

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:

• Hiking Route: ~ 75-100 miles	• Possible peak ascents
• Elevations of 10,000' - 13,000'	• Course Length: 23 or 26 days
• On and off-trail hiking, as well as above tree line	• Opportunity for independent student travel
• Excellent rock climbing and bouldering	• 12 Students /2 Instructors
• Possible snow climbing	• Fishing possible (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 skills from off-trail travel to leadership. There are sweeping expanses of rock to climb, perennial snowfields to glissade, fish to catch and snowstorms in July. During your course, you'll backpack and move camp almost daily, stopping at prime locations to fish, ascend a 13,000-foot peak, or rock climb.

You will work hard traveling over rocky, steep terrain, crossing rivers, and keeping yourself and others warm and well fed. Once you have your basic outdoor living skills mastered, you'll move into advanced curriculum such as hazard analysis and mitigation; off-trail travel techniques; individual and team leadership; as well as 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.

Teamwork and leadership are the core of the curriculum. You'll 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 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, 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. 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.

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'll 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'll 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's exhilarating! Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes and hanging your food to keep it away from bears or other animals. You'll 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.

NALE 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 that each student accomplishes 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



