

Backpacking Wyoming Wind River Traverse

NOLS Rocky Mountain - Lander, WY
August 3 - 11, 2026



Features

- Approx. 60 miles, backpacking across Wyoming's Wind River Mountains
- Nine days, 8 nights in the field
- On and off trail hiking at or above tree line at 8,000-12,000 feet
- Opportunities for exceptional photography
- Options for world-class fly-fishing and non-technical peak ascents
- Black and grizzly bear habitat
- Pre- and post-trip lodging provided by NOLS' Noble Hotel, included in tuition
- Average pack weight: 40-50 pounds

Cost: \$2,395

Minimum Age: 18

Historic Age Range: 18-64

Max group size: 12 Participants

2 NOLS Instructors

Trip Description

It's the quintessential NOLS course - backpacking in the Wind River Mountains. Fifty years ago, the Wind River Wilderness Course launched the school; today, it's still our most popular offering, staged in the same wilderness that founder Paul Petzoldt chose back in 1965. This trip is a chance to traverse across the Winds and explore some of the least explored wilderness in the lower 48.

The route for this traverse is approximately 60-miles of mostly on-trail hiking. It offers challenging trails and travel at elevations that most folks aren't accustomed to. There will likely be options for non-technical peak ascents, fly-fishing in the range's many lakes, practicing wildlife and scenic photography, and learning about the area's ecology. In addition to these fun activities, Instructors will cover basic wilderness skills including navigation and Leave No Trace techniques, bear camping, and backcountry cooking that are needed to thrive outdoors.

This trip starts in Lander, Wyoming at NOLS' historic hotel. The group will meet up in the evening for orientation to get to know each other and talk about the week ahead. After breakfast the next morning you will head to the NOLS issue room down the street to rent any gear you need and pick up the group gear (tents, cooking equipment, etc...). Sometime around mid-day you will find yourself heading to the mountains and that night you will be camping out under the stars.

The Wind River Range is a rugged, glacier-carved mountain range, renowned for its sheer granite walls, and famous for its fly-fishing and rock climbing. Over the next week we will travel through a wilderness surrounded by towering peaks, glistening alpine lakes, and perennial snow. To traverse across the Winds, we will travel both on and off trail, through pine forests and alpine meadows, and above tree line as we cross the Continental Divide, possibly multiple times.

The trip spends 9 days and 8 nights in the backcountry. It will be similar to a traditional NOLS expedition in that we will carry all our own equipment: tents, cooking equipment, food, and all our personal clothing and supplies. We will rise early, cook breakfast, pack up camp, travel in small groups to our next camp, set up camp, cook dinner, and head to bed. Life is simple in the backcountry and it is this simplicity that many crave. We will also make time for fishing, hanging out around campfires, and enjoying the splendor of the night sky.

If you are interested in long, challenging days through the beautiful and rugged terrain of the Winds, then this is the trip for you! The average day is about 8 miles, some, with big changes in elevation. This trip does traverse a well-known and well-traveled route that NOLS uses often, but that doesn't diminish the difficulty or remoteness of the trip.

We will finish the trip with a pickup around mid-morning on the last day. We will shuttle back to Lander and use the rest of the day to de-issue our gear, shower, and formally end the trip with closing dinner together.

Trip Environment

The Wind River Mountains offer a variety of terrain—wooded trails, mountain lakes, flowery meadows, and expansive granite slabs. Our route will take us into the high alpine of the Winds, where we will travel through steep talus and boulder fields, managing both exposure and rock-fall. Weather this time of year can be variable; we could experience both hot sunny days or several days of wet, overcast weather. Cold and snowy conditions can occur any month of the year.

Moose, elk, mule deer, and coyotes live in the area and are often seen by quiet watchers at dawn and dusk. Black bears frequent the range, and grizzly bears, though less common, are also around. NOLS, in collaboration with bear biologists, has developed specific practices to minimize the risk of a bear encounter, including carrying pepper spray, hanging food and/or protecting all “smellables” in an electrified fence, and maintaining a meticulously clean campsite. Mosquitoes can be tenacious, especially early and late in the day.

