

# Course Description

## Skiing

### Features of this Course:

- 9 backcountry days
- Training in avalanche assessment
- Training in backcountry ski techniques
- Excellent backcountry skiing opportunities
- Ski route of 20 to 40 miles
- Elevations of 8,000 to 12,000 feet
- Travel on skis, often towing sleds, through forested mountain terrain
- Six days at NOLS Teton Valley, including two at Grand Targhee Resort
- Pack/sled loads up to 70 lbs.
- Average group size: 12 student and 3 instructors
- Minimum age: 17, Average age: 23
- Typical Male/Female ratio: 75/25

### The Expedition

It is winter in the mountains. Cloaked in a blanket of glittering snow, the world is transformed into a quiet, magical place where icicles decorate the trees, animal tracks tell a story and untracked powder snow calls you to ski. Temperatures can plummet to well below zero and three feet of snow can fall in one storm, but hard work and a positive attitude make winter one of the most rewarding times to travel in the backcountry. This course is designed to help you develop the skills to travel responsibly and enjoyably through the mountains in winter.

The first four days of a winter ski course are spent at NOLS Teton Valley near Driggs, Idaho. Here in the comfort of a heated facility, with home-cooked meals and dormitory-style accommodations, we'll teach basic skills in the evenings, and head out for skiing and field trips during the day. Everything from lighting stoves and lanterns, to pack packing, dressing for the field, and avalanche awareness will be covered.

In the first days we will review the equipment you brought, issue the equipment you need and bag food for the course. You will watch a cold injuries slide show and begin practicing search techniques with your avalanche beacon. You will head to Grand Targhee Ski Resort, just up the hill in Alta, Wyoming, for two days of ski instruction. Grand Targhee is renowned for its powder and open-glade skiing. Your group will be divided into smaller classes for instruction appropriate to your current skill level. In addition to formal classes with Targhee's Nordic staff, you will have time to practice with and be coached by your NOLS instructors. Ski lifts and videotaping will speed your progress and help prepare you for the backcountry.

On the fourth day, the course takes a ski tour away from the lifts to warm up for the backcountry section. Activities on this day include travel techniques, avalanche terrain observation, and concepts of snow camping. The field time will round out the classroom material with practical experience and observation in avalanche terrain.

On the fifth day you begin your expedition into the Absarokas, the Wyoming Range or the Tetons. Although these mountains are very different geologically, they are all known for dependable snow and terrific skiing. Heavily timbered slopes are intermixed with open glades and broad bowls; steep, expert chutes are broken up by gentle beginner and intermediate terrain. These mountains are magical places to explore, and exhilarating areas to learn the intricacies of backcountry skiing and winter travel.

For nine days, you'll camp, travel and play in the backcountry. Living in the winter is hard work and days are long, but you'll quickly learn that you can be comfortable and happy outside in temperatures well below freezing. Your homes will be elaborate snow shelters— igloos, quinzhees or snow caves, which you'll find are



remarkably warm and comfortable. Outside the wind can rage, snow can fall, and the temperature can drop; inside you'll be reading by candlelight enjoying the muffled sounds of the blizzard beyond your insulating snow walls.

Camp chores take up big portions of your days. Melting snow for water, building kitchens and shelters, packing up piles of gear and clothes, and staying warm and dry, are time-consuming activities. However, you'll quickly become masters of efficiency and the time you free up can be spent learning about winter ecology, playing in the snow, or making turns. Learning about avalanche assessment, avoidance and rescue will also be an important part of your course and a fair amount of time will be spent on this subject. If weather and snow conditions permit, you may also climb a peak.

In the backcountry, you'll be divided into groups of three to four people for camping. Together, you'll shovel and dig, melt snow for water, prepare meals, and enjoy the warmth and coziness of a well built home. Teamwork and cold injury prevention are important to the entire group's comfort and morale while you are in the field.

### **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. In town, students often have independent unsupervised time, before and after the day's activities and classes.

### **Weather and Other Challenges**

Given the altitude and latitude of these mountain ranges, bitter cold and blizzard conditions can occur at any time. You should expect highly variable weather that can change quickly from sunshine to snow and sometimes even rain.

The demanding winter environment is extremely challenging. You will be living in cold (possibly sub-zero) temperatures and constant care must be exercised to minimize the possibility of hypothermia and frostbite. Travel requires skiing with a pack and, at times, pulling one of the sleds that each tent group shares to help transport its gear and rations. In these mountains, avalanches occur and can bury unwary skiers. Predicting the likelihood of an avalanche is a skill akin to predicting the weather; it requires experience and practice but is never 100 percent accurate.

While the course is in the backcountry, you will be far from telephones and transportation.

Our instruction emphasizes recognizing and managing hazards. We'll focus on providing you with the tools to travel responsibly and enjoyably through the winter.

### **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.



## Winter Skiing Course Objectives

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics and environmental conditions. Working with these variables, it is our intent each student accomplish the following outcomes.

**Leadership:** Performs timely appropriate actions that guide & support the group to set & achieve realistic outcomes.

**Communication:** Communicates effectively on interpersonal and group levels.

- States personal opinions and expectations with clarity and timeliness.
- Actively listens; when necessary seeks clarification.
- Balances participating, listening, and observing in-group interactions.
- Gives timely, growth-oriented, specific, behavior descriptive feedback.

