

Course Description

Salmon Backpacking & Rafting

Features Of This Course

- Field Days: 28
- Mountain Hiking Route: ~ 60 - 80 miles
- Average Pack Weight: 60-65 lbs
- Elevations of 3,000' - 11,000'
- Possible peak ascents
- Fly Fishing
- Combination of on- and off-trail travel
- Salmon River: 80+ miles
- Rapids to Class III
- Avg. Group Size: 12 Students/ 3 or 4 Instructors
- Backpacking: 19 days
- Rafting: 9 days
- Typical Male/Female Ratio: 50/50

The Expedition

Idaho is known for its rugged wilderness and raging whitewater. The Salmon Backpacking and Rafting course allows you to experience both through an amazing 29-day backcountry adventure. Your route will depend upon the season. This backpacking and rafting course hikes in the Beaverheads or Lemhi mountain ranges then rafts on the Main Salmon River in the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness. Any of these routes teach the skills needed to travel and explore the wilderness by foot and by boat.

These courses start with the basics. Essential outdoor skills like camping, cooking and stove use, map reading, and *Leave No Trace* techniques will be taught. The first days of the hiking section will be slow. This allows you to get used to your pack and boots and to assimilate all of the new skills to which you are being exposed. As you gain comfort and experience, you'll move on to more advanced instruction on topics that can range from first aid to fishing for cutthroat trout in high alpine lakes and streams, from baking bread to expedition behavior, or from discussing environmental issues to identifying plants and animals.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a "cook" group during the hiking and rafting sections. These small groups help disperse the impacts on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You will 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.

You will also hike in small groups consisting of four to six students. Initially, you will be accompanied by an instructor but, once you've become practiced in backcountry travel skills, groups of students will hike alone. NOLS believes that you learn best through experience. Unaccompanied travel allows you to practice what you've been taught.

Group dynamics and leadership will be an important part of the course curriculum. You will learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the wilderness. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other members, and a willingness to work hard will be critical to success. As your group gains leadership skills and experience working together, you can expect your instructors to give you more responsibility for leading yourself and your peers.

Following the hiking section, your course will raft down the Main Salmon River. It's time to give your legs and feet a break and start using your upper body to paddle and row your rafts down this classic Western river. The Salmon is famous for being one of the longest free flowing rivers (425 miles) in the Lower 48. It flows through the heart of the largest wilderness area (2.3 million acres). Other highlights include beautiful sandy beaches, which we will call camp, and a riverside natural hot springs.

As we go downstream, you will learn how to guide the paddle rafts and row the oar rigs. As we travel, you will learn how to recognize river hazards and obstacles and how to avoid them, as well as find the good lines through the rapids. There will also be time spent learning and practicing river rescue techniques. After rigging boats in the morning, we'll head downstream for another day of learning on our flowing river classroom, making stops at historic homesteads and mines. You will learn what it



takes to run a river trip even down to the finer points of cooking brownies in a Dutch oven.

The Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness Area is home to abundant wildlife including gray wolves, black bears, and big horn sheep. Osprey and golden eagles soar over large Ponderosa Pines and Douglas Firs. The opportunity to give back to this spectacular wilderness may exist in the form of a noxious weed project with the Forest Service. Western rivers are popular, and we will talk about the use, management policies, water politics, and wilderness ethics specific to the river environment. Other topics range from fire ecology classes taught in recent burn areas to discussions about dwindling Chinook salmon populations. 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 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 or between sections.

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.

This course may culminate in a Student Expedition. After successful practice with daily independent student travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, the instructors will help you divide into student expedition groups (usually three to six students each). With instructor oversight, each group will then select a leader and carefully plan and execute a multi day independent student led expedition. This part of the course builds on the skills you've learned and practiced and allows you to travel without instructors for up to four days. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. The instructors with emergency communication capability may be up to 24 hours away from the students. Our students often say the student expedition was the highlight of their course.

Fasting is an optional part of the curriculum for the student expedition (or optional solo if applicable) on this course. If the instructors think fasting is appropriate for the conditions and student abilities the students may chose to fast during the student expedition (or optional solo). Rations will be carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

On this course you may have an opportunity to do a "solo" when you spend a day and night alone. There is no hiking during the solo. Many people find this experience a good way to reflect on the course and immerse them selves in the environment.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather in the intermountain west is unpredictable. 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 wilderness can be tough. During the hiking section, you may find yourself off-trail bushwhacking through thick forests or scrambling around refrigerator-sized boulders in a desert landscape. Rivers will be icy from snowmelt and can be hard or impossible to cross. You may traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock or grass, and grunt up steep inclines. 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 out at miles of new country opening up before you. It's exhilarating!

Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes, avoiding rattlesnakes, or hanging your food to keep it away from bears. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.



You can expect cold-water temperatures even in the middle of summer on your river section. The hazards you face will include large, crashing waves; shallow, rock-strewn rapids; re-circulating holes; fallen trees that can trap a person underwater; strong currents that can pin you against a rock; hypothermia; and sun exposure.

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. Identifying and managing the hazards of moving water, falling and rolling rocks, weather, animals, and steep terrain will be a constant theme in our instruction. The consistent practice of risk management techniques and assumption of responsibility for yourself and other group members is critical to success. Such things will also make your expedition healthy and enjoyable. Instructors will be carrying communication equipment (usually a satellite phone or 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.

Salmon Backpacking and Rafting 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. Objectives include the ability to:

- demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a mountain environment, e.g., rockfall, weather, river crossings, etc.
- demonstrate an understanding of river features and hazards of the whitewater environment, e.g., hydraulics, strainers, shallow water, hypothermia, submerged rocks, etc.; "read" Class III whitewater
- consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- show an awareness of cold water and river-related injuries and their prevention
- demonstrate the first aid skills necessary to support a patient until help arrives
- demonstrate an understanding of river risk management/rescue techniques; prepare for such situations
- 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
- paddle safely/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. Objectives include the ability 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
- 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 well being and care of the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Dress appropriately for a variety of conditions; be punctual and organized
- Cook nutritious meals using a camp stove or fire; participate fully and effectively in the group kitchen
- 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
- Experience basic spin and fly fishing techniques

Environmental Studies

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; understand significant ecological principles
- Develop a sense of place and relationship to the land, a recognition of the inherent value in wilderness and a sense of responsibility to protect the environment
- Consistently perform sound Leave No Trace living and travel skills; be able to extrapolate knowledge to new environments
- Demonstrate a knowledge of public land management and river conservation issues; discuss means to be involved in issues of interest
- Demonstrate awareness and understanding of current and historic local cultures

River Rafting Skills

Objectives include the ability 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 ropes, raft-flip recovery, and swimmer rescue

