

Rock and River Equipment List

Welcome to NOLS!

Learning to choose the right equipment for your adventure is an essential part of the NOLS curriculum. We know that walking into an outdoor store can be a daunting experience, but preparing for your course need not feel overwhelming. This list is designed to help you make smart, prudent choices about the gear you bring on your trip.

When you arrive, your instructors will first look through all the equipment you've brought and help you decide what to take into the field. You'll then go into our Outfitting Department to rent or purchase any remaining items. The list below is comprehensive; however, the actual equipment needed for your course will vary depending on location, season, and instructor judgment. For this reason, we do not recommend that you go out and purchase a lot of expensive, specialized gear for your course.

Due to COVID-19, we have made some updates to the typical equipment list to protect your well being while traveling and while on course. These changes include bringing two washable face coverings. Students are expected to use masks and hand sanitizer while traveling, which you will need to provide yourself. You will find more information on these items, and all the necessary gear, in the following equipment list.

Here are some thoughts to guide you as you pack:

- **First, use gear you already own!** You'll be comfortable in tried-and-true clothing. Bring more layers than you think you'll need; your instructors will help you choose your best options. If an item is deemed suitable for your particular course, you can take it into the field; if not, you can leave it in storage at the branch. If in doubt, bring it!
- **Second, rent key items from NOLS.** When it comes to gear, every adventurer has their own preferences. In the field, you'll have the opportunity to hone your preferred system. We recommend that you rent, rather than purchase, several "big ticket" items, such as a sleeping bag and backpack. While you are not obligated to rent gear from us, there are several reasons why we suggest it. Our rental gear is high quality, chosen specifically for the heavy use it receives on

courses. Rental prices are reasonable, so you can try out gear and make informed decisions on future adventures.

- **Third, purchase specific items from our Outfitting Department.** To make shopping simple, we offer basic kitchen utensils (mug, bowl with lid, spoon, 32-ounce water bottle), personal care items (lip balm, sunscreen, hand sanitizer, bug spray), and camping sundries (headlamp, batteries, lighter). We also carry a selection of clothing, including wool socks, ball caps, hats and gloves, rain jackets and pants, and base-layers. NOLS is a not-for-profit organization, and revenue from our Outfitting Department goes to serve the mission of the School.
- **Fourth, visit a local outdoor store.** Most gear shops, from REI to mom-and-pop shops, are familiar with NOLS and its courses. We encourage you to keep the tags on all equipment and clothing, and the receipt at home, so that you may later return any items you don't use.

Equipment Fees

In addition to your course tuition, you will pay an equipment deposit. This deposit will be applied directly to the charges you incur for gear rentals, purchases, or any loss or damage to our equipment. Total charges will vary depending on the amount of equipment you rent or purchase from us; the prices listed below will help you estimate your costs. At the end of your course, you will be billed for any amount that exceeds the equipment deposit, or refunded any balance.

Quality Over Quantity

At NOLS, we fundamentally believe that you don't need to own a lot of expensive gear to live and travel comfortably in the backcountry. By purchasing high-quality items and learning to care for them, you're making a lifetime investment. Spend money on the few items that really matter, but don't get lured into splurging on the trendiest fabrics or unnecessary gadgets.

Questions?

Contact your Admission Officer if you have any questions or would like further information about the equipment list.

How to Use This List

Items under the **Required** heading are items that you **must** either bring yourself or rent or purchase from NOLS as available. Items under the **Optional** heading are not required, and you may bring them from home, buy, or rent from NOLS as available. If

you see an **X** in the price column, that means that an item is not available for rent or for purchase as indicated.

