

# Course Description

## Whitewater River Expedition

### Features Of This Course:

- 85 miles in Desolation/Gray Canyon on the Green River
- 45 miles in Dinosaur National Monument
- Average group size: 14 students/5 instructors
- Minimum age: 16
- Average age: 18
- Trip duration: 16 Days
- Opportunity for service project

### The Expedition

Utah's canyon country consists of towering cliffs, exciting whitewater, and quiet dells where the only sound is the song of the canyon wren. This arena will be your classroom for 15 days. You'll travel by raft and kayak through this country, learning how to live, camp and travel down a big western river.

You'll work hard on this expedition and your rewards will be great. You will learn the skills you need to paddle through remote wilderness rivers on your own. These skills begin with the basics—river camping, large group and/or small group cooking, map reading, Leave No Trace techniques, and sanitation—which are the foundation for remote river travel. The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and immediate application of new skills.

Basic paddling skills will be taught immediately. You will move towards advanced techniques and other themes such as map reading, first aid, expedition behavior, teamwork, leadership, local natural history, human history, geology, weather and environmental issues.

Utah's Green River is a great classroom because of its progression of difficulty and hazard identification as well as its wide variety of land use and management by several different agencies, private landowners and sovereign land. The Green will allow you to develop skills in a secure and confident manner. This high desert region is full of geologic diversity, human history, and unique flora and fauna. As you travel through the limestone and sandstone canyons, you will experience firsthand the crucial riparian zone. While the river corridor may be lush, most of the terrain beyond it reflects the aridity of the region. The few roads that exist serve as put-in and take-out points along the Green. This remoteness helps preserve populations of deer, Bighorn sheep, and even the occasional mountain lion and black bear.

During the first few days you will be introduced to whitewater gear and group kitchen skills. You'll have a lake session to learn basic kayak strokes, maneuvering and how to enter and exit the kayak and learn the kayak roll. Once you arrive at the put-in, you will get an introduction to the rafts, the rigging process and more whitewater gear. After this intensive introduction and being checked by rangers you will head downstream and immediately put your new skills to use.

During moving water instruction, you learn eddy turns, peel-outs, ferries, river reading and how to surf waves in kayaks. Rafting instruction begins with an overview of paddle rafting and captaining skills. Mastering the stroke combinations, timing, and communication skills needed to put your raft exactly where you need it, precedes more advanced techniques, including flipping/ recovery and other raft rescue techniques. You learn to scout rapids and to employ techniques to efficiently manage your group as you negotiate hazards. Learning to rig, load, and row the oar rafts that carry the gear completes a well-rounded curriculum of whitewater skills.

You'll help in the traditional river kitchen. Cooking chores rotate among the group, with 4 or 5 people doing a single day's cooking for everyone. Daily tasks such as: setting up and taking down camp, rigging and unloading boats will be shared by everyone.

You will receive ongoing verbal coaching and input throughout the course, with written performance summaries at course end. This feedback takes place whether you are taking your NOLS course for college credit or not.



## **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. **There is no independent student travel permitted on NOLS Utah river courses.** This is due to permit regulations set by the State of Utah and Dinosaur National Monument. Away from the field, students have unsupervised time, in town, before and after their course.

## **Weather and Other Challenges**

Given the mountainous headwaters of these rivers, you should expect cold-water temperatures, even in the middle of summer. The highly variable weather can change quickly from hot sunshine to rain and from dead calm to fierce headwinds. Afternoon thunderstorms, with lightning and thunder, can arise suddenly and drive you to seek shelter. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. There are times when you will be cold, wet, and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations and maybe even smile as you do.

Bear avoidance techniques will be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course. Steps will be taken to not have food or food odors at sleeping sites. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness in all areas of the campsite, and having bear spray available as a deterrent.

Identifying and managing the hazards of a river environment will be a constant theme in our instruction. Expect to be confronted by large, crashing waves, high volume or shallow water, conditions that can promote both hypothermia and sun exposure, and re-circulating holes. Objective river hazards such as fallen trees that can trap swimmers underwater or strong currents that can pin paddlers against rocks will be addressed. The consistent practice of risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members will help make your expedition on these rivers healthy and enjoyable.

## **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 an understanding of river features and the hazards of the whitewater environment, e.g., hydraulics, strainers, shallow water, hypothermia, submerged rocks, etc.; "read" Class III whitewater
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to reduce or avoid these hazards
- Demonstrate an understanding of river safety/rescue techniques; prepare for such situations
- Show an awareness of cold water and river-related injuries and their prevention
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of personal /group strengths and limitations
- Paddle effectively/responsibly as a member of a group on the river



## **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:

- Participate in the decision-making process; effectively communicate and problem-solve on interpersonal and group levels
- 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
- 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; initiate participation in group tasks and camp work
- 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 health and care for the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Dress appropriately for a variety of conditions; be punctual and organized
- Participate fully and effectively in the group kitchen
- Use appropriate campsite selection and shelter set-up; tailor practices to a river expedition
- Treat each member of the expedition with respect and dignity

## **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
- Show an understanding of current river conservation issues, management practices and agencies, and conservation groups

## **River Kayaking Skills**

Each student is expected to:

- Understand the design, outfitting, care, use, and repair of whitewater kayaks and related equipment
- Show correct biomechanics in paddle strokes
- Demonstrate competent wet exit and kayak rescue; show ability to execute a self-rescue in moving water
- Show ability to efficiently maneuver a kayak in Class II water
- Display an understanding of the kayak roll
- Know and practice techniques needed for running Class III water and "playing the river"

## **River Rafting Skills**

Each student is expected to:

- Understand the design, outfitting, care, use and repair of rafts and related equipment
- Show competency with raft rigging techniques for paddle and oar rafts
- Demonstrate paddle rafting skills; guide in Class II water, crew in Class III water
- Demonstrate effective rowing technique in Class II water in oar raft
- Demonstrate basic rescue skills: self-rescue, throw lines, raft-flip recovery, and swimmer rescue.

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

