Technical Canyoneering

Dirty Devil River, Utah
March 22-29, 2026



Features

- Base camping paired with day excursions
- Seven days and six nights in the field
- Spectacular geology and canyon specific flora/fauna
- Technical travel using rappels, hand lines, scrambles, wading, and more

Cost: $2,295 (includes pre and post-trip lodging in Grand Junction, CO)
Minimum Age: 18

Max group size: 10 Participants
2 NOLS Instructors

Historic Age Range: 20-74

Trip Description

This trip takes place in the desert environment of southeastern Utah's canyon country. You will spend the week scrambling around these canyons as you rappel, squeeze, crawl, and maybe swim through a variety of stunning canyons. Days will be physically challenging as you use your body hard but returning to a basecamp every day makes recovery comfortable and easy.

Exposed landforms, steep, vertical walls, slot canyons, deep pools, and massive rock piles will provide textbook illustrations of the region's geologic past and also create a classroom environment unparalleled in the world for canyoneering. Thickly vegetated riparian zones will present themselves as well when the narrow canyon passageways open into large, flat-bottomed washes. This terrain will not fail to amaze.

Once we arrive at our camp location we will spend some time getting the group installed for a week of base camping. Getting tents well set up, a kitchen organized and built, and determining hygiene facilities are all a part of this process as we will likely be in this camp for the duration of the trip. Maintaining the same camp allows us to bring a bit more creature comforts and also spend more time exploring canyons rather than moving camps.

In our base camp you will likely be sharing a tent with other group members throughout the trip; we are happy to put couples or families together, but privacy in a tent is unlikely.

This trip will likely explore several side canyons of the Dirty Devil River system, although depending on local conditions this could change. The team will camp near several canyon "drops" and spend full days exploring. Nights in camp provide opportunities for socializing, honing backcountry cooking skills, practicing rope systems and relaxation.

Although not a focus on this trip, the area holds a wealth of ancient human history, from Paleo-Indian, to Archaic and Anasazi and Fremont cultures. Alert eyes can spot the cliff dwellings and ancient granaries that abound as well as rock art sites left from these venerable and mysterious cultures.

This technical canyoneering trip is rated as a “four” on the difficulty scale. This is a subjective rating of anticipated physical difficulty—weather, route and the group mix can combine to make trips more or less "difficult"—higher numbers indicate more challenge. The beauty of our base camp setup is that if you need to take a day off to hang out in camp, you can.

Trip Environment

Weather is our biggest variable in the canyons but springtime is reliably mild, with highs reaching into the 80s F and temps typically not dropping below 30 F. Although rain, even snow, could be encountered, sunny bluebird days and starry nights are more the rule, not the exception... Expect to walk on multiple types of terrain, from soft, sandy creek beds, to steep and rocky narrow passages, to smooth, flat, and/or vertical “slickrock.” If sleeping out under the stars, outside of a shelter, is appealing, you will likely have the opportunity to fall asleep looking at the spectacular night sky in one of the areas in the lower-48 states least polluted by artificial light.

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 out with a group prepared breakfast followed by a refresher of the plan for the day. You will then either head out for a full day of exploring canyons or potentially stay around camp for the morning to learn rope systems before heading out.

You will be working hard throughout the day and it is important to remember that lunch starts when breakfast is over and ends at dinner. Snacking and eating informally throughout the entire day is more typical than an organized lunch time.

After a full day out, you will return to the basecamp and start thinking about dinner. Dinners will be prepared by the group and eating communally before enjoying an evening under the stars with your trip mates. Evenings will also include planning for the next day and creating some potential options for the group.

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 4 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

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS skills, including desert-specific Leave No Trace hiking and camping as well as map reading/navigation. The technical components of this trip may include:

-Learning 4th and 5th class terrain management.
-Building anchors for rappels, pack lowers, handlines, and other technical actions.
-"Dropping" "slot" canyons employing scrambling, rappelling, wading, and teamwork
-Developing heightened risk management skills while negotiating canyon-specific hazards (steep terrain, loose rocks, exposed edges, and cold water swims).

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS course; however, it is not a guided trip—we call it an educational, participatory vacation. Alumni trips are self-reliant adventures through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Throughout the course, you will live outdoors, help to prepare meals, and care for yourself. The expedition emphasizes hands-on learning and application of new skills in a variety of situations.

Different from 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

March 22	NOLS has made lodging reservations for you at the Clarion Inn, Grand Junction (included in your tuition). **Trip orientation is at 6 p.m.** meeting in the Lobby.
March 23	Please eat breakfast and check out of your room, then **meet in the lobby at 7 a.m.** The drive from Grand Junction to the trailhead is about four hours. This evening will be our first night sleeping under the stars!
March 24-28	Hiking, camping, cooking, rappelling, and exploring this magical location.

March 29	Drive from final basecamp to Grand Junction for showers at the Clarion Inn and a final group dinner. Lodging this night is included.
March 30	Onward travel

Trip Logistics

Getting to Grand Junction

This trip starts and ends in Grand Junction, Colorado at the Clarion Inn. Grand Junction can be reached by air or road. Grand Junction Regional Airport is serviced by several airlines with daily, non-stop, flights from several hubs. As the major hub between Salt Lake City and Denver, Grand Junction is easily accessible from all directions and via AMTRAK and Greyhound Bus Lines.

