

Wilderness Horsepacking Equipment List

Welcome to NOLS!

Learning to choose the right equipment for your adventure is an essential part of the NOLS curriculum. We fundamentally believe you don't need to own a lot of expensive gear to live and travel comfortably in the outdoors. We recognize the process of getting ready for a course can be an intimidating experience, especially if you have never done anything like it before. This list is designed to help you make decisions about what gear you bring and hopefully help you feel confident about entering your course.

When you arrive, your instructors will first look through all the equipment you've brought and help you decide what to take into the field. You'll then go into our Outfitting Department to rent or purchase any remaining items. The list below is comprehensive; however, the actual equipment needed for your course will vary depending on location, season, and instructor judgment. For this reason, we do not recommend that you go out and purchase a lot of expensive, specialized gear for your course.

Horsepacking has weight limits. In addition to personal gear, horses will be carrying all your food, fuel, camping gear, and specialized horse gear. Depending on the seasonal weather and instructor preference, personal gear will be limited to 15 - 20 pounds.

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you pack:

- **First, use gear you already own!** You'll be comfortable in tried-and-true clothing. Bring more layers than you think you'll need; your instructors will help you choose your best options. If an item is suitable for your particular course, you can take it into the field; if not, you can leave it in storage. If in doubt, bring it!
- **Second, rent key items from NOLS.** When it comes to gear, everyone has their own preferences. In the field, you'll have the opportunity to hone your preferred system. We recommend that you rent, rather than purchase, several "big ticket" items, such as a sleeping bag and backpack. While you are not obligated to rent gear from us, there are several reasons why we suggest it. Our rental gear is high quality and chosen specifically for the heavy use it receives on courses. Rental prices are reasonable (based on wear/tear and duration of use), so you can try out gear and make informed decisions on future adventures.
- **Third, purchase specific items from our Outfitting Department.** To make shopping simple, we offer basic camping essentials and personal care items. The items we sell in our Outfitting Department are tailored to what works well on our courses. Approximate price ranges for the items we sell are listed below - you can use these price ranges to help you decide whether to purchase items ahead of time.

- **Fourth, go shopping before your course.** A few options:
 - **REI or a local gear store**
 - Pro: Employees often have some sense of what you will need
 - Con: Gear at these locations is often expensive
 - **Target, Wal-Mart, and other department stores**
 - Pro: The active wear and camping sections can have inexpensive options
 - Con: Employees are unlikely to be able to offer suggestions
 - **Thrift stores**
 - Pro: Likely the least expensive option
 - Con: Can take a lot of time to find what you need
 - **Online**
 - Pro: Can find a wide variety of options
 - Con: The variety of options can be overwhelming to sort through

Equipment Fees

In addition to your course tuition, you will pay an equipment deposit. This deposit will be applied directly to the charges you incur for gear rentals, purchases, or any loss or damage to our equipment. Total charges will vary depending on the amount of equipment you rent or purchase from us; the prices listed below will help you estimate your costs. At the end of your course, you will be billed for any amount that exceeds the equipment deposit, or refunded any balance.

How to Use This List

Items under the **Required** heading are items that you **must** either bring yourself or rent or purchase from NOLS as available. Items under the **Optional** heading are not required, and you may bring them from home, buy, or rent from NOLS as available. If you see an **X** in the price column, that means that an item is not available for rent or for purchase as indicated.

Feedback?

NOLS is trying to update this list to be more welcoming and effective. If you are willing to provide some feedback to help our effort please take this [survey](#).

Questions?

Contact your Admission Officer if you have any questions or would like further information about the equipment list.

