

Course Description

Wind River Mountaineering

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: ~ 75 miles
- Elevations of 10,000' - 13,000'
- Excellent rock climbing
- Opportunity for fishing
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Average age: 20
- Minimum age: 16
- Travel mostly above tree-line
- Combination of on and off-trail hiking
- Some snow and ice climbing
- Possible technical peak ascents
- Average pack weight: 50-65 pounds
- Course length: 30 days

The Expedition

The Wind River Range, site of this expedition, is a rugged, glacier-carved mountain range renowned for its sheer granite walls and superb climbing. These are perfect mountains for learning mountaineering skills. There are sweeping expanses of rock to climb, perennial snowfields to glissade, and even glaciers to traverse.

For 28 days, you'll backpack through the Winds moving from one climbing area to another. You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain, crossing rivers, and keeping yourself and others warm and well fed. The skills you gain and the friendships you form during the early days of the course will serve as a foundation for your focus: mountaineering. Once you have basic outdoor living skills mastered, you'll move into the climbing curriculum beginning with knots, rope handling, climbing movement, and belaying. You'll spend time practicing these techniques on short cliffs near camp. As your experience builds, you may move on to longer, technical climbs. Non-technical peak ascents are also an option. You can expect to be moving before dawn on these days. "Alpine starts" will help you avoid afternoon thunderstorms on exposed ridges and summits.

If you choose to take a course in the beginning of the summer—June through early July—you can expect to learn snow climbing as well as rock climbing techniques. Snow work involves everything from ice axe use and self-arrests to step cutting and front-point climbing in crampons. Late summer courses—the end of July through August—will encounter less snow in the mountains. This means these courses spend more time rock climbing, traveling over glaciers, and mixed climbing on old snow, ice and rock. Please call the NOLS admission office for more information regarding specific route and climbing techniques.

During your course, you will 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 will travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. However, once students have learned the intricacies of map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, they often travel without instructors. NOLS courses are designed for learning to take place through experience. Your instructors are there to train, supervise, and provide feedback and advice, but ultimately, 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 input during the expedition, with written evaluations 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.

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 up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. However, 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 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 will be integrated into this course. Note that precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. We will protect all food and attractants from bears. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls while hiking to warn bears of our 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 that each student accomplishes 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 a contingency 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; work effectively as a team member
- Employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role
- 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

Mountaineering Skills

Students learn a wide range of skills to allow them to negotiate technical terrain in a mountainous setting. Each student is expected to:

- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope handling techniques
- Demonstrate consistency with fourth and fifth class belays employing varied friction sources
- Demonstrate appropriate climbing techniques on rock, snow, and mixed terrain
- Demonstrate the ability to remain composed and thoughtful in difficult and exposed terrain
- Competently build simple top-rope and rappel anchors
- Responsibly and efficiently follow multi-pitch climbs and use a variety of descent techniques
- Effectively use the ice axe for snow travel and self-arrest

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; identify characteristic flora and fauna of the area
- Demonstrates a knowledge of public land management and discusses the means to be involved in issues of interest

