

# Rocky Mountain Service Expedition

## Course Description

You're ready to work hard and play hard in the Rocky Mountains. You're looking for an opportunity to contribute to something bigger than yourself and are curious about public lands management. You're not afraid to break a sweat, get your hands dirty, and put in long hours on a job. If you're looking to combine a wilderness expedition with a backcountry service project, this course is for you.

### Features

- Duration: 30 days / approximately 15 hiking days and 15 work days
- Route length: approximately 50 miles
- Average group size: 12 students / 2–3 instructors and one Forest Service ranger
- Average age range: 17–19 / Minimum age: 16
- Average pack weight: 50–65 pounds
- Elevations of 8,000–13,000 feet
- On- and off-trail hiking
- Travel near or above tree-line
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Combination of backpacking and basecamp-style living at remote work sites

### Overview

Your course will take place in the Wind River Mountains: rugged, glacier-carved mountains renowned for their sheer granite walls and famous for their beautiful alpine lakes. You'll backpack in a wilderness surrounded by towering peaks and perennial snow.

Along the way, you'll base camp for several nights at a time at remote work sites, where a Forest Service ranger will lead your group in a service project. These projects might include building or repairing bridges; replacing trail signs; shoring up eroded trails; clearing brush; and cleaning up impacted campsites.

Your course will begin with basic skills: cooking and stove use, map reading, Leave No Trace practices, expedition behavior, and techniques for hiking and camping in grizzly bear habitat. Then, the group will move into more advanced topics, such as: leadership styles, effective communication and feedback skills, wilderness first aid, and navigation using a GPS and compass. Other skills that may be taught based on conditions, group

interest, and instructor focus include: baking, fly-fishing, snow travel, and plant identification. As you travel, you'll learn about a range of topics, from natural history to leadership to geology, and you'll have opportunities to put your new knowledge into practice every day.

During work-project portions of your course, you'll camp at a single location for four to seven days at a time. You'll continue cooking and camping in small groups, and having leadership classes in the morning and evenings. Expect to put in long, hard days of work, including heavy lifting and tool use (e.g., shovels, pulaskis, saws, axes). Your projects may not be glamorous, but they will ensure that others can adventure in this wilderness for years to come. By taking time out of your own expedition to care for our public lands, you're serving both your country and your fellow travelers.

Ultimately, you'll learn the skills needed to travel in the mountains long after your expedition ends, while gaining valuable exposure to a career in public land management.

## **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.

## **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 early season courses may 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.*