

# Backcountry Rock Climbing - 30 Day Course Description

You're eager to leave the ground and see the mountains in a way that few ever will. You're keen to learn technical rope skills, improve your strength and flexibility, and study the art of alpinism. Whether you're a veteran sport climber looking to learn traditional climbing or a curious novice, this is the course for you.

## Features

- Duration: 30 days (16–20 hiking days, 10-14 climbing days - very dependent on route, weather, and group performance)
- Average group size: 12 students and 3 instructors
- Average age: 18 / minimum age: 16
- Average pack weight: 55-65 pounds
- Introduction to wilderness living and travel
- Extensive rock climbing curriculum
- Potential to lead climb and climb multi-pitch routes
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Opportunity for students to travel in small groups independent of instructors (based on instructor discretion)

## Overview

This expedition takes place in Wyoming's Wind River Range, blending rock climbing with the fundamental outdoor skills required to live comfortably in the wilderness. The Wind River Range is a rugged, glacier-carved range renowned for its sheer granite and world-class climbing. Ultimately, you'll learn the skills necessary to travel in the mountains long after your expedition is over.

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. The group will then 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, geology, and plant identification. A foundational course goal is building an inclusive community with your peers. Learning the value of teamwork, you will tackle group challenges and achieve common goals.

At the start of your course, you'll also start learning the basics of climbing, including tying knots, rope handling, belaying, protection placement, anchor building, and rappelling. Climbing is a perfect way to push your limits, develop confidence, build strength, and have fun.

After you've spent time top roping, you'll be introduced to more advanced climbing. Topics may include the fundamentals of lead climbing, multi-pitching, and the basics of improvised self rescue. During this part of the course, it may be possible to follow an instructor up climbs that are several hundred feet long and take most, or all, of a day to complete. Additionally, if you demonstrate proficiency with all necessary techniques, you may have an opportunity to lead climb. By the end of this course, you'll have the skills and experience to pursue a lifetime of climbing adventures.

### **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 course 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 four days (depending on group competence, terrain, and route). 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.

## Weather and Other Challenges

### Weather

Mountain weather 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 courses in May or June will likely 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.

### Climbing

To learn rock climbing, you'll climb and rappel on or above sheer cliffs where loose rock and steep terrain require precise movement. You must master rope and protection systems to minimize the possibility of falling. Unforeseen changes in weather can be especially hazardous if you are in the middle of a climb where the possibility of retreat is limited.

### 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.*