Horsepacking in Wyoming's Wind River Range

Jackson Hole, WY
August 21-29, 2026



Features

- Learn about horse care, handling, and wilderness riding skills
- Learn and practice Leave No Trace with horses
- Three nights at the NOLS Three Peaks Ranch
- Five days, five nights in the field in Wyoming's Wind River Mountains
- Travel and camp with horses in the backcountry
- Opportunities for exceptional photography
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Options for world-class fly fishing

Max group size: 10 Participants
3 NOLS Instructors

Cost: $2,995
Minimum Age: 16
Historic Age Range: 18-71

Trip Description

It's time to explore the mountains and build relationships with horses! This is your chance to practice the time-honored work and rewards of traveling through the backcountry on horseback.

If you are flying in, we will pick you up in Jackson, Wyoming at 8 am on August 21 and drive about two hours to the NOLS Three Peaks Ranch in Boulder, Wyoming. Once we arrive at the ranch, anyone who drives themselves will join the group and the whole trip will get a tour of the operations, meet the herd, and then have a trip orientation meeting.

Regardless of your riding level, everyone will spend the first 2.5 days at NOLS Three Peaks Ranch, where NOLS horse courses and re-ration logistics are based. This time will allow the group to get to know each other, learn about your horses, and practice some fundamental riding and packing skills. These days are hard work and a lot of fun as you get prepared for a week in the backcountry together. Everyone eats communally and camps in the campground on the property.

After this introduction to ranch life and horsepacking basics, on the morning of day four you will find yourself helping to load horses in the trailer and gear into trucks before driving to the trailhead. Then, you will put your new skills into practice and ride into the mountains with a train of pack animals for five nights and six days of riding, horsecamping, and exploring the stunning and rugged landscape of the Wind River Mountains.

Horse packing is hard work. You have to care for yourself in the mountains and also care for your horse. Nearly every day is spent traveling 5 to 10 miles and involves loading and unloading about 150 pounds of gear. Mornings begin around 6:00 a.m., when you crawl out of your sleeping bag, care for the horses, cook breakfast, break camp, and then saddle and load the horses before hitting the trail.

The work starts again when you arrive at camp. At this point it's time to unload, unsaddle, water, and hobble or picket the horses. All this before you can set up camp and cook dinner. The work is hard, the days are long, and the level of responsibility you shoulder is considerable, but the rewards are great, and this will be a trip you'll never forget.

The scenery looks a bit different from atop a horse and you will view the backcountry through the eyes of explorers, trappers, and native peoples. We'll focus on the art of Leave No Trace camping with horses and pack stock and develop the decision making skills involved in this craft.

On the last day, August 29, you will be picked up at a trailhead and transported back to Three Peaks Ranch. You spend the morning cleaning up and putting away gear before an afternoon shuttle back to Jackson. Or, if you drive yourself to Three Peaks Ranch, you can hit the road from here this afternoon.

Trip Environment

The Wind River Mountains are an extensive glacier-carved range of steep granite peaks and cirques, punctuated by numerous lakes, rivers, and snowfields. No roads and few developed trails exist. Altitudes range from 8,000-13,000 feet. Occasionally, elk, deer, moose, bears, and bighorn sheep may be sighted. Once the realm of mountain men, this area provides a wonderful setting for horse packing, hiking, and fishing.

Mountain weather is capricious. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. Afternoon thunderstorms are common in late summer and can be quite violent. This trip may experience snow and rain, or several days of sun and clear blue skies. Average temperatures in late-August will see highs of around 50-65 with lows dipping into the 30's. Mostly you will be riding on trails, but even so there may be times when you need to dismount and lead your horse through downed trees, steep rocky slopes, or other varied mountain terrain.

NOLS Staff

Our staff are employees of NOLS and trained and certified accordingly. This means they maintain certifications in wilderness medicine and are trained to NOLS' high standards in risk management. They are senior staff at NOLS who have spent years working and teaching in backcountry environments all over the world. Additionally, our staff specialize in bringing together groups of strangers and building the group culture and camaraderie that makes NOLS trips great.

A Day in the Life

Days start early with breakfast and a check on the horses, followed by packing up camp, catching, saddling, and loading up your ride and pack horses. Lunches on the trail are casual and consist more of snacking and eating trail food than a sit down meal together as a group. There will be opportunities to dismount during the travel day, but you will also get to practice eating and drinking while on horseback. Before leaving in the morning, snacks are packed to be accessible throughout the day.

