

# Course Description

## Idaho Backpacking Adventure For 14-&-15-Year-Olds

### Features Of This Course

- For students 14 and 15 years old
- 13 nights in the field, 2 ration periods
- Course areas in Montana, Idaho and Wyoming
- Hiking route of approximately 45-50 miles
- Combination of on and off-trail hiking
- Forest and alpine travel
- Elevations of 7,000' - 11,000'
- Activity opportunities may include: peak ascents, snow school, fishing
- Typical Male/Female ratio: 70/30
- Avg. Group size: 15 Students / 3 Instructors
- Average pack weight: 45-55 lbs.

### The Expedition

The Snake River Range, Jed Smith Wilderness, Lemhi Mountains, Wyoming Range and the Beaverhead Mountains are all sites for our backpacking courses for 14 and 15 year olds. These Idaho, Montana and Wyoming mountains were once the realm of Indians and mountain men and all provide a wonderful setting for learning wilderness skills. They are still home to moose, elk, deer, black bear, sheep, goat and fox. This two-week course is designed to teach the basic camp and travel skills that provide a solid foundation for living comfortably in the mountains. You'll travel on alpine ridges, through flower-filled mountain meadows, and in thick forests of aspen and fir. You'll work hard hiking over rocky, steep terrain with all your gear on your back - often following a trail, sometimes forging your own. But you'll play hard as well. Whether you climb your first peak, catch your first fish, or bake your first round of cinnamon rolls, this course is designed to maximize hands-on learning and doing in the backcountry. For some it will be a great prelude to a 30-day NOLS expedition and for others it will provide a springboard to pursuing your own outdoor adventures.

The pace of the course will be slow in the beginning. This way you'll have plenty of time to get used to your pack, the elevation, and all the new skills you'll be learning. We'll start with the basics—the essentials of backcountry living like camping, cooking, sanitation, stove use, map reading and *Leave No Trace* techniques. Later we'll move into more advanced topics: compass use, basic mountaineering, group dynamics and leadership. You may even find yourself talking about constellations and astronomy as you lay out under a sky crowded with stars.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a "cook" group during the course. These small groups help you disperse your impacts 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.

Group dynamics and leadership will also 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. The ability to overcome adversity, work hard and maintain respect for others will be critical to your success. As your group gains leadership skills and experience working together, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for leading yourselves and your peers.

These courses provide a substantial amount of personal attention and supervision. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and feedback throughout the course, with written performance summaries at the 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, sleeping 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 starts.



## **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.

## **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 quite violent. Courses may experience snow and rain, or long stretches of sun and blue skies.

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Often you'll be off-trail bushwhacking through thick forests or hiking on trail muddy from snow-melt. Rivers are icy and can be hard or impossible to cross. You may 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 or 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.

Idaho, Montana and Wyoming are states with bears—black and grizzly. On all courses, travel and camping practices will emphasize bear risk management and awareness. Depending on your specific locale, your course may be in territory that demands rigorous practices on a daily basis. Some examples are making noise while traveling, never leaving food in tents and always traveling in a group of four or more.

While the course is in the backcountry, you will be far from telephones and transportation. NOLS does not permit students to use personal cell or satellite phones or other communication devices, including satellite/GPS trackers while in the field. 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 assuming responsibility for yourself and your peers will help make your expedition in these wild and beautiful 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.

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

## **Adventure 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 outcomes.

### 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
- 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 yourself and others
- demonstrate sound expedition behavior, including commitment to group decisions and a positive attitude
- show initiative in leadership roles with peers
- effectively communicate and problem solve on interpersonal and group levels
- work effectively as a team member
- 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 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 basic map and/or compass skills
- move through technical terrain with strength and agility

### Environmental Ethics

At NOLS, environmental studies encompasses natural sciences, ecological principles, environmental ethics, Leave No Trace camping, land management and cultural issues. Each student is expected to:

- show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world; know characteristic flora and fauna of the area
- develop a sense of place and relationship to the land, including an understanding of local history and current use
- consistently perform sound *Leave No Trace* living and travel skills