Upper Body Clothing			
<p>We layer our clothing, combining different garments to achieve optimum insulation and protection from wind, rain, and snow. We use either synthetic or wool fibers, both of which insulate when wet; merino wool products are increasingly popular. We avoid cotton, which is poor insulation when wet. It is common to need three insulating layers. However, on the river, it is most important to think of “travel clothes” as those worn on the river that will get wet each day, and “camp clothes” as those that stay dry and are worn around camp and overnight. Especially for “camp clothes” on the river, cotton layers help keep you cool and comfortable (unlike other environments where cotton can be dangerous).</p>			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$50-75	Mid-weight long underwear top, wool or synthetic (e.g. Patagonia Capilene series)
Middle layer (fleece jacket)	X	\$40-160	Fleece jacket (e.g. Patagonia Regulator series) or a wool sweater
Top layer (puffy jacket)	\$40	\$95-220	A warm, synthetic-fill “puffy” jacket that fits over your base layers and under your rain jacket. For courses that start in June, you may want 2 puffy jackets: a lighter one and a heavier one.
Wind shirt/anorak	\$25	\$55	A lightweight, breathable, durable nylon wind shell, in either pullover or parka style
Rain jacket	X	\$100-150	A sturdy waterproof jacket with a hood. Both coated nylon and breathable fabrics are acceptable (e.g. Gore-Tex, Marmot Precip, Mountain Hardwear Dry.Q, Patagonia H2No)
T-shirt	X	\$25-50	A lightweight synthetic or wool t-shirt
<p>Our advice? Bring the sweaters, fleece jackets, and synthetic layers you think might work. We’ll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on the season and course area.</p>			
Lower Body Clothing			
<p>You will need 1–2 synthetic insulating layers (usually a base layer and, in early summer, a pair of fleece pants). All must fit comfortably over each other so that they can be worn at the same time. If you tend to get cold easily, add a middle layer of mid-weight bottoms to the base layer and fleece pants.</p>			

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Base layer (long underwear)	X	\$60	Mid-weight synthetic or wool bottoms (e.g. Patagonia Capilene series). Cotton and cotton blends are not acceptable.
Middle layer (fleece pants)	X	\$60	Heavier-weight bottoms that fit comfortably over the base-layer bottoms. Fleece pants or insulated (puffy) pants are both acceptable. These are highly recommended on courses that start in June, but they may not be needed on later summer courses.
Wind pants/hiking pants	\$25	\$60	Nylon shell pants. These should fit comfortably over all lower-body layers. Side-zippers allow the pants to be put on over boots. Soft-shell fabrics are acceptable, but lightweight "running pants" are not durable enough. We recommend renting NOLS wind pants. They are the most popular piece of equipment we've ever designed! Many students purchase their wind pants at the end of their course.
Nylon shorts	X	X	Loose-fitting nylon athletic or river shorts. Should be quick-drying. NOLS Rocky Mountain does not rent or sell this item.
Underwear and sports bra (2-3 pairs)	X	\$20-35	Some students prefer to go without underwear and use nylon shorts with liners. If you use underwear, synthetic is preferred.
Optional Items			
Rain pants	X	\$80-110	Although not required, some people like to use rain pants in conjunction with a rain jacket.
Our advice? Bring the synthetic base layers, rain gear, and exercise clothing you think might work. We'll advise you on the best combination for your trip, depending on the season and course area.			
Head, Neck, and Hand Layers			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
2 Masks (for travel)	X	X	Student must bring.
4 Masks	\$0	\$0	NOLS provides.

(for your course)			
Baseball cap or wide-brim sun hat	X	\$16	To protect ears and face from the sun; baseball hats available with NOLS logo
Wool or fleece hat	X	\$16-35	Thick enough to keep your head and ears warm on a chilly night
Mosquito head net	X	\$6	A light nylon head net
Gloves/mittens	X	\$17-65	Ragg wool or fleece

Our advice? As long as they're not cotton, bring your gloves, mittens, and shells. We'll check them and see if they'll work. Depending on the weather, you may need one or two pairs.

Packs and Bags

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Backpack or duffel bag	\$50	\$250	For your front-country rock climbing section, a large backpack (80–110 liters) or big duffel bag will be used to store your clothes at the campsite. We rent expedition backpacks, but recommend simply bringing a no-frills duffel bag from home.
Small stuff sack (2-3)	\$2	\$4	Small nylon or mesh sacks for organizing items in your pack

Our advice? An expedition backpack is a major purchase. If you don't already own one, we think you should rent ours, gain some experience, then make an informed decision after your course.