Each travel day will be a full day of riding, where you can plan on spending 5-8 hours in the saddle. You will ride on-trail through a variety of types of mountain terrain. While riding, you will have opportunities to practice leading the pack horses and navigating, not to mention enjoying the unique mountain views you get on horseback!

Once arrived at the next camp location, you will scout for tenting and kitchen locations and start setting up camp for the team— including the horses. The group shares dinner in camp before drifting off to bed or spending some time reading or fishing before it gets too dark.

Throughout the trip, meal preparation, cleanup, and horse duties are shared with the team. Your instructors will drive the show but everyone is expected to pitch in with all of the camp functions.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 3 out of 5 on our difficulty scale.



We use a difficulty scale to help participants evaluate if a trip is right for them. It considers probable weather conditions, physicality of activities, and food and accommodations. You don't need to be a honed athlete, but pre-trip work to improve your strength, flexibility and endurance, is highly encouraged to improve your enjoyment of the place. If you have specific questions regarding physical preparation and your readiness please reach out to the Alumni Trips Department.

Food on the trip

There will be plenty of food provided on the trip for everyone. We are happy to ensure that folks who have reasonable dietary needs and/or preferences are well taken care of throughout the entire trip. Listing those needs on your registration paperwork is critical for our success here.

If you would like to bring your own snacks along, that is highly encouraged. We all have treats that we enjoy and bringing something special is a great way to keep motivation high and not have to rely on the group's schedule for your munchies.

Curriculum

Alumni trips are more relaxed than a typical NOLS course; however, it is not a vacation or a guided trip. Trips are self-reliant expeditions through remote wilderness areas where evacuation to modern facilities can take several days. Throughout the trip, you live outdoors, prepare your own meals, and care for yourself and the horses. The expedition format emphasizes hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations. Participants have the freedom to bring equipment that is necessary for the enjoyment of the trip, and are expected to take responsibility for this aspect.

We will begin our curriculum at NOLS' Three Peaks Ranch in Boulder, Wyoming. The first few days are spent at the ranch so you can absorb new skills slowly. Here you'll be introduced to the basics: skills like catching your horses, grooming, saddling, riding, packing, and loading panniers. We'll also review tent pitching, stove use, and backcountry cooking.

NOLS is not a "riding school." Our normal speed when traveling is a walk. This allows both horse and rider to negotiate hazards and obstacles. Mountain travel is at a steady but constant pace.

Expectations of Participants

Participants for this trip are expected to be able to mount and dismount a horse from the ground without assistance. While this is a skill that can be developed, participants need to have the physical ability to do this in order to participate in a backcountry riding experience.

Not all horses can carry the same amount of rider weight. This means that we need to consider rider weights into the makeup of the group and what horses are brought along. Riders weighing over 220 lbs exceed our standard maximum weight and should contact us ahead of time to see if we can make an exception.

For NOLS horse trips, participants are required to wear riding helmets while riding in the backcountry. This is a protective measure that we implement because of the remoteness of the areas that we go to and the lack of access to definitive medical care.

Unlike our standard expeditions, Alumni trips do allow electronics and alcohol for those that are of legal age in the country of the trip. We believe that these luxuries can add to a course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

August 20	Arrive in Jackson on this day if you are flying. Make a reservation as soon as possible as summer books up. Lodging for this night is not included in tuition.
August 21	Breakfast & pack lunch on your own. (Pearl St Bagels is a great option for a sandwich to go). **We will pick you up at 8:00 AM** outside of the Antler Inn hotel. Thus, we suggest staying at The Antler Inn at the corner of Pearl and Cache Streets to help facilitate a timely pickup. Together, we will shuttle to Three Peaks Ranch. If you are driving yourself to the ranch, please be there ready to go at 9:45am. Today will include a ranch tour, orientation meeting, and an introductory instruction in horse handling and riding. You will stay at the Three Peaks campground.
August 22-23	Continued instruction in preparation for heading into the mountains. Breakfast/lunch/dinner provided.
August 24-28	Horsepacking in the Wind River mountains, traveling 5-10 miles per day.
August 29	Picked up and transported back to the NOLS Three Peaks Ranch. We will wrap up after lunch and shuttle participants back into Jackson. Optional group dinner this evening (not included in the trip tuition). Lodging is on your own in Jackson.
August 30	Travel home this morning at the earliest**.**

Travel Logistics

Getting to Jackson Hole, WY

Several major airlines provide service to Jackson, WY (airport code JAC).