Lodging

Clarion Inn
755 Horizon Drive
Grand Junction, CO 81506
970-243-6790

NOLS provides paired, same-gender hotel lodging on the first and last nights of the trip. Please let us know if you have a roommate request. The Clarion Inn has a free airport shuttle.

Please note that bad weather could delay the end of your trip. This is uncommon, but we always choose safety before punctuality. We will try our best to help you make connections. NOLS will inform your family if your trip is late.

Storage of Personal Belongings

There have been no problems with stored gear left at the Clarion Inn, but NOLS assumes no responsibility for lost or damaged luggage or other stored items.

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.**

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.

Suggested Reading

1. *Canyoneering Two: Technical Loop Hikes in Southern Utah* by Steve Allen.
2. *House of Rain* by Craig Childs
3. *Desert Solitaire* by Edward Abbey
4. *Great and Peculiar Beauty* by Thomas Lyon and Terry Tempest Williams
5. *A Vagabond for Beauty* by Everett Ruess

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

**Please note that this trip does not start at a NOLS Outfitting facility. You will be contacted ~4 weeks before the trip to arrange for gear rentals as needed. NOLS will be bring this gear to Grand Junction.

Group Gear provided by NOLS			
Cooking Gear/ Spice Kits/water treatment	Water bladders (Dromedaries)	Stoves, Fuel, Fuel Bottles	All technical gear (ropes, helmets, harnesses, hardware)

Reference Books	Maps & Compass	First Aid kits	Emergency Communication
Food	Tents or Shelters	Trowels	Equipment Repair Kits

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	**Rent**	**Notes**
Base Layer (2)	X	Mid-weight wool or synthetic top
Mid Layer (1)	X	Fleece or a wool sweater. Vests are a great addition also.
Top layer (“puffy” jacket)	Yes	A warm, synthetic or down-fill “puffy” jacket that fits over your base layers.
Wind Jacket	Yes	A lightweight, nylon wind shell. Hooded wind jackets are recommended. Does not need to be waterproof.
Rain Jacket	X	Bring a waterproof, breathable rain jacket. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics such as Gore-Tex® are acceptable. Needs to fit over all your insulating layers.
Hiking Shirt	X	A lightweight cotton, synthetic or merino wool shirt, collars add sun protection.
Sports Bras (1-2)	X	Should be silk, wool, or synthetic.
Wool / Fleece Hat	X	A lightweight warm hat made of wool or fleece.
Sun Hat	X	A baseball hat, wide-brimmed sun hat, or visor.
Light Gloves	X	Wool or fleece.
Lower Body Clothing		
Base layer (2)	X	Mid-weight bottoms of wool or synthetic.
Hiking pants (1)	Yes	One pair of sturdy hiking pants, these will likely see a lot of abuse sliding down and scrambling over sandstone. Bring a pair that can stand up to abuse or rent a pair of NOLS windpants.
Hiking Shorts	X	Loose fitting, nylon or something similar.
Underwear (2-4 pairs)	X	Wool or synthetic are best although some women prefer cotton briefs.
Footwear		
Trail Hiking or Approach shoes	X	Sturdy low top hiking shoes. Ideally approach shoes with sticky rubber.
Camp Shoes	X	A comfortable pair of running shoes or crocs. Must be closed toe.
Gaiters	X	Optional, but recommended. Short gaiters are the best option.
Socks (3-4 pairs)	X	½ crew to crew length wool or synthetic socks.

Miscellaneous Personal Gear		
Sleeping Bag	Yes (synthetic)	We recommend either synthetic or down bags. A bag with a 0°- 15° F temperature rating is required.
Compression Sack	Yes	Useful for traveling but not critical for this trip.
Sleeping Pad	Yes(foam)	A 3/4-length closed cell foam or inflatable pad.
Backpack	Yes	Sturdy and abrasion resistant day pack, 25-50 Liters.
Duffel Bag	X	A medium to large duffel to store your stuff in while in camp.
Leather Gloves	X	Useful for rappels, Leather palms are important.
Knee Pads	X	Very helpful when crawling or chimneying through the slots. Volleyball type works well.
Bowl	X	A lightweight bowl with a snap or screw on lid.
Spoon	X	Lexan spoons are light, durable and popular.
Water Bottles	X	Bottles with at total capacity of at least 2 Liters.
Lip Balm (1-2)	X	SPF 15 or greater.
Sunscreen	X	SPF 30 or greater.
Bandannas (1-2)	X	A few of these are always handy.
Sunglasses (1-2)	X	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark.
Headlamp	X	Bring spare batteries.
Lighter	X	Used for lighting your camp stove.
Toiletries	X	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, tampons, etc.
Watch	X	A watch with an alarm is a necessary item.
Notepad and Pencil/Pen	X	A small, lightweight pad is necessary for taking notes.
Optional Items		
Hydration System	X	Very handy and popular.
Insulated Mug/Thermos	X	12 to 20 oz. insulated mugs or a thermos.
Sunglass Retainers	X	Something for keeping track of your glasses or sunglasses.
Pocket Knife	X	One small, lightweight, knife is sufficient. Simple fixed blade knives clean the easiest.
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 chair or something compact.
Prescription Glasses And Contact Lenses (1-2 pairs)	X	Bring at least one spare pair of glasses or lenses. Contact lens wearers should also bring a pair of glasses as backup. Prescription sunglasses are a nice item to have.
Coffee	X	We provide coffee for the trip, but you are also welcome to bring your own if you prefer a specific type.