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

You will start your day early with breakfast followed by packing up camp and loading up your pack. Lunches on the trail are casual and consist more of snacking and eating trail food than a sit-down meal together as a group, you will pack your snacks accessible in the morning. Each day will have a full day of hiking or possibly a side excursion with a summit attempt. Plan on spending 6-9 hours each day walking with your pack on.

Once you arrive in your next camp location, you will scout for tenting and kitchen locations and start setting up camp. The group will share dinner in camp before drifting off to bed or spending some time reading or fishing before it gets too dark.

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

Difficulty Scale

This trip is rated 5 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, competencies, and concepts, including map reading, hiking and group travel. The instructors will provide information necessary for the group to comfortably travel, as well as optional topics as desired by participants. These could include natural history, local history, leadership, decision making, and team function, among other things. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional but informal discussions are plentiful. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion— this is a mountain expedition.

Fishing:

Fishing is often outstanding in the Wind Rivers. Your instructors will advise you on the practicality of purchasing a license.

If you're keen to fish, please bring to Lander the last four digits of either your:
Social Security number (for US citizens)
Tax Identification Number (for US legal aliens)
Passport number (for foreign visitors)

Your instructors will have details on fishing opportunities, and can help you decide between purchasing an annual or multi-daily license. The cost of a license is not included in your course tuition; you will settle this extra fee, if applicable, at the end of the trip.

Expectations of Participants

The alumni trip atmosphere is more relaxed than a typical NOLS expedition. However, it's not a full-service vacation or guided experience. You'll have to participate, carry your load, and help out as needed. These expeditions are fun, but they still require self-reliance, self awareness, risk management and sound decision making as we trek through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Like all NOLS courses, these expeditions emphasize hands-on learning and the application of new skills in a variety of situations.

All participants need to complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

Alumni trips allow electronics and alcohol (for those of legal age in the country of the trip). Many participants find that these luxuries can add to the course experience and local flavor. Excessive alcohol consumption is not a part of the culture of Alumni trips.

Trip Itinerary

Aug 2	There will be an orientation meeting at 6:00 p.m. At the Noble Hotel in Lander, please arrive no later than this afternoon.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Noble Hotel. Please make sure we know if you are traveling with someone else.
Aug 3	Start the day with an early breakfast and then you will review gear and rent anything that you need. Depending on our course volume in town, we might pack rations or head straight into the field with a pre-packed pile of food.	Meals included.
Aug 4-10	Travel across the Winds!	Camping!
Aug 11	Pickup at the trailhead in the mid-morning. Return to Lander, clean and de-issue gear, and eat dinner out to celebrate the week. If you drive to Lander, you are welcome to depart this day after we are done. Others might choose to stay this night at a local hotel in town instead of at the Noble Hotel for a bit more comfort.	Lodging provided by NOLS at the Noble Hotel.
Aug 12	If flying, depart NO EARLIER than this morning.	Breakfast on your own.

Travel Logistics

Getting to Lander

By Plane:

The commercial airport nearest to Lander is Riverton (RIW). You can book a contiguous flight into Riverton on United's website. Flight schedules are always evolving and if the only one available is a late night arrival, we suggest arriving a day earlier to ensure you don't miss the start of the trip.

There is a shuttle service from the Riverton airport to Lander and the NOLS Hotel (Noble Hotel) offered by WRTA (<http://www.wrtabuslines.com>). The cost ranges from \$25–60, depending on the number of passengers, and a reservation is always required. If Share-A-Ride, WRTA are unavailable or not your style, you can contact **BDS Taxi** (307-840-0954), which requests 24 hours advance notice or [Gator Creek Taxi](#) out of Riverton.

Jackson Hole (JAC), and Casper, Wyoming (CPR), as well as Salt Lake City, Utah (SLC), and Denver, CO (DEN) are all viable airports. You'll need to utilize a rental car for any of these airports.

By Car:

Lander is a 4.5-hour drive from Salt Lake, 2.5 hours from Casper or Jackson Hole, and 6 hours from Denver. Look up Lander on Google maps for detailed directions. It may be the most cost-effective to fly to one of these airports and then rent a car for the week.