Sleeping Gear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Sleeping bag	\$60	\$220-350	Synthetic-fill bags (e.g. Quallofil, Hollofil, Polarguard, etc.) perform well in the variety of conditions we encounter on courses. A bag with approximately 3 pounds of fill, rated to 5°–15°F. Down-filled bags are ok, but need to be carefully kept dry in the wilderness.

Plastic trash bag (2-3)	X	\$1	2–3 heavy-duty lawn-and-garden bags (33 gallon) to help waterproof your sleeping bag and backpack
Foam or inflatable sleeping pad	\$6	\$15-75	Used for padding and insulation between sleeping bag and ground. Foam pads, which we rent, should be closed-cell and at least 3/8-inch thick. Inflatable pads, which we sell but don't rent, are a welcome luxury in the backcountry; Therm-a-Rest and REI are reliable brands.
Ground cloth	\$4	\$20	A waterproof nylon sheet to go between your sleeping pad and the ground

Our advice? A sleeping bag is another major purchase. If you don't already own one, we think you should rent ours, gain some experience, and then make an informed decision after your course.

Climbing Section

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Day pack	\$15	\$50-100	A medium-sized daypack with at least a 50-liter capacity. You may be walking to the climbing area for a mile or more, and you will need to carry ropes, gear, layers, food, and water in your pack.
Rock climbing shoes	\$40	\$85-100	We have a limited supply available for rent. If you bring your own, make sure they are comfortable enough to spend all day in.
Harness	No charge	\$40-70	We have harnesses to rent, free of charge, but if you own one, bring it along.
Helmet	No charge	X	We have harnesses to rent, free of charge, but if you own one, bring it along.
Optional Items			
Climbing pants/shorts	X	\$69-100	Comfortable pants or shorts to wear while climbing, either cotton or synthetic. Short shorts are not optimal for climbing with a harness.
T-shirts (1-2)	X	\$25	An extra T-shirt or two is always nice to have at climb camp. These can be cotton.
Chalk Bag & Chalk	X	\$30	Some people like to rock climb with a chalk bag to keep their hands and fingers dry. It is not necessary.

Our advice? If you own a harness, helmet, chalk bag and pair of shoes, bring them along. If your instructors approve, you can use them. We will use NOLS' protection, belay devices, slings, carabiners, and ropes.

River Section			
Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
River shoes	X	X	A simple solid sneaker works best. There are “river specific” shoes at outdoor retailers—those are an option, but are really the same as an old pair of sneakers! (Keens or other river sandals are not acceptable—they do not provide enough coverage and protection.)
Long-sleeved UV-protective shirt	X	\$40-50	Light-colored long-sleeved nylon shirt for sun protection. Hoods encouraged.
Lightweight cotton pants and shirt	X	X	Convenient sun and bug protection around camp. Cotton layers help keep you cool and comfortable on the river (unlike other environments where cotton can be dangerous).
Swimsuits (1-2)	X	X	Most students prefer wearing nylon shorts. Some students like to wear Lycra swimsuits in the river; others prefer nylon shorts and a sports bra-type top.
Large dry bag	\$10	\$90-125	3-cubic-foot dry bag made of heavy-duty waterproof material. Used to carry all personal clothing
Small dry bag	\$2	\$35	600-cubic-inch dry bag made of heavy-duty waterproof material. Used to carry all personal items needed during the day
Water-insulating breathable, long-sleeve top	\$13	\$60-85	A top layer; water-specific breathable, insulating fabric (e.g. NRS Hydroskin) used as a midlayer on the river.
Paddle jacket	\$5	\$50-85	A long-sleeve waterproof jacket with drawstring closure at the bottom and closures at the wrist and neck. Used during windy and wet conditions. A windjacket is appropriate.
Paddle pants	\$5	\$50-85	Used during windy and wet conditions.. Wind pants or rain pants are acceptable.

