

Course Description

Wind River Wilderness

Learning Outcomes for this Course

The foundation of the Wind River Wilderness course is to prepare students to: assume leadership roles in their lives through excellent teamwork, communication, and expedition behavior; live and travel in mountain environments while applying the outdoor skills practiced on this course; connect with natural places that enrich their lives and foster a strong environmental ethic; and apply effective decision-making tools to real world problems. The following course features define the likely activities that will support this learning:

Features Of This Course:

- Hiking route: ~ 100 miles
- Elevations of 8,000' – 13,000'
- World-class fishing
- Potential opportunities for rock climbing and/or snow travel
- Minimum age: 16
- Average age: 19 (Except for 16 and 17- only courses)
- Travel near or above tree-line
- On and off-trail hiking
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Average group size: 12-15 students / 2-3 instructors
- Course length: 30 days
- Average pack weight: 40-50 pounds
- Peak ascents

The Expedition

The Wind River Wilderness is *the* quintessential NOLS course. More than 40 years ago, this was the course that launched the school. Today, this course still provides an excellent all-around introduction to mountain travel in the same wilderness setting that was handpicked by Paul Petzoldt back in 1965. If you are looking for a course that provides all the skills you need to travel in the mountains in the future, this is the one for you.

The Wind River Range is the classroom for our wilderness course. It is a rugged, glacier-carved range renowned for its sheer granite walls and famous for fishing and climbing. For 28 days, you will backpack in these mountains surrounded by towering peaks, glistening alpine lakes, and perennial snow. You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain, crossing rivers, and keeping yourself and others warm and well fed in a mountain storm. You'll also learn how to fly fish, rock climb, identify plants and wildlife, and climb peaks to take in the spectacular vistas of this mountain wilderness.

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. Eventually, the curriculum will move on to more advanced instruction on topics that range from first aid to trout fishing, from GPS navigation to expedition behavior, and from discussing environmental issues to identifying plants and animals.

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.

You will also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. However, once students have learned map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, they often travel on their own. NOLS courses are designed for the 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.

Expeditions, unlike a college or high school classroom, are influenced by weather, terrain, and the group's health, as well as its skills, experience, and ability. We can't script our courses as precisely as your school, but to give you a sense of the experience,



we'll describe what your days might be like.

Wilderness courses often hike three out of every four days. You'll travel in small hiking groups so you have more opportunities to lead, make decisions, and map read as you move through beautiful wilderness. The days begin early when you light your stove, cook and enjoy breakfast, and then organize and pack your pack. You're usually hiking by mid-morning. Lunch on the trail might be bread you baked the day before, 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 through boulders or snow, or move over 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, there may be a class or discussion.

The difficulty of a hiking 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 special location, have classes, or climb a peak. On these layover days, after breakfast and organizing camp, there may be a class or an excursion to go climbing or fishing. Lunch may be something cooked—layover days are great times to bake for the next day's travel. The evening plan may hold a class, a discussion, or an organizational meeting.

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 input throughout the expedition, with written performance 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. 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.

All NOLS courses are different given the variability of weather and conditions. The activities we choose will depend on the conditions we experience, but every weather variable and condition provides some opportunity for learning. As an example, while early season snow may make rock climbing less realistic, it provides more opportunity for learning how to snow climb. Recognize that what YOU learn on your course will depend on the weather and seasonal conditions, the group, and many other expedition variables. The foundation of a NOLS expedition is learning from the experiences you face.

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 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 generally four persons. You will live and travel in a group. This is a challenging aspect of living in grizzly bear country. This course will protect all food and attractants from bears. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your 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 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 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
- 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

Outdoor Skills

At NOLS, our students learn to live and travel in the wilderness within a framework of personal well being and care of 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
- Experience basic spin and fly fishing techniques
- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope handling techniques
- Effectively self-arrest and travel on snow

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
- 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

At the conclusion of this course, we expect our students to be competent and responsible wilderness travelers and leaders.

