

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

Naval Academy Yukon Whitewater Expedition

Features Of This Course:

- Remote whitewater canoe expedition in the Yukon Territory on the Frances, Hyland, Hess, or McMillen rivers
- Class I, II and III whitewater running. Portaging around Class IV and V rapids.
- 18 - 20 hours of continuous daylight
- Dry climate with potential for prolonged periods of wet, cold weather
- Grizzly, black bear, moose, sheep, caribou and wolf populations
- Arctic mountain and boreal forest ecosystems
- Area of significant fur trade, gold rush and First Nation People's history
- Some courses begin by flying into remote lakes via float plane
- Travel between 400 and 600 kilometers
- Bear awareness & risk management
- Day hiking opportunities up to the alpine tundra and the boreal forest
- Group Size: 14 Students /3 Instructors

The Expedition

The majority of the Yukon Territory is accessible only by plane, foot or river. Here, in the headwaters of the Canadian Rockies, you'll share the wild with caribou, bear, wolf, moose and migrating birds. The Yukon Whitewater River Expedition is a serious wilderness river expedition during spring runoff on the Frances, Hyland, Hess, or McMillen rivers. Successfully negotiating a river in a tandem canoe demands the highest level of communication and teamwork skills. This dynamic medium requires you to make in-the-moment decisions that affect your boat and the rest of the team on the river. The river teaches you to assess risk, and execute precise risk mitigation strategies every day. You will learn the skills you need to paddle wilderness rivers on your own.

Teamwork and leadership are the core curriculum. At NOLS, leadership means timely and appropriate actions that guide a group to set and achieve realistic goals. NOLS teaches situational leadership that demands different decision-making styles depending on group skill, task urgency and outcome predictability. NOLS Professional Training customizes this time-tested curriculum to a wide variety of audiences from college and private schools, to corporations and NASA astronauts. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Having tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, a willingness to work hard, and respect for your comrades will be critical to the success of the expedition as a whole.

NOLS expedition skills begin with the basics—flat water paddling, camping, cooking, stove use, Leave No Trace methods, bear risk management techniques and sanitation—which form the foundation for backcountry canoe travel.

The river's progression dictates the flow and focus of the course. The headwaters are fast with closely interspersed rapids. The rivers widen and slow as they descend out of the mountains.

The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and immediate application of new skills. Instruction includes canoeing and rescue skills, wilderness navigation, map reading, first aid, expedition behavior, teamwork, leadership, plant and animal identification, natural history, human history, weather and environmental issues. You will become proficient with up-river and overland portage travel techniques, or float plane logistics as you approach the headwaters.

During your course you will live with two or three other students in a "cook" group. These small groups disperse the impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. Expect to change cook groups two or three times. Even though you will cook in small groups, as a bear



risk management procedure you will often camp in close proximity to each other. Do not expect to have a lot of personal time away from the group.

Group dynamics and leadership are an integral part of our curriculum. You'll learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. Bringing a tolerance for adversity and uncertainty, respect for other group members, and a willingness to work hard are 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. You should expect ongoing verbal coaching and input 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.

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 the whole group will travel together, and as students gain a level of proficiency in canoeing skills and understanding aspects of decision-making on the water, you may break up into 2 or 3 "pods" and travel with one or two instructors in a more personalized learning environment. 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 paddle 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 4- 8 students each*). With instructor oversight, each group then selects a leader and carefully plans and executes 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 five 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.

* The Yukon is grizzly bear country, so student expedition groups are usually a minimum of 4.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather is unpredictable. Given the mountainous headwaters of these rivers, expect very cold water temperatures. The weather can change quickly from hot sunshine to rain, sleet and hail. In a wet year, it can be rainy and cold every day. There may be fierce head winds on the lower and broader sections of the river. Mosquitoes are at their worst through early July. There are times when you will be cold, wet, and tired, but you will learn to manage these situations, perhaps even with a smile.

The rivers we paddle are remote wilderness rivers. While each course carries a satellite phone for emergency communication purposes, communication cannot be guaranteed. Medical evacuations may take several days. The expedition requires a serious commitment from each team member.

Your expedition may run a river that NOLS has not run previously. Flexibility is critical to the success of

any expedition. The character of wilderness is unpredictable and can create surprises even on previously navigated routes. However, exploratory routes can have considerably more challenges because so many of the conditions are unknown. Having an open-minded approach is your best bet for success.

A constant theme in our instruction is identifying and managing the hazards of river travel in remote country. Hazards include inclement weather, hypothermia, log jams, long committing rapids, shallow water and powerful river waves. Throughout the course you will also learn the techniques and habits of safe camping in grizzly country. Bear avoidance techniques (such as traveling in groups of four and making loud noises) while camping, paddling and hiking are an integral part of daily activity in the Yukon backcountry.

