

Salmon Backpacking and Rafting

Course Description

Prepare yourself for an amazing adventure in the rugged mountains and on the surging rivers of the West. You'll take on real leadership challenges as you and your group learn to navigate rapids and traverse steep ridges. If you're looking to learn leadership and a variety of outdoor skills that open the door to future adventures, then this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 28 days
- Course sections: backpacking (19 days) and river rafting (9 days)
- Hiking route length: 60-80 miles
- River route length: approximately 80 miles
- Average group size: 12 students / 3-4 instructors
- Average age: 18 / minimum age: 16
- Average backpack weight: 45-60 pounds
- Elevation range: 5,000-11,000 feet
- Potential for peak ascents and fly fishing
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors (based on instructor discretion)
- Terrain: on and off-trail travel, possibility of encountering up to Class III rapids on the river section
- Wildlife you may see: moose, elk, deer, bear, sheep, mountain goat and fox

Overview

On this course, you will hike in the stunning Lemhi Mountains, then raft on the Main Salmon River in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness, learning the skills you need to explore the wilderness on foot and by boat.

Your course will start with the basics, including camping, cooking and stove use, sanitation, and Leave No Trace techniques. As you gain comfort and experience, you'll move on to topics that may include first aid, fishing for cutthroat trout, baking bread, leadership, and environmental issues. You may have an opportunity to perform a service project with the U.S. Forest Service, too.

Backpacking

- Duration: 19 days
- Route length: 50-70 miles
- Emphasis on mountain hiking skills and navigation

On this section, you'll discover the wildlife and wilderness of the West's breathtaking high-elevation terrain. As you travel through wide valleys and work your way to the top of high ridges, you'll practice leadership as well as outdoor skills. You'll learn to read a map and use a compass as well as decision-making and self-reliance. By the end of this section, you'll have plenty of basic skills and experiences to head out on your own trips in the mountains, and take your family and friends with you.

River

- Duration: 9 days
- Route length: approximately 80 miles
- Emphasis on river navigation and risk management
- Watercraft used: rafts and oar rigs

On this section, you'll travel the Salmon River in the Frank Church-River of No Return Wilderness. Here you'll travel on rafts and oar rigs, learning basic river skills like scouting, paddle strokes, hazard evaluation and rigging boats. You will also spend time learning and practicing river rescue techniques. Other highlights include beautiful sandy beaches, which we will call camp, and a riverside natural hot springs.

You'll work hard, have fun, and return home with leadership skills to last a lifetime.

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 hiking section 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.

Solos

On this course you may have an opportunity to do a "solo," when you spend a day and night alone. There is no hiking during the solo. Many people find this experience a good way to reflect on the course and immerse themselves in the environment.

Fasting may be an optional part of the solo. If the instructors feel that fasting is appropriate for the conditions and the group, students may choose to fast during their solo. Rations are carried to allow students to eat in the event of an emergency.

Service

In support of NOLS' core values of wilderness and community, we emphasize an element of service and stewardship on our courses. Students and instructors will have the opportunity before, during or after their course to spend an afternoon alongside local or regional land managers, "getting their hands dirty" in a team effort to enhance our backcountry classrooms. Projects could include clearing or reconstructing trails, improving backcountry sites, removing noxious weeds from river corridors and contributing to the upkeep of historic ranches.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

Weather in the intermountain west is unpredictable. On any given day, temperatures may range from below freezing to sweltering. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and can be intense. Courses may experience snow and rain, or long stretches of sun and blue skies.

Terrain

Travel in the mountains can be tough. Often you'll be off-trail bushwhacking through thick forests or hiking on trails muddy from melted snow. Rivers are icy and can be difficult or impossible to cross. You may traverse steep slopes of snow, loose rock or grass, and grunt up high-mountain passes.

You can expect cold water temperatures even in the middle of summer on your river section. The hazards you face will include: large, crashing waves; shallow, rock-strewn rapids; recirculating holes; fallen trees that can trap a person under water; strong currents that can pin you against a rock; hypothermia; and sun exposure.

Remoteness

Camping may involve dealing with swarms of mosquitoes, avoiding rattlesnakes, or hanging your food to keep it away from bears. You'll be miles from the amenities of civilization. Telephones, ambulances, and hospitals may be several days away.

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.

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.