy, and ones that you'll believe are impossible. Climbing is a perfect way to push your limits, develop your composure, build strength, and have fun.

After you've spent time top-roping, you'll be introduced to more advanced climbing. Topics include vertical-cliff rescue, fixed-line ascension, aid climbing, the fundamentals of lead climbing, and multi-pitching. You may also get to follow an instructor up "multi-pitch" climbs that are several hundred feet long and take most — or all — of the day to complete.

During your course, you'll live with two or three other students in a "cook group." 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.

You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Typically, these groups will include an instructor, but later in your course — once you know the intricacies of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, students may 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 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.

You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback 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, 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. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors 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 2 to 4 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.

## **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 quite violent. Courses may experience snow and rain, as well as sunny blue skies.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. You may bushwhack off-trail through thick forests or scramble around refrigerator-sized boulders. There may be times when you will wish you were somewhere else, but the hard work is worth it!

Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes and hanging your food or using portable electric fences 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.

To learn rock climbing, you will climb and rappel on or above sheer granite cliffs where loose rock and steep terrain require precise movement. You must master rope and protection systems to minimize the danger of falling. Unforeseen changes in weather can be especially hazardous if you are in the middle of a climb where the possibility of retreat is limited. Weather can preclude climbing all together. Rain or snow may drive you to your tent or out fishing instead of climbing. Flexibility is key to any trip in the mountains.

Bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling will be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. To minimize risk, group size in bear country is generally 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, 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 assuming responsibility for yourself and your peers will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful 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**

Each student is expected to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a technical climbing and mountain setting, e.g., rockfall, weather, river crossings, recognition of technical terrain, etc.
- Consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Demonstrate the ability to develop an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Demonstrate basic self-rescue and cliff evacuation techniques
- Make sound judgments regarding personal and group climbing and travel abilities; know own 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
- Contribute to a supportive atmosphere; respond positively to individual and group needs
- Consistently display effective teamwork; participate in the planning and execution of multi-pitch climbs
- Show initiative in leadership/teaching roles with peers; set positive example, share knowledge
- 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
- Cook nutritious meals using a camp stove or fire
- Demonstrate appropriate campsite selection and shelter set-up; minimize impact at base camp and climbing sites
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and compass skills
- Utilize off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques to minimize hazards
- \* Understand and execute techniques for hiking and camping in bear habitat

## **Climbing Technique & Movement**

Students are exposed to a wide variety of climbing techniques, coaching and practice. Most students see their skills improve dramatically. Each student is expected to:

- Use varied and appropriate climbing techniques for crack, face, friction, etc.
- Display balance, precise footwork, adequate strength
- Demonstrate the ability to remain composed and relaxed on exposed terrain during difficult moves

## **Technical Skills**

Accomplishment of some of these objectives is particularly weather dependent:

- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope handling techniques
- Consistently display effective belaying techniques using appropriate methods for varied circumstances
- Competently set up and use a variety of rappel methods, e.g., carabiner brake and belay device
- Effectively and safely follow multi-pitch climbs; comprehend techniques and systems



- Efficiently place and remove artificial protection
- Display the ability to construct natural anchors and artificial anchors
- Demonstrate an understanding of lead climbing theory.

### **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 *Leave No Trace* living and traveling skills; be able to extrapolate knowledge to new environments
- Show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna
- Discuss the history of pertinent environmental concerns/ issues and offer potential solutions
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and discuss the means involved in issues of interest

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