Your NOLS instructors will teach the skills and share the knowledge you need to handle these situations; even so, a good attitude and consistent assumption of responsibility for yourself is critical for ensuring the well-being and success of the entire group. Students who get the most out of a course are invariably those who arrive open to new ways of learning, enjoy working with others, and are committed to being a positive, responsible member of the expedition.

Upon graduation from the 26-day course, graduates should expect to be able to plan long wilderness canoe trips on comparable or less difficult water. As a result of the course, we expect our students to be safe, competent, responsible wilderness travelers and leaders.

USNA Yukon Canoeing Course Objectives

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

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork, and expedition behavior. NOLS teaches a situational leadership that demands different decision-making styles depending on group skill, task urgency and outcome predictability. At NOLS, expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, acceptance of others, and cooperation to achieve goals. Each student is expected to:

- Function effectively in all four leadership roles: self-leadership, active followership, designated leadership and peer leadership
- Practice and develop competence in NOLS' seven leadership skills:
 1. Continually increase technical competence in all skill areas
 2. Display strong expedition behavior by working effectively as a member of a team and serving group goals with a positive attitude
 3. Maintain flexibility, commitment and positive attitude in the face of adversity and uncertainty
 4. Accurately identify personal strengths and areas for growth
 5. Work to understand the leader's vision and when appropriate develop your vision as a leader; follow through with appropriate action to help the group achieve its potential
 6. Employ leadership styles and decision-making strategies appropriate to the situation
 7. Effectively communicate ideas and concerns on an individual and group level
- Take responsibility for learning through setting and attaining personal goals
- Respond to problem situations using decision-making and planning skills
- Provide effective oral and written feedback

Risk Management

NOLS teaches wilderness visitors to practice responsible habits that promote the health and safety of self and others. Each student is expected to:

NACE 12/21/07

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- Demonstrate an understanding of river features and the hazards of the whitewater environment, e.g., hydraulics, strainers, shallow water, submerged rocks, etc.; be able to "read" Class I, II and III whitewater
- Demonstrate an understanding of river risk management/rescue techniques
- Display an awareness of cold water and river-related injuries and their prevention
- Consistently perform specific techniques taught on the course to reduce or avoid hazards
- Describe an emergency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Demonstrate the ability to perform basic first aid to support a patient until help arrives
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self limits
- Paddle safely, effectively, and responsibly as a member of a group on the river

Wilderness and Canoeing Skills

NOLS students learn to live and travel in mountains within a framework of personal safety and care of the environment. Each student is expected to:

- Live comfortably in a mountain environment, learn to camp, cook, and dress for a variety of conditions
- Travel competently in mountain terrain using map and compass skills, off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, route-finding techniques, bear camping and river- crossing techniques
- Accurately assess skills, strengths and endurance in self and others and conservatively apply those limits to given situations
- Understand the design, use, outfitting and care of canoes and related equipment
- Demonstrate effective canoe paddling techniques on flat and Class I and II water
- Demonstrate appropriate techniques for lining and portaging canoes
- Demonstrate basic rescue skills: self-rescue, throw lines, canoe-flip recovery, and swimmer rescue
- Demonstrate the ability to organize and securely load a canoe for extended river travel

Environmental Studies

An integral part of every NOLS course is to raise students' awareness of their impact on the natural world. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently perform minimum-impact living and travel skills by following Leave No Trace principles
- Display basic natural history observational and interpretive skills and use them to demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the course environment
- Discuss the history and potential solutions relevant to pertinent environmental issues
- Demonstrate basic knowledge of and respect for local cultures

Suggested Books and Websites

Leopold, Aldo. *Sand County Almanac*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1966

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

Pielou, E.C. *A Naturalist's Guide to the Arctic*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994.

Lopez, Barry. *Arctic Dreams*. New York, NY: Scribner's, 1986.

<http://www.canoe.ca/che-mun/home.html> (canoe resource)

<http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/oilandgas/info/mapsdata.html> (oil/gas)

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/index.html> (Smithsonian Institute Arctic Studies Center)

<http://www.cyfn.ca/> (council for Yukon First Nations)

<http://www.cnie.org/NAE/arctic.html> (Native Americans and the arctic)

http://arctic.unep.net/index.cfm?issue=arctic_all (the UNEP arctic page)



<http://www.mb.ec.gc.ca/nature/index.en.html> (Environment Canada page)
<http://www.cnf.ca/links.html> (Nature Canada)
<http://www.canoemuseum.net/> (all about canoes)
<http://www.emr.gov.yk.ca/> (Yukon gov. website)

