

# **Course Description**

## **River Guides**

### **National Outdoor Leadership School**

#### **Features Of This Course:**

- Travel 130 miles in paddle rafts or oar rigs
- Focus on training students to become professional raft guides
- Raft class 3 water
- Group size: student/instructor = 15/5
- Course length: 21 days, 16 on the river, 5 in town
- River rescue training
- Raft field repair
- Leave No Trace trainer certification

#### **The Expedition**

The raft slips silently across the flat water toward a horizon line where the river disappears as it drops into the rapid below. You shout out commands to your crew, "Forward, hard!" and the boat surges toward the line, slips past a boulder, and drops into the rapid. The silence is gone. Around you, water roars. You lean into each paddle stroke as the raft buckles and bends over a train of standing waves, continuing to yell commands: "Right turn, hard." Your team responds, and the raft slides through the maze of rocks smoothly. Then it's over. You float into a pool and everyone leans back and smiles. "Nice run," you say.

Have you dreamed of guiding a raft through raging rapids in the shadow of great walls of stone? Our River Guides course is designed to give you just what you need make that dream a reality. At the end of this 21-day course, you will have the skills required to raft guide on class III whitewater rivers throughout the western US.

The River Guides course focuses on skills critical for employment in the whitewater industry. You'll learn how to repair your equipment in the field. You'll also learn intensive river rescue skills that include lots of on-the-water practice.

The Green River was first run by, John Wesley Powell and his entourage in 1869. No one quite knew what the river did before he led his crew down into its mysterious, impassable canyons. Today this continues to be a land best visited by boat. The canyon walls are precipitous and the country arid and hostile if you are unprepared. But the scenic beauty is astounding. You'll be shadowed by, huge walls of cream and rose-colored sandstone, streaked with desert varnish. You'll find hidden bits of verdant paradise where perennial springs provide water for the thirsty desert. You may get to view bighorn sheep scrambling over vertiginous slopes and watch eagles soar in the blue skies overhead.

Your days will be spent mastering the skills needed to negotiate the river in a raft. You'll learn to scout and read rapids, and you'll perfect the stroke combinations, timing and communication skills needed to put your raft exactly where you want it in a rapid. You'll also learn how to rig, load, row and maneuver an oar rig. At the end of the day, you'll set up camp, and help prepare food for your group. Cooking chores rotate allowing each course participant to learn how to feed large groups, which is one



of those unexpected skills needed for successful river guiding. Finally, there's also time to explore this amazing desert environment.

During your first section you will navigate Desolation Canyon's 85 miles of river, which ends near Green River, Utah. From here you'll head back north to Dinosaur National Monument to run Lodore Canyon, a 45-mile stretch of the Green with increasingly difficult whitewater rapids to test your growing expertise. After this section you will head to the Yampa River, the last major western river without a dam. You will spend the final 5 days of your course in this remote beautiful canyon before heading back to Vernal where the course ends.

NOLS courses are expeditions, and leadership and teamwork are part of every expedition. While this course focuses on river skills, expedition behavior, leadership, communication and teamwork will also be part of the course curriculum. You'll learn to live and work closely with your course mates while you paddle. Tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other group members, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success both on this course and as a raft guide in the future.

Whether you take the course for college credit or not, you should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the course, with written performance summaries at its conclusion.

### **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 the permit regulations set by the State of Utah and Dinosaur National Monument.*** Away from the field, students often have independent unsupervised time, usually in town, before and after their course.

### **Weather and Other Challenges**

Given the mountainous headwater of these rivers, you should expect coldwater 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 safety. 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.

## **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:

### **Safety and Judgment**

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible habits that promote the health and safety of self and others. Each student is expected to:

- demonstrate an understanding of river features and hazards of the whitewater environment, e.g., hydraulics, strainers, shallow water, hypothermia, pour-overs and undercut 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; prepares for such situations
- show an awareness of cold water and river-related injuries and their prevention
- display sound judgment and awareness of personal and group strengths and limitations
- paddle safely/effectively/responsibly as a member of a group on the river

### **Leadership and Expedition Behavior**

Students are exposed to 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 health and safety 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 safety and care of 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
- learn new skills and adapt existing skills to any and all conditions that may arise.



### **Environmental Studies**

Students develop 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; be able to extrapolate knowledge to new environments
- show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area
- show an understanding of current river conservation issues, management practices and agencies, and conservation groups

### **River Rafting Skills**

Each student is expected to:

- understand the design, use, outfitting and care 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.**

