

# Course Description

## Wind River Wilderness

### - 40 & Over -

#### Features Of This Course:

- Hiking Route: ~ 40 miles
- Elevations of 8,000' - 12,000'
- Good fishing
- Average age: 43
- Minimum age: 40
- Average group size: 12 students / 2 instructors
- Trip duration: 13 Days
- Pack horse support
- On and off-trail hiking
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Average pack weight: 45 lbs.

#### The Expedition

The Wind River Range is the site of this expedition. It is a rugged, glacier-carved range renowned for its sheer granite walls and famous for its fishing. For 13 days, you'll backpack through these mountains surrounded by towering peaks, glistening alpine lakes, and perennial snow. You'll work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain both on and off-trail, but you'll play hard as well. Ultimately, you'll learn the skills you need to travel in the mountains long after your course ends.

The big difference between this course and our other backpacking expeditions is that it has been designed specifically for working adults or adults with families who want a two-week expedition instead of 30 days. We've focused our curriculum, added horse support to keep pack weights down, and set an age limit so you can enjoy a wilderness adventure that fits your schedule and needs. You'll find yourself traveling through the Wind Rivers with a group of peers from a wide variety of backgrounds: teachers, architects, businessmen and women, doctors, and so forth. The main commonality is that you are all adults with extensive life experience who are now interested in exploring and learning about the mountains.

This course begins with the basics: cooking, camping, stove use, map reading, and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Eventually, the curriculum will move on to more advanced instruction covering topics that range from baking and fly fishing to environmental issues and plant and animal identification. We'll take advantage of the Wind River's famous granite and introduce you to rock climbing. There may be an opportunity to climb a peak as well.

Horses will carry the bulk of your food. Having pack animals helps lighten loads and provides an opportunity to learn about traveling with stock in the mountains. However, even with the help of pack animals, you should expect to carry a backpack that may weigh as much as 45 pounds. You'll start slowly to allow you to get used to the weight, new boots, and the elevation. As the group becomes acclimatized, the pace will increase and hiking distances will grow.

You'll be divided into groups of two to four people for cooking and camping. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn 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. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. However, later in the course, your group may have the opportunity to travel independent of instructors. NOLS courses are designed for the learning to take place through experience. This is not a guided tour or a vacation from responsibility.

Expedition behavior and leadership will be an important part of the course curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for others, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success.

You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the expedition, with written performance evaluations at course end.



## **Student Independence**

On all NOLS courses, students will be independent (that is, 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. Away from the field, students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after 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. Sometimes 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 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. For this reason, students are not permitted to take personal music players (iPods, MP3 players, CD players, etc.), cell phones, or satellite phones on NOLS Alaska courses. Instructors will be carrying sufficient communication equipment (usually a satellite phone and a ground-to-air or marine band radio) to handle any emergencies that may arise.

## **Course Objectives**

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.

## **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; model effective teamwork
- Employ leadership styles appropriate to the situation; support others in the leadership role
- 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
- Travel efficiently in mountainous terrain using map and/or compass skills
- Utilize off-trail navigation and route-finding techniques to mitigate hazards
- Be able to assemble and use spin and fly fishing gear
- Effectively belay and rappel using a friction device

## **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 varied settings
- 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.

