

Wind River Mountaineering

Course Description

You're excited to challenge yourself with new experiences in the mountains. Learning about traveling on a glacier and climbing peaks is your idea of exciting, even if you've never camped before. If you want to grow as a leader and learn the skills to pursue a lifetime of mountain travel, this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 30 days
- Route length: approximately 75 miles
- Average group size: 12 students / 3 instructors
- Average pack weight: 50–65 pounds
- Elevations of 10,000–13,000 feet
- Combination of on- and off-trail hiking
- Travel mostly above tree-line
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Introduction to mountain travel and rock climbing basics
- Possible technical peak ascents, snow, and ice climbing
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors (based on instructor discretion)

Overview

Wyoming's Wind River Range, where your expedition takes place, is a rugged, glacier-carved range known for its sheer granite walls and superb climbing. Remote crags and thousand-foot couloirs offer unparalleled opportunities for learning mountaineering skills.

Your course will begin with basic camping and travel skills: cooking and stove use, map reading, Leave No Trace practices, and techniques for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat. A foundational course goal is building an inclusive community with your peers. Learning the value of teamwork, you will tackle group challenges and achieve common goals. Whether you spend more time learning to travel on snow, ice, or rock will depend on the snowpack and conditions in the mountains during your course. Beyond the basics of knots, rope handling, and belaying techniques, you may learn ice axe use and self arrest, step cutting, climbing in crampons, glacier travel, rock protection placement, "mixed" climbing on old snow, ice and rock, and more. You'll

spend time practicing these techniques on small cliffs near camp. As your experience builds, you may move on to longer, technical climbs. Non-technical peak ascents are also an option.

Mountaineering courses hike or climb almost every day. When moving camps, you'll travel in a small hiking group so you have more opportunities to lead, make decisions, and practice navigation as you travel through the wilderness. When top-rope climbing or attempting a peak, you may travel as a large group or in a smaller team with a single instructor. Ultimately, you'll learn the skills needed to travel in the mountains long after your expedition ends.

Independent Student Group Travel

At the beginning of the course your instructors will travel with you to teach travel skills including navigation, leadership, risk assessment, and decision-making. As you develop competence, instructors will gradually give you more responsibilities. Once you gain proficiency and demonstrate competence to your instructors, you may travel in student-led groups without instructors for up to a day at a time—we call this independent student group travel.

Student Expedition

After successful practice with independent student group travel and if your instructors think your group is ready, your course may culminate in a multi-day student-led expedition. Usually, for the Student Expeditions you will travel in a group of four to six students independently of instructors for two to six days (depending on location). This independent expedition caps off your NOLS experience and gives you a chance both to put into practice the skills you've learned and to appreciate the relationships you've formed with your expedition mates over the duration of your course.

Independent student group travel is carefully planned with your instructors and emergency plans are created for each group. Your instructors may be up to 24 hours away, but each group carries an electronic emergency communication device to alert the NOLS emergency response system in the event of an accident. Ultimately, on this course you will develop the competence to travel independently in the wilderness and with your family and friends.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

Summer weather in the Rockies is unpredictable. You'll learn to live comfortably outside in blizzards, rainstorms, and high winds. Cold and snowy conditions can occur any month of the year, and courses in May or June will likely spend much of their time camping on snow or using snowshoes to travel.

Terrain

You may be bushwhacking off-trail through thick vegetation, scrambling over refrigerator-sized boulders, or battling sleet. Rivers are icy from snowmelt and can be difficult or impossible to cross. You may have to traverse slopes of loose rock and carry a heavy backpack up steep passes.

Wildlife

The area your course will travel through is home to grizzly and black bears. NOLS, in collaboration with bear biologists, has developed specific practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter. Your instructors will teach these practices to you and you will have to follow them every day. Bear avoidance practices include carrying bear deterrent pepper spray, meticulously maintaining cleanliness at the cooking sites, not having food in tents, and proper food storage. In some situations in grizzly bear country, the minimum group size is generally four people. You will live, travel and take care of personal necessities with a group of your peers always close by. Precautions against bear encounters will decrease the opportunities for solitude and privacy on this course, one of the most challenging aspects of living in grizzly bear country.

Remoteness

Identifying and managing the risks from hazards—such as falling rock, stormy weather, animals, moving water, and steep terrain—will be a constant theme on your course. You're often miles from the amenities of civilization, including medical care; telephones may be several days away. You are expected to demonstrate the highest regard for risk management in the field.

Learning Goals at NOLS

NOLS courses teach wilderness and leadership skills on expeditions and in classrooms. You will apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning culture with high expectations. Your course will provide you with the opportunity for a positive, transformative experience intended to inspire you and empower you to act.

We craft NOLS courses so graduates will be able to assume leadership roles; live and travel in the outdoors; act with confidence and competence; respect and collaborate with others on expeditions, on teams and in communities; care for themselves and others; understand their strengths, habits, and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively; connect with natural places; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.