Upper Body Clothing

Your clothing will form a layering system of base layers, mid-layers, and shell layers. The base layers are designed to wear close to your skin and provide moisture management, light insulation, and sun protection. Warmer mid-layers are for insulation and need to fit well together to give you options as conditions change. On the outside, wind and rainproof jackets prevent heat loss by cutting wind, rain, and snow. Look for synthetic materials that dry quickly and retain their warmth when wet, which cotton does not do.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$70	Mid-weight long underwear top, wool or synthetic (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Body Zone)
Middle layer (fleece jacket)	X	\$50-160	Fleece jacket (e.g. Patagonia R-1, Mountain Hardwear Microchill, etc.) or a wool sweater
Insulated Jacket (1-2)	\$45	\$95-220	A warm, synthetic or down “puffy” jacket that fits over your other layers and under your rain jacket. A hood is recommended. For courses that start in May/June, you may want 2 puffy jackets: a lighter one and a heavier one.
Rain jacket/Slicker	\$20 (Slicker only)	\$100-150 (Rain jacket only)	A sturdy waterproof jacket with a hood that can fit over a helmet. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics are acceptable (e.g. Gore-Tex, Marmot Precip, Mountain Hardwear Dry.Q, Patagonia H2No). Three Peaks rents slickers, which are long jackets that split at the legs in order to cover you while you ride.
Sports bra (1-2)	X	\$40	Lightweight bras that offer adequate support. Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) that dry quickly are preferable.
Binder (1-2)	X	X	If you usually wear a binder or are planning to wear one during your NOLS course, make sure it allows you to breathe freely and doesn't cause pain or limit athletic activity.
Optional Items			
Long-sleeved work shirt	\$5	\$20-35	A button-down, long-sleeved shirt (or a pearl-snap if you want to get western!) is a great item to protect skin from the elements. Wool, synthetic, or cotton are all acceptable.
T-shirt	X	\$25-50	A lightweight synthetic or wool t-shirt

Sun Hoody	X	\$60-70	A lightweight synthetic or natural fiber (non-cotton) hoody that provides both sun protection and works well as a base layer.
Our advice? Bring the non-cotton sweaters, fleece jackets, athletic clothes, and synthetic layers you think might work. We'll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on conditions.			
Lower Body Clothing			
You will need 1–2 synthetic insulating layers (usually a base layer and, in early summer, a pair of warm pants). All must fit comfortably over each other so they can be worn simultaneously. If you tend to get cold easily, add a middle layer of mid-weight bottoms to the base layer and fleece or puffy pants.			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$70	Mid-weight synthetic or wool bottoms (e.g. Patagonia Capilene, Terramar Performance, Icebreaker Bodyfit Zone).
Middle layer (fleece pants)	\$32	\$60-150	Mid- or heavy-weight bottoms that fit comfortably over the base-layer bottoms. Fleece pants or insulated (puffy) pants are both acceptable. These are highly recommended on courses that start in May/June, but they may not be needed on later summer courses.
Denim jeans (2 pairs)	X	X	1-2 pairs (one for the ranch, one for the field). Jeans that are in good shape and can be worn over synthetic or wool long underwear.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	X	\$20-35	Clean underwear is essential for backcountry hygiene and you will likely have opportunities for laundry on your course. Synthetic or natural fibers (non-cotton) are great options.
Optional Items			
Wind pants/hiking pants	\$24	\$75	Nylon or synthetic pants. These should fit comfortably over lower-body base layers. Soft-shell fabrics are acceptable, but lightweight “running pants” are not durable enough.
Chaps	\$45	X	If you already own a pair, bring them. Some people prefer to ride in chaps, although they are not required.
Rain pants	X	\$80-110	Although not required, some people like to use rain pants in conjunction with a rain jacket. Recommended for May/June courses.