If you arrive early and need to get to town, Jackson Hole Transportation Company provides shuttle service to and from the airport to the town of Jackson for all flights at a nominal fee. Shuttle reservations can be made by calling (800) 443-6133. Your hotel may also provide airport shuttle service.

If you are arriving in Jackson early we suggest staying at The Antler Inn.

NOLS will pick you up at the Antler Inn at 8:00am on August 21st to shuttle to Three Peaks Ranch.

By Car:
Please arrive at NOLS Three Peaks ranch at 9:45am on Aug 21st to meet the group.

Address:
NOLS Three Peaks Ranch
534 State Highway 353,
Boulder, WY

There are a number of hotels in Pinedale, Wyoming (12 miles north of Boulder) where you could spend the night before your trip. You can park your vehicle at the ranch for the duration of your trip. Let us know ahead of time if you are driving and we will give you the exact address of the NOLS ranch.

Post Trip

On the last day of the trip you will be picked up at the trail and brought back to the NOLS Ranch. At the Ranch you will clean up, clean gear, and help get the horses back into their pastures. Typically the day will wrap up around 4pm and folks will be shuttled back to Jackson or can depart on their own.

For folks going to Jackson, participants often organize a group dinner together this evening for anyone who is there. This is not included in the trip price.

It is best practice to book homeward bound flights from Jackson the following day. If you need to book a flight on the last day, please don't do so before 8pm and know that you might have to change it at your expense if any of the many steps are delayed that day or take a bit longer.

Lodging

NOLS provides lodging during the duration of the trip only. For lodging in Jackson before and after the trip we recommend staying at the following hotel. They will provide a discount to NOLS participants; ask for the "NOLS student rate."

The Antler Inn
50 West Pearl St Jackson
WY 83001 (307) 733-2535

There are many other lodging options, from budget to 5-Star, in Jackson that you may wish to consider. Some budget options include:

Ranch Inn
45 E Pearl St
(307) 733-6363

Rawhide Motel
75 S Millward St
(307) 733-1216

49er Inn
330 W. Pearl St
(800) 451-2980

Pony Express
50 S Millward St.
(307) 733-3835

Storage of Personal Belongings
Personal belongings and vehicles may be stored at the NOLS Three Peaks Ranch for the duration of your course. Although we assume no responsibility, due care will be taken to prevent theft or damage of your stored items. Valuables will be locked. Vehicles will be parked in an unfenced lot with little or no security.

Travel Insurance
Travel insurance is worth exploring in case unforeseen events cause you to change your plans or if NOLS has to cancel a trip for any reason. Check with your personal insurance carrier and credit card to understand what you already might have or check out cat70.com for a wide variety of options.

Carbon Footprint and Offset
Current estimates are that the Travel Industry accounts for ~8% of global emissions. This percentage includes everything from transportation to accommodation and shopping. NOLS recognizes that our business contributes to this problem but we do not have a comprehensive strategy at this point.

If you would like to offset part or all of the carbon emissions related to your Alumni trip, we recommend South Pole. Their calculator can help easily calculate your footprint and choose a project to contribute to. Here is a link to their calculator.

Tipping
While tipping is common in the outdoor guiding culture, your NOLS Instructors are not driven to excellence by tips but rather a love for taking people outdoors. You are welcome to tip the Instructors if you choose, but many instructors are honored by a donation in their name to the NOLS Annual Fund which supports scholarships for future NOLS students.

Trip Registration
The best way to register is through the trip information page on the nols.edu website. A non-refundable deposit secures your spot on the trip. If any issues arise, please call the NOLS Alumni Department at (800) 332-4280. Your enrollment is complete with receipt of your full tuition and your completed application forms; these are **due 60 days before the start of your trip.**

Your tuition includes meals starting with dinner on the first night through lunch on the last day, all group equipment, camping gear (tents, stoves, kitchens, etc.), safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation to and from your lodging.

For any gear that you purchase or rent, we only accept cash and check at the NOLS Ranch or your account can be charged and you can pay later.

