

# Course Description

## Southwest Lightweight Backpacking

### Course Features:

- Hiking route: 60-90 miles
- Elevations of 8,000'- 10,000'
- Field days: 13
- Average group size: 8-12 students / 2 instructors
- Average packweight: 25-30 lbs.
- On and off-trail hiking
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Minimum age: 18

### The Expedition

Partnering with **GoLite** and **Backpacking-Light.com**, NOLS is offering the first lightweight backpacking course in the American Southwest. This adventure will start in the equipment room as you and your instructors select and fit your lightweight gear and prepare your food for the expedition. Then the real fun begins—"shaving" the ounces. How light can you go?

The beautiful Gila Wilderness or Galiuros Mountains are the site for this lightweight backpacking expedition. Both ranges are renowned for their spectacular Sonoran ecology and beautiful vistas. The Southwestern Sonoran desert is famous for its incredible diversity and wealth of plants and animals. It's not the barren, sandy place that often comes to mind when people imagine a desert. For 13 days, you'll travel through saguaro cactus, mesquite, ocotillo and palo verde trees. 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 light in the mountains long after your course ends.

There is one major difference between this course and our other backpacking expeditions. The main goal is to travel light through the mountains using the latest techniques and technology to keep pack weight down. We've focused the curriculum and added specialized gear so you can enjoy a wilderness adventure without carrying a heavy pack.

Outfitted with 25-30 pound packs (10-15 pounds without food and fuel) you'll be off to one of the southwest's most remote and wild ranges where you will travel light and develop your outdoor skills. You'll learn essential skills like cooking one-pot meals on an alcohol stove, staying warm and dry with a minimum of gear and backcountry navigation. You will leave this course with the skills and background necessary to plan and execute your own lightweight adventures.

Lightweight packs will allow you to travel over long distances in a given day. This allows participants to see an incredible variety of terrain over the duration of the course. It also dictates a solid foundation of physical fitness to allow for long days of hiking.

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 topics that range from environmental issues to plant and animal identification. You'll be divided into groups of two to three people for cooking and camping, receiving valuable coaching from your instructors while learning new skills.

You'll also travel in small groups, usually of four to six. Initially, these groups will include an instructor. Later in the course, your group may travel on it's own. NOLS courses are designed for 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. Tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for others and a willingness to work hard will be critical to both individual and group 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 extreme. 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. You'll traverse steep slopes 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 hot or cold temperatures 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.

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 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**

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 and desert environment, e.g., rock fall, 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
- pack only the essentials for lightweight backcountry travel.
- cook nutritious single-pot 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

### **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 knowledge of public land management and discuss the means to be involved in issues of interest.