Hiking shorts	X	X	If you like to wear them, bring them. Loose fitting nylon athletic or river shorts. Nylon “quick dry” shorts can double as swim trunks.
Our advice? Bring the synthetic base layers, rain gear, and exercise clothing you think might work. We’ll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on the season and course area. When buying jeans, look for jeans that are comfortable to hike and walk in, and that have a smooth inseam, if possible.			
Head, Neck, and Hand Layers			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Baseball cap or wide-brim sun hat	X	\$16-30	Lightweight headwear for sun protection. We sell a variety of visors, trucker hats, and running hats.
Warm Hat	X	\$20-35	Warm, thick hat for cold nights. Should cover your ears. Wool or fleece are ideal.
Mosquito head net	X	\$5	A light, nylon head net. Can also double as a hair net.
Liner gloves	X	\$10	Lightweight, synthetic glove that can be layered under heavier-weight gloves for added warmth.
Horseback Riding Helmet	Free to rent	X	If you already own a helmet designed specifically for horseback riding, bring it. Instructors will check to make sure that your helmet meets current safety standards.
Optional Items			
Neck Gaiter	X	X	Neck gaiters are synthetic pieces of multi-functional headwear (hat, bandana, neck warmer, etc.) that many folks use in the outdoors. Buff is a common brand
Religious Headwear	X	X	Headwear associated with religious custom (Hijab, Pagri, Chunni, Yarmulke, etc.)
Hair Care Headwear	X	\$5-10	Wave cap, hair wrap, or bonnet whatever you are used to. Cotton, satin, or synthetics are all good.
Mosquito head net	\$4	\$6	A light nylon head net
Silk scarf/wild rag	X	\$12-24	This is a great, lightweight cowboy accessory that provides extra warmth and protection from wind and insects.
Leather work gloves	X	\$15-20	These are for hand protection while working with ropes and leading packhorses.

Our advice? As long as they're not cotton, bring your gloves, mittens, and shells. We'll check them and see if they'll work. Depending on the weather, you may need one or two pairs.

Packs and Bags

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Small stuff sacks (2-4)	\$2	\$10-20	Small nylon or mesh sacks for organizing items in your pack
Zip bag	\$4	X	Nylon duffel bag with zippers, used as a clothing storage bag. Recommended rental item, as rental bags are sized for use with panniers
Sleeping bag sack	\$9	X	Large bag, often mesh, that your sleeping bag will be packed in. Often is the bag your sleeping bag is sold with, not a compression stuff sack.

Sleeping Gear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sleeping bag	\$80	\$220-350	Synthetic-fill bags (e.g. Thermolite, Thermal.Q, APEX, etc.) perform well in the variety of conditions we encounter on courses. A bag rated to 5°-15°F.
Sleeping Pad	X	X	Used for padding and insulation between sleeping bag and ground. Foam pads (which we rent) should be closed-cell and have at least an R-Value of 2.0. Inflatable pads (which we don't rent) can provide more comfort, but are less durable. Many people choose to leave the sleeping pad behind and sleep on horse pads to reduce the weight carried by pack horses.
Plastic trash bag (2)	X	\$1	Heavy-duty lawn-and-garden bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof your sleeping bag and clothes bag
Ground cloth	\$3	\$8	A waterproof nylon sheet to go between your sleeping pad and the ground.

Our advice? A sleeping bag is another major purchase. If you don't already own one, we think you should rent ours, gain some experience, and then make an informed decision after your course.

Toiletries

Self-care in the outdoors is an essential component of any expedition. Whatever systems you use to take care of yourself in your daily life can often be modified to the appropriate size/quantity for your course. Any starred (*) item is something that we sell at NOLS.

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Lip balm	X	\$3-5	Stick, cream, or tube-type moisturizing balm, SPF 15 or greater. Products with zinc provide superior protection.
Sunscreen	X	\$5-10	At least 3-6 oz., SPF 30 or greater. Products with zinc provide superior protection.
Dental Care	X	\$3-6	Whatever your oral hygiene system is (toothpaste*, toothbrush*, floss*, retainer, etc.), you can likely adapt it to your course using trial or travel size versions.
Skin Care	X	\$7	You may want to consider lotion* (preferably unscented) or Vaseline in 3-5 oz travel-sized bottle, wash cloth-sized pack towel for backcountry bathing, and ointment for scrapes if you are prone to scarring.
Hair Care	X	X	You may want to consider a comb* or brush*, bands*, chopsticks, headwrap, ties, or whatever your system is.
Menstrual products	X	\$5-35	Required if you menstruate. Bring the products which work well for you, and bring slightly more supplies than you think you might need. This might mean tampons*, pads*, a menstrual cup*, or some combo thereof.
Personal Medications	X	X	Any prescriptions/supplements that are part of your system should be brought in sufficient quantities.