Lodging (if you arrive early)

There are other lodging options in Lander including free camping at the City Park, camping for a fee in Sinks Canyon State Park, and other hotels and bed and breakfast inns. For additional lodging information, contact the Lander Chamber of Commerce at 800-433-0662 or visit their website at www.landerchamber.org. We recommend the following two hotels:

Pronghorn Lodge

150 E. Main Street
307-332-3940

Inn at Lander

260 Grand View Drive
307-332-284

If you choose to book your own lodging for the last night of the trip, NOLS will not refund any of the tuition and the expense will be yours.

If you are delayed:

If you have any problems on arrival day, please leave a message at 307.335.2265, the front desk at the NOLS Noble Hotel. Also, contact the NOLS Alumni office at alumni@nols.edu and (800) 332-4280.

Storage of Personal Belongings

Personal belongings and vehicles may be stored at the NOLS facility 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 may be checked into our safe. Parking is generally available on a NOLS lot for the duration of your course in an unfenced parking 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 breakfast on the first day through dinner on the last day, all group equipment, camping gear (tents, stoves, kitchens, etc.), safety equipment, instruction, permits, and transportation to and from your lodging.

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 Readings

- Clelland, Mike. *Ultralight Backpackin' Tips*
- Ehrlich, Gretel. *The Solace of Open Spaces*
- Kershaw, Linda, Andy MacKinnon & Jim Pojar. *Plants of the Rocky Mountains*
- Kelsey, Joe. Falcon Guides. *Climbing and Hiking in the Wind River Mountains*
- Mathews, Daniel. *Rocky Mountain Natural History: Grand Teton to Jasper*. Raven Editions.

Equipment List - available for rent “yes” Not available for rent “X”

Gear provided by NOLS			
Emergency Communication	Tents	Stoves and Fuel	Food storage system for Bear protocols
Reference Books	Maps & Compass	First Aid Kits	Cooking Gear/ Spice Kits/water treatment

Upper Body Clothing		
Equipment	Rent	Notes
Mid-Weight top (1-2)	X	Mid-weight top, wool or synthetic
Insulating top	Yes	Heavyweight fleece or midweight puffy layer
Wind shirt (optional)	Yes	A lightweight, breathable, nylon wind shell
Rain jacket	X	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 a synthetic sports tank
Liner Gloves	X	Good for cool evenings
Warm Hat	Yes	Synthetic or wool
Sun hat	X	Baseball cap or full brim
Lower Body Clothing		
Mid-Weight bottom	X	Mid-weight bottom, wool or synthetic
Wind/Hiking pants	Yes	Breathable nylon pants or lightweight hiking pant. We recommend renting NOLS wind pants.
Underwear (2-3 pairs)	X	Synthetic or wool are best
Footwear		
Boots or Hiking Shoes	X	Boots or sturdy hiking shoes. These should be broken in and well tested before the trip.

Camp Shoes	X	Something light with a closed toe for around camp
Socks (2-3 pairs)	X	½ crew to crew length wool socks
Miscellaneous Personal Gear		
Backpack	Yes	A medium to large sized pack (65L+) is adequate for this trip
Day Pack	Yes	A lightweight day pack (10-15 L) for our summit attempts
Sleeping Bag and stuff sack	Yes	Synthetic or down bags with a temperature rating of ~ 20° F
Sleeping Pad	Yes (foam)	A ¾ or full length closed cell foam or inflatable pad to insulate and pad between the ground and your sleeping bag
Plastic Trash Bags (1-2)	X	One to two heavy-duty trash compactor bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof items in your pack.
Trekking Poles (optional)	X	With lots of up-and-downhill, we believe that most participants will want 2 poles.
Insulated Mug	X	12 to 20 oz. insulated mugs with lids
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
Sunglasses w/ retainer	X	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection
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
Optional Items		
Hydration System	X	Very handy and popular
Pocket Knife	X	Should you want one, a small knife or multi-tool is fine.
Book or e-reader	X	Bring something fun to read
Camera	X	We would love to see your photos post-trip!
Thermos	X	Great for keeping morning drinks warm out at basecamp
Camp Chair	X	Crazy Creek chair or something compact
Notepad / Pen	X	A small, lightweight pad is necessary for taking notes
Coffee	X	We provide coffee for the trip, but if you want your own, Starbucks Vias are a great way to go