

# C O U R S E   D E S C R I P T I O N

## Naval Academy Wind River Leadership Expedition

### Features of this Course:

- Course Length: 25 days
- 12 Students / 2 – 3 Instructors
- Hiking Route: ~75 – 100 miles
- Elevation: ~10,000 – 13,000 feet
- On, off, and above-tree-line trail hiking
- Excellent rock climbing and bouldering
- Possible snow climbing
- Possible peak ascents
- Opportunity for independent student travel
- Possible fishing (additional license required)

### The Expedition

The site of this expedition will be the Wind River Range: rugged, glacier-carved mountains in Wyoming renowned for their sheer granite walls and rugged alpine beauty. These are perfect mountains for learning such skills as off-trail travel and leadership. There are sweeping expanses of rock to climb, perennial snowfields to glissade, fish to catch and snowstorms in July. During your course, you will backpack and move camp almost daily, stopping at prime locations to fish, ascend a 13,000-foot peak, or rock climb.

Teamwork and leadership are the benchmarks of the NOLS' 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 to NASA astronauts. You will learn how to live and work closely with your course mates while you travel through the mountains. 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.

You will travel over rocky and steep terrain, cross rivers, and keep yourself and others warm and well fed. Once you have mastered basic outdoor living skills, you will move into advanced curriculum such as hazard analysis and mitigation, off-trail travel techniques, individual and team leadership, and basic climbing and bouldering on short cliffs near camp. Non-technical peak ascents are also an option. "Alpine starts" in the pre-dawn hours will help you avoid afternoon thunderstorms on exposed ridges or summits.

NOLS instructors provide structured briefing, debriefing, feedback, technical expertise, risk management, evaluation, classes and participant leadership and followership opportunities. 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 will receive ongoing verbal coaching and input from instructors, as well as written evaluations at the end of the course.

During your course, you will live with two or three other students in a "cook" group. These small groups help disperse our impacts on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living.

### Student Independence and Independent Student Group Travel

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.

This course emphasizes 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. Initial travel groups of four to six students will include an instructor who will teach travel skills and leadership. As you gain proficiency with map reading, route finding, and hazard evaluation, the instructor allows you to take on more decision-making responsibility. When you demonstrate the necessary competency, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors 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 will likely culminate in a student expedition. With instructor oversight, student expedition groups (usually four to six students each) select leaders, then plan and execute a multi-day independent student-led expedition. Students are aware of where the instructors and the other student groups are planning to travel and camp. Each student expedition group will carry an emergency locator beacon that when activated in the event of a serious emergency will initiate a response from local search and rescue agencies. 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.

Of all the courses available to USNA midshipmen, this course offers the most expansive and in-depth opportunities for student leadership, including the likelihood of beginning daily independent student group travel earlier in the course than other course types.

### **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 violent. You may experience snow, hail, and rain, as well as long stretches of sunny, blue skies. Travel in the mountains can be tough. Early season courses may spend most of their time camping on snow and using snowshoes to travel. Other times, you will bushwhack through thick forests or scramble around boulders the size of refrigerators. Rivers are icy from snowmelt and can be difficult or impossible to cross. You will 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 is exhilarating. Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes and hanging your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. You will be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. Bear avoidance techniques while camping and traveling will be integrated into this course. Precautions against bear encounters may decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy. This course will protect all food and attractants from bears. Other bear avoidance tactics include meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites and making loud calls to warn bears of your presence.

During the first summer training block course, you can expect to learn snow travel techniques, and potentially the Tyrolean traverse, a way to cross a river suspended from ropes. If this season's snow pack is deep, you may travel exclusively on snowshoes, and possibly learn to use an ice ax for self-arrest. The later training blocks will encounter considerably less snow in the mountains.

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 being responsible for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in these wild mountains healthy and fun.

### **USNA Wyoming Backpacking Course Objectives**

Each course is unique due to variables such as route, group dynamics, fitness levels and environmental conditions. Students will practice and gain competence in the following areas:

#### **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
  - Take responsibility for the health and safety of self and others
  - Assist in planning and participate in a student-led, multi-day Student Expedition

### **Risk Management**

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

- Demonstrate knowledge of the hazards in a mountain environment, e.g., rockfall, weather, and river crossings
- Consistently perform appropriate techniques to reduce or avoid hazards
- Demonstrate the first aid skills necessary to support a patient until help arrives
- Demonstrate the ability to develop a contingency plan for a group in the outdoors
- Display sound judgment and an awareness of group and self-limits

### **Wilderness Skills**

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

- Travel competently in mountain terrain using map and compass skills, off-trail navigation, hazard evaluation, route-finding techniques, bear camping and river-crossing techniques
- Live comfortably in a mountain environment; learn to camp, cook, and dress for a variety of conditions
- Accurately assess skills, strengths and endurance in self and others and conservatively apply those limits to given situations
- Demonstrate appropriate travel techniques on rock, snow, and mixed terrain
- Demonstrate the ability to remain composed and thoughtful in difficult and exposed terrain
- Correctly tie fundamental climbing knots and display efficient rope handling techniques; effectively use the ice ax for snow travel and self-arrest

### **Environmental Studies**

Students develop an awareness of how to apply Leave No Trace ideas to their lives beyond the course. Each student is expected to:

- Consistently perform Leave No Trace living and travel skills and be able to apply this knowledge to new environments
- Show an understanding, appreciation, and respect for the natural world
- Identify characteristic flora and fauna of the area

**NALE graduates will have the experience to lead others in a mountain environment.**