Our advice? Bring what you think will support your health on course, minimizing bulk and extra quantity where possible. Travel-size containers can be helpful in this process.

Miscellaneous Items

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Bowl	X	\$7	A plastic bowl with a screw- or snap-on lid is handy.
Spoon	X	\$1-\$10	Lexan spoons are light and durable. We also sell plastic and titanium sporks

Water bottle (1-2)	X	\$14-16	Squeeze bottles are preferable for drinking while riding. We recommend that everyone have 2 liters of capacity.
Bandana (1-2)	X	\$2	Useful for a variety of purposes from wiping post-pee to sneezing, from a cooling neck tie to wiping your bowl.
Headlamp	X	\$30	Durable and lightweight. Bring spare batteries.
Batteries	X	\$1	AA/AAA are available for sale. We recommend 2 full sets for your headlamp.
Lighter	X	\$1.50	For lighting your camp stove
Watch	X	\$25	A watch with an alarm is a nice feature.
Pen/pencil	X	\$0.75	For journaling and taking notes during classes
Notepad	X	\$10	A small, lightweight pad is fine.
Sunglasses	X	\$30-80	Sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark. If you wear prescription lenses and have limited vision without them, bring your own prescription sunglasses, clip-ons, or over glasses. We sell Suncloud and Optic Nerve.
Prescription glasses/contacts (2-3)	X	X	Bring a spare pair of glasses or lenses. Contact-lens wearers should also bring a pair of glasses as backup.
Optional Items			
Book or e-reader	X	\$140	A lightweight paperback book or e-reader. Tablet-style e-readers (e.g. Kindle Fire) are not acceptable. We recommend bringing a padded case as well.
Trekking poles	\$12	X	Sturdy, telescoping poles that can be used for increased stability while walking and minimize impact on your legs. Rental price is for an individual pole.
Camera	X	X	GoPros and lightweight digital or 35mm cameras are acceptable; bring a protective case. Avoid elaborate lenses and heavy SLRs. (Please note: you may not bring your smartphone or tablet into the field to use as a digital camera.)
Camp chair	X	\$35	Bonus for camp life, we sell Crazy Creek chairs.
Hydration system	X	X	An alternative hydration system to bottles, whether a Camelbak, Platypus, etc.

Stand-to-pee device	X	\$12	If you plan to use a stand-to-pee device on your NOLS course, make sure it is one you have practiced with and are confident it works well for you.
Sunglasses retainer	X	\$8	Chums or Croakies for keeping track of your glasses or sunglasses.
Pocket knife	X	\$25-35	One small knife is sufficient; simple folding knives are popular.

Footwear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Cowboy boots	\$30	X	Either pull on or lace-up styles are acceptable. Should fit with a thick pair of wool socks. Boots should have smooth, composition soles (without lugs) and at least a one-inch heel. No leather soles; they are too slick for the terrain. We recommend buying your own boots if you have hard-to-fit feet, including sizes smaller than 6 or larger than 14. Please do not bring extra-large work boots, as they will be too wide to fit into the saddle stirrups.
Wool socks (4-5 pairs)	X	\$13-30	Mid to heavyweight. A combination of both weights is recommended for hiking and sleeping.
Camp shoes	X	X	Running, tennis, or cross-training shoes. Open-toed footwear is not allowed around horses.
Rubber boots	\$15	X	Lightweight mid-calf-length rubber boots. Mid-calf rain boots with a heel are also acceptable (Bogs, Muck boots, etc.).

Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply

Expedition members share both the use of and the responsibility for the group gear that NOLS issues. NOLS charges only for group equipment lost or damaged. Keep in mind that NOLS evaluates gear from a number of perspectives beyond those that an individual user might consider. Performance, durability and simplicity are all contributing factors towards our gear selection.

Tents and shelters
Trowel or shovel
Stoves, fuel bottles and fuel
Pots and pans
Maps and compasses
Bear-resistant food containers

Fishing gear
Equipment repair kits
Reference books
Binoculars
First aid kits
Veterinary and horseshoeing kits
Saddles and tack (Western style) - you may bring your own or borrow.
Riding helmets