**Self-Awareness:** Understands personal tendencies, strengths and limitations as a leader and expedition member.

- Seeks feedback and learns from experience.
- Displays an awareness of their impact on others.
- Shows the self-confidence to take personal risks and state opinions.
- Displays an awareness of personal values and goals.

**Tolerance for Adversity and Uncertainty:** Maintains a positive attitude during adverse and uncertain conditions.

- Stays calm, focused and positive during hardship.
- Manages conflict appropriately.

**Vision and Action:** Helps plan and implement course activities.

- Demonstrates initiative and completes tasks.
- Takes responsibility for self-learning.

**Expedition Behavior:** Demonstrates teamwork, respect for others and commitment to group decisions.

- Supports leadership in all group members.
- Is punctual to meetings and activities.
- Balances group goals with personal goals.
- Helps others without routinely doing their work.
- Influences the group in a positive way, supports a positive learning environment.
- Displays a work ethic that contributes to group goals; does their share of group tasks.
- Treats everyone with dignity and respect.

**OUTDOOR SKILLS:** Lives comfortably in a winter environment.

- Dresses effectively; quickly adapts to conditions.
- Cooks nutritious meals using a camp stove.
- Consistently arrives prepared for day trips and meetings.
- Demonstrates effective group travel skills.
- Demonstrates the ability to select a good campsite, set-up a shelter and construct a kitchen.
- Demonstrates fundamental map reading and navigation skills.
- Safely constructs a viable snow shelter.
- Consistently practices bombproofing, organization and efficient camping skills.

**Risk Management and Judgment:** Demonstrates hazard awareness and good judgment & decision-making skills.

- Participates in the decision-making process.
- Recognizes, anticipates and assesses objective & subjective hazards.



- Appropriately minimizes and manages hazards in a winter environment, including prevention techniques for cold injuries.

**Rescue and Avalanche Skills:**

- Understands terrain, snow pack, weather and human factors and how they relate to avalanche hazard.
- Demonstrates safe travel technique in avalanche terrain.
- Competency with the use of transceivers; understands and demonstrates how to check range and function.
- Demonstrates the ability to quickly locate a shallowly buried transceiver.
- Participates in an avalanche rescue scenario.
- Completes curriculum and training and received a NOLS Recreational Level 1 Avalanche Certification.
- Completes curriculum and training and received a NOLS Avalanche Awareness Certification.

**Environmental Studies:** Shows an understanding of their surroundings & practices LNT skills.

- Demonstrates natural history observation and interpretation skills by noticing and studying tracks, flora, fauna and other natural wonders of the area.
- Demonstrates appreciation through enthusiasm and interest, learning and sharing with others.
- Demonstrates knowledge of ecological concepts pertinent to the surrounding environment.
- Understands winter plant and animal adaptations.
- Consistently performs sound Leave No Trace (LNT) living and travel skills.
- Understands the transference of wilderness ethics to daily life.

**Skiing Skills:**

- Travels competently and efficiently with a pack and sled while moving camp.
- Travels efficiently using wax and climbing skins.
- Demonstrates basic proficiency with Nordic downhill skiing techniques (telemark or parallel turns).
- Demonstrates the ability to travel on skis in a variety of snow conditions.

**Based on the conditions experienced on this course, this student, at this time:**

(Instructor will check one upon the completion of the course)

- Should seek additional training before leading novices.
- Can lead peers of a similar skill level in similar conditions.
- Can assist leading novices under supervision of a more experienced leader.
- Can lead novices in similar conditions.

## Suggested Reading

Two weeks is a short time to assimilate the depth of knowledge to be gained on a winter expedition. If you are keen to begin now, here are several of the texts we use on our courses. You can start preparing for your course next to a cozy fire or snuggled deep under the covers! If you only have time (desire) to read a little, start with any of the first five on the list.

- *Allen and Mike's Really Cool Backcountry Ski Book*, Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland, Falcon, 1996
- *Allen and Mike's Really Cool Telemark Tips*, Allen O'Bannon and Mike Clelland, Falcon, 1999
- *Snow Sense*, Jill Fredston and Doug Fesler, Alaska Mountain Safety Center, 1994
- *Winter World: The Ingenuity of Animal Survival*, Bernd Heinrich, Ecco, 2003
- *Staying Alive in Avalanche Terrain*, Bruce Tremper, The Mountaineers, 2001
- *The Avalanche Handbook*, David McClung and Peter Schaerer, The Mountaineers, 1993
- *Avalanche Safety for Skiers and Climbers*, Tony Daffern, Cloudcap, Second Edition 1992
- *The Avalanche Book*, Betsy Armstrong and Knox Williams, Fulcrum Publishing, 1992
- *Winter: An Ecological Handbook*, James C. Halfpenny and Roy Douglas Ozanne, Johnson Books, 1989
- *Field Guide to Tracking Animals in the Snow*, Louise R Forrest, Stackpole Books, 1988
- *Free Heel Skiing*, Paul Parker, The Mountaineers, Second Edition 1995