All participants are required to submit registration materials, including a medical form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status while also providing NOLS information about things like your dietary needs.

NOLS is not responsible for additional costs incurred by late arrivals or evacuations. Those expenses are the responsibility of trip participants and we recommend purchasing travel insurance to mitigate the impact of unforeseen circumstances.

Do not book travel greater than 60 days before the start of the trip unless you have confirmed with NOLS that the trip will run. On rare occasions, we do cancel trips due to low enrollment.

Cancellation and Transfer Policy

For your reference, here is the Alumni Trips Cancellation and Transfer Policy. When enrolling on a trip, you will need to agree to this policy.

Equipment List - available for rent "yes"
Not available for rent "X"

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	**Rent**	**Notes**
Mid-Weight Top (1-2)	X	Mid-weight top, wool or synthetic
Middle layer (fleece jacket)	X	Fleece jacket or a wool sweater
Top layer (synthetic jacket)	Yes	Heavy weight fleece or mid-weight puffy layer
Wind shirt/anorak	Yes	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket/Slicker	Yes	A light waterproof jacket with a hood
T-shirt (1-2)	X	A lightweight synthetic or wool t-shirt
Sports Bra or Tank (1-2)	X	Synthetic or wool sports bra or tank
Baseball cap / full brim hat	X	To protect ears and face from the sun
Wool or fleece hat	X	A warm hat made of wool or fleece
Mosquito head net	Yes	A light nylon head net
Gloves	X	Wool or fleece
Silk scarf/wild rag (optional)	X	Warmth or protection from wind and insects
Leather work gloves (optional)	X	These are for hand protection while working with ropes and leading packhorses
Lower Body Clothing		

Mid-Weight bottom	X	Mid-weight bottom, wool or synthetic
Middle layer	X	Expedition-weight bottoms, Fleece or puffy
Wind pants/hiking pants	Yes	Breathable nylon wind pants or lightweight hiking pants, roomy enough to fit over lower body layers. We recommend renting NOLS windpants
Denim jeans (2 pairs)	X	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	Synthetic or wool are best
Rain pants	X	Rain storms tend to be short.
Optional Items		
Chaps	Yes	If you already own a pair, bring them
Hiking shorts	X	Can double as swim trunks
Packs and Bags		
Small stuff sacks (2-4)	Yes	Small nylon or mesh sacks for organizing items in your pack
Zip bag	Yes	Nylon duffel bag with zippers for your stuff in panniers. Rentals are sized correctly
Sleeping bag sack	Yes	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		
Sleeping bag	Yes	Synthetic or down bags with a temperature rating of around 20° F
Plastic trash bag (2)	X	Heavy-duty lawn-and-garden bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof your sleeping bag and clothes bag
Sleeping pad	Yes	A closed-cell foam pad designed for the backcountry
Ground cloth	Yes	A waterproof nylon sheet to go between your sleeping pad and the ground
Miscellaneous Items		
Insulated mug or thermos	X	12- to 20-oz. insulated mug with a lid
Bowl	X	A lightweight bowl with a snap or screw on lid
Spoon	X	Lexan spoons are light, durable and popular.
Water Bottles	X	Total capacity of at least 2 Liters
Bike bottle	X	Squirt type bottles are easier to drink from while riding. Camelbak bottles with bite valves work well, too
Lip balm	X	SPF 15 or greater

Sunscreen (1-2)	X	A 3- to 6-oz. tube, SPF 30 or greater
Bandana (1-2)	X	A few of these are always handy
Headlamp	X	Durable and lightweight. Bring spare batteries.
Disposable lighter	X	For lighting your camp stove
Toiletries	X	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, tampons, etc.
Watch	X	A watch with an alarm is a nice feature
Sunglasses w/ retainer	X	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV
Optional Items		
Binoculars	X	Small travel binoculars work well
Book or e-reader	X	Bring something fun to read
Camera	X	We would love to see your photos post-trip
Camp chair	X	Crazy Creek–style works well
Insect repellant	x	Small bottles; seasonally dependant
Footwear		
Cowboy boots	Yes	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 (3-4 pairs)	X	Ski socks work well with cowboy boots
Camp shoes	X	Closed Toe, running, tennis, or cross-training shoes
Rubber boots	Yes	Lightweight mid-calf-length rubber boots. (Bogs, Muck boots, etc.)