

Rock and River

Course Description

You're hungry to learn how to climb and follow a river deep into the backcountry. You're passionate about teamwork, problem solving, and leadership. If you're looking for a course that will push your adventurous spirit to grow and deepen your interest in the natural world, then this is the course for you.

Features

- Duration: 30 days
- Course sections: 19-day rock climbing section, 10-day whitewater section
- River route length: 84 miles
- Average group size: 10 students and 4–5 instructors
- Average age: 19 / minimum age: 16 (except for 16 and 17-year-old courses)
- Watercraft used: oar raft, paddle raft, and kayak
- Basic rescue skills in the rock and river settings

Course Sections

Rock Climbing

- Duration: 19 days
- Emphasis on climbing movement and risk management
- Location: Wild Iris or Vedauwoo, Wyoming

You will start your course out of the Rocky Mountain Branch in Lander, WY.

Your climb section will take place in Wild Iris near Lander, or Vedauwoo near Laramie pending season conditions and other course logistics. Both areas are world-class climbing destinations with Wild Iris known for its exceptional limestone sport climbing and Vedauwoo known for its soaring granite crack climbing.

You'll begin with learning knots, rope handling, belaying, protection placement, anchor building, and rappelling. As you progress, you'll be introduced to more advanced climbing, including vertical cliff rescue, fixed-line ascension, aid climbing, the fundamentals of lead climbing, and multi-pitching. 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.

Climbing is done both as a large group, when top roping, and in a small group of three to four, for multi-pitch routes. You'll progress at your own speed. Your climbing instructors have been selected as much for their teaching abilities as for their technical expertise; they'll emphasize a positive, non-competitive attitude toward climbing and the development of your abilities.

Climbing camps are base camps. You'll set up your tents, establish a kitchen, and stay in one place for the duration of the section. You may stay in an established campground or at a backcountry site. Regardless, you should expect to encounter other climbers on this section, and you may drive to and from the crag each day.

River

- Duration: 10 days
- Route length: 84 miles
- Emphasis on paddle skills in various watercraft
- Location: Green River, Desolation Canyon, Utah

Following your Climb section, you'll transition down to the NOLS River Base in Vernal, Utah, where you'll be introduced to the rafts and kayaks that will take you down the Green River, through the remote and rugged Desolation and Grey Canyons.

Before getting on the river, you'll spend time at our river base getting familiar with whitewater kayaks. You'll practice basic strokes and self-rescue rolls. Once you're comfortable with the basics, you'll head to a put-in in Desolation Canyon on the Green River.

Desolation Canyon progresses in increasing difficulty. You'll start with basic instruction in eddy turns, peel-outs, ferries, and river reading. Rafting instruction begins with an overview of paddle rafting and captaining skills. Mastering the stroke combinations, timing, and communication skills needed to put your raft exactly where you need it precedes more advanced techniques, including raft rescue. You'll learn to scout rapids, and to employ techniques that ensure your party's safety as you negotiate them. Learning to rig, load, and row the oar rafts that carry your gear completes a well-rounded curriculum of whitewater skills.

While on the river, you'll have time to study the area's rich natural and human history. The spectacularly exposed geology makes a perfect classroom for observing plants, animals, and ecosystems. Water is a vital resource in the West, and rivers have long sparked special management and conservation concerns.

Weather and Other Challenges

Weather

Summer weather in the Rockies 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.

River

Identifying and managing the risks from hazards of a river environment will be a constant theme in your instruction. Expect to be confronted by large, crashing waves, high volume or shallow water, conditions that can promote both hypothermia and sun exposure, and re-circulating hydraulics. Objective river hazards such as fallen trees that can trap swimmers underwater or strong currents that can pin paddlers against rocks will be addressed. As you will be days away from medical care, you are expected to demonstrate the highest regard for risk management in the field.

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. Our students apply these skills to challenges in a supportive learning environment with high expectations. Students have the opportunity for a positive, transformational experience and leave our courses inspired and empowered to act.

We craft NOLS courses so that 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, teams and communities; care for themselves and others; understand their habits, strengths and areas for growth; function under difficult circumstances; make informed and thoughtful decisions; communicate effectively and manage conflict; and appreciate living simply.

We believe positive, ethical leaders change the world. Join NOLS and become one of these leaders.