

C O U R S E D E S C R I P T I O N

Salmon River Rafting

Features Of This Course

- Field Days: 12
- Rafting: 10 days
- Fly Fishing
- Main Salmon River: 94 miles
- Rapids to Class III
- Natural history interpretation
- Typical Male/Female Ratio: 50/50
- Travel in oar rigs and paddle rafts
- Group kitchen and social evenings
- Birding
- Avg. Group Size: 12 Students/4 Instructors

The Expedition

For ten days, our classroom will be the Main Salmon River, which bisects the Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness in Idaho. This classic Western river holds the distinction in the Lower 48 for being one of the longest free flowing rivers at 425 miles, and for traveling through the heart of the largest wilderness area at 2.3 million acres. The slopes in this deep river canyon are covered with ponderosa pines and Douglas firs rising high above. The Frank Church is also home to 370 species of mammals and birds including gray wolves, black bears, big horn sheep, mule and whitetail deer, peregrine falcons, osprey and bald eagles. Other highlights include beautiful sandy beaches, which we will call camp, a riverside natural hot springs, and many historic homesteads from the gold mining era.

You will be following in the footsteps of many legendary river runners and explorers who often risked their lives trying to seek fortune in gold. Our expedition on the Salmon will begin just downstream of where Lewis and Clark abandoned their boats and began their overland journey to present day Montana. You will also be immersed in a NOLS educational expedition—you will not be just a client on a guided raft.

As we go downstream in the paddle rafts and oar rigs, you will learn how to guide the paddle rafts, row the oar rigs, be a solid crew member, recognize river hazards and obstacles and how to avoid them, and find good lines through the rapids. There will also be time spent learning and practicing river rescue techniques. You will learn what it takes to run a safe, enjoyable river trip even down to the finer points of cooking brownies in a Dutch oven.

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.

Camp life is half the fun of river trips! Once camp is set up each evening, there will be time for fly fishing, swimming, birding, reading, attempting to beat your instructors at horseshoes, and socializing with other group members or enjoying solo time to reflect. Group meals will be prepared by teams of two or three students with an instructor as coach. We will be using a river kitchen system, which contains a four-burner stove, pots and pans, tables and more. Raft coolers will ensure that we have fresh food everyday. You will also learn how to rig the oar boats each morning, set up your shelter, set up and break down the river toilet, purify water for the group, and take care of personal and group gear. We will practice Leave No Trace techniques for the river corridor on a daily basis. You will receive lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn these new skills.

You will be camping with two or three other students in a tent group. These small groups help disperse the impacts on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry living. 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 downstream. 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.

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 or semesters. While on the river you will travel as one group within visual sight of each other.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather in the intermountain West is unpredictable. On any given day, temperatures may range from the 40's to the 100's, from hot and sunny to cold and rainy, and from dead calm to fierce upstream winds. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and can be quite violent. There are times you will be cold, wet, and tired, but you will have the skills you need to stay comfortable in all kinds of adversity.

Camping may involve avoiding rattlesnakes and poison ivy, and utilizing practices to emphasize bear risk management and awareness. You will be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances and hospitals may be several days away.

The hazards you face will include: large, crashing waves; shallow, rock-strewn rapids; recirculating holes; fallen trees that can trap a person underwater; strong currents that can pin you against a rock; hypothermia; and sun exposure.

Identifying and managing the hazards of moving water, weather, and animals 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.

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

Salmon River 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 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 an understanding of river risk management/rescue techniques; prepare for such situations
- 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. 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

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
- Participate fully and effectively in the group kitchen
- Demonstrate appropriate campsite selection and shelter set-up

Environmental Studies

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 basic rowing skills on the oar rigs in Class I and II water
- Demonstrate basic rescue skills: self-rescue, throw ropes, raft-flip recovery, and swimmer rescue

Suggested Reading:

Ambrose, Stephen. *Undaunted Courage*. New York, NY. Touchstone, 1996.

Heider, John. *The Tao of Leadership*. New York, NY. Bantam Books, 1986.

Bechdel, Les and Ray, Slim. *River Rescue*. (Third Edition). Boston, MA. Appalachian Mountain Club Books, 1997.

Hampton, B and Cole, D. *Soft Paths*. (Second Edition) NOLS, 1995. Stackpole Press. ISBN #0-8117-2234-1

Conley, Cort. *River of No Return*. Cambridge, ID. Backeddy Books, 1978.

