

COURSE DESCRIPTION

ALASKA SEA KAYAKING EXPEDITION

National Outdoor Leadership Expedition and Student Expedition Program
June, 2006

Features of this Course

Field Days: 23	Paddling Route: 120 to 200 miles
Age of Participants: 15-18	Travel in both single and double sea kayaks
Group Size: 10-12 Students / 3 Instructors	Opportunity for day hikes

The Expedition

Prince William Sound is the classroom for this expedition. This area offers a spectacular and varied natural history; it is a place for observation, exploration and discovery. The variety of the landscape is compelling. For 23 days, you'll paddle a sea kayak beneath towering glaciers and past wooded coves. The sea teems with various forms of life including whales, porpoises, sea otters, seals and sea lions. Sea birds wheel in the sky overhead while tidal pools with starfish, anemones and other small creatures dot the shorelines. You'll work hard paddling with all your gear for the expedition stowed in your boat, but you'll play hard as well. Ultimately, you will learn the skills you need to paddle in an ocean environment long after the end of your course.

These skills begin with the basics, which include camping, cooking, map reading, stove use, Leave No Trace techniques and sanitation. These are the foundation for wilderness sea kayaking. You'll move into the sea kayaking curriculum beginning with paddle strokes, tides and ocean currents, weather, marine hazards, rescue techniques and wet exits. Throughout the course, the instructors hold both formal and informal classes on a wide range of subjects. As the course progresses and students become more comfortable with the environment, the teaching emphasis shifts to outdoor recreation skills. Topics include paddling techniques, ocean hazard evaluation and fishing. Do not be surprised to find yourself sitting in a class about local geology, tides, rain forest ecology or sea mammals, or participating in a discussion on different leadership styles and expedition behavior.

You'll be living with two or three other students in a "cook" group during the course. These small groups help disperse the impact on the land and enable you to master the art of backcountry cooking and living. You'll get lots of coaching from your instructors while you learn these new skills. Before you know it, you'll be savoring homemade pizza and cinnamon rolls - gourmet delicacies that you made from scratch on a single-burner stove.

Weather and Other Challenges

In the summer, there can be plenty of rain. You can expect it to rain or drizzle for at least half of the course. Storms can prohibit paddling and ground the course at a beach for a few days. You will also experience sunny, warm summer days.

Identifying and managing ocean hazards will be a constant theme in our instruction. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away. Managing risks and assuming responsibility for yourself and your colleagues will help make your expedition in this wild and beautiful place healthy and fun.

The group will learn to work together, and as you learn about and depend upon each other for safety and comfort, strong friendships can develop. Learning to be a contributing member of an expedition can be a challenge with immense personal rewards. Leadership and teamwork will be stressed on this Prince William Sound course. It takes a lot of commitment to the group and a willingness to set aside personal goals at times for an expedition to succeed. Just as you need to be physically fit you also need to be mentally ready to take on the challenges and have a blast.

Alaska Sea Kayaking 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:

Safety and Judgement

NOLS teaches wilderness users to practice responsible actions that promote the health and safety of self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the dangers in a cold water environment.
- Describe and consistently perform specific techniques to negotiate or avoid hazards.
- Learn and apply the basic first aid skills appropriate to this environment.
- Display an awareness of weather and sea conditions appropriate for safe travel.
- Use experience and judgment to implement sound decisions and follow them through to completion.

Leadership and Teamwork

Students are exposed to the theory and practice of outdoor leadership, teamwork and expedition behavior. At NOLS expedition behavior involves commitment to the group, a positive attitude, acceptance of others and cooperation to achieve goals. Objectives include the ability to:

- Work effectively as a member of a team.
- Appropriately communicate ideas and concerns on individual and group levels.
- Accurately identify personal strengths, skills and areas for growth in developing leadership styles.
- Take responsibility for learning by setting and attaining personal goals.
- Understand the considerations for planning and carrying out safe and environmentally sound expeditions.
- Use abilities and initiative in a teaching/leadership role with peers.
- Respond to problem situations using decision and planning skills.

Outdoor Living Skills

At NOLS our students learn to live and travel in remote areas within a framework of personal safety and care of the environment and the equipment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Live comfortably in a maritime environment: learn how to dress for a variety of conditions, camp and cook with a minimum of impact.
- Safely explore the shore and coastal forest by foot.
- Practice the principles of coastal seamanship as it relates to sea kayaking.
- Demonstrate a respect for and care of all personal and expedition equipment.

Environmental Ethics

An integral part of every NOLS Sea Kayaking Course is to raise students' awareness of their effect on self, others and the environment. Objectives include the ability to:

- Consistently perform sound minimum-impact living and travel skills by following the Leave No Trace principles; be able to extrapolate this knowledge to new environments
- Display an understanding of the history, facts and potential solutions to pertinent environmental issues.
- Use basic observation and interpretive skills to demonstrate an understanding, appreciation and respect for the natural world above and below the water.

Sea Kayaking Skills

The necessary skills for safe travel by sea kayak are taught throughout the course. The teaching progression is dependent on students' abilities and the weather conditions experienced on each particular course. Objectives include the ability to demonstrate an understanding of the following:

- 1) Safe launchings and landings in various conditions.
- 2) Paddle Signals.
- 3) Basic paddling strokes; forward, reverse, sweep, draw, low and high braces.
- 4) Basic self and assisted rescues.
- 5) Coastal hazards; wind, waves, weather, currents, tides and geography of the coastline.
- 6) Safe group travel and use of safety equipment.