Optional Items			
Neoprene booties	\$9	\$20-40	River or diving booties that stay on the foot securely while swimming. Must have a hard sole capable of walking on rocks. These would be used primarily in a kayak, and brought in addition to the “river shoe” described above.
Water-insulating, breathable bottom	\$13	\$60-85	A bottom layer; water-specific, breathable, insulating fabric (e.g. NRS Hydroskin). Used specifically for kayaking in cold water.
Sun Gloves	x	\$15 - \$30	Lightweight gloves for sun protection; synthetic (cotton okay). Flingerless gloves (similar to biking or rowing gloves) are acceptable.

Our advice? Rental of whitewater-specific gear (PFD, helmet, etc.) is included in your tuition. Feel free to bring any personal whitewater gear you already have (e.g. paddling jacket, dry top, river booties, helmet, etc.) and your instructors will check it to make sure it is appropriate for your trip.

Footwear

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Boots/Low top hiker	X	\$175-250	Sturdy boot, trail shoe, or approach shoe to walk to climbing area with heavy backpack
Wool socks (4-5 pairs)	X	\$13-30	Mid- to heavyweight wool socks.
Camp shoes	X	\$30	Comfortable shoes to change into in camp. Must be closed-toe. Lightweight and quick-drying running shoes or Crocs work well.

Optional Items			
Sandals	X	X	Open-toed “river” or “mountain” sandals (e.g., Chacos) can be brought <i>in addition</i> to camp shoes.
Liner socks (2-3 pairs)	X	\$6-8	Lightweight wool or synthetic “wicking” socks. (Note: liner socks are mandatory if you are renting rock shoes for a climbing course.)
Lightweight socks (2-4 pairs)	x	x	Lightweight wool, blended or cotton are acceptable on the river; at or above the ankle recommended

Miscellaneous Items

Equipment	Rent	Buy	Notes
Required Items			
Insulated mug/ small Nalgene	X	\$4-40	12- to 20-oz. insulated mug with a lid. 0.5L Nalgene water bottles can also function as a mug.
Bowl	X	\$7	A plastic bowl with a screw- or snap-on lid is handy.
Spoon	X	\$1	Lexan spoons are light, durable, and popular.
Water bottle (2)	X	\$10-15	Required 2 liters of carrying capacity. We recommend wide-mouth quart- or liter-size plastic bottles, like Nalgene bottles. Water bladders (like camelbak) are great at climb camp, but are not recommended on the river.
Lip balm	X	\$3	Stick, cream, or tube-type moisturizing balm, SPF 15 or greater
Sunscreen (1-2)	X	\$5-10	A 3- to 6-oz. tube, SPF 30 or greater
Bandana (1-2)	X	\$2	A few of these are always handy.
Headlamp	X	\$30	Durable and lightweight. Bring spare batteries.
Disposable lighter (2)	X	\$2	For lighting your camp stove
Insect repellent (1-2)	X	\$5-8	Small bottles; no aerosol spray cans.
Toiletries and towel	X	X	Toothbrush, toothpaste, comb, brush, skin lotion, and tampons. Travel or trial sizes are enough.
Watch	X	\$20-40	A watch with an alarm is a nice feature.
Pen/pencil	X	\$0.75	For journaling and taking notes during classes
Notepad	X	\$10	A small, lightweight pad is fine.
Sunglasses	X	\$30-50	Good-quality sunglasses with 100-percent UV protection; lenses should be dark. If you wear prescription lenses and have limited vision without them, bring your own prescription sunglasses or look for a quality pair of clip-on polarized shades at an outdoor store. We sell Suncloud, Spokiz, and Optic Nerve.

Instant hand sanitizer (2)	X	\$2	Must have two 2-oz. bottles for keeping hands clean
Optional Items			
Prescription glasses and contact lenses (2-3 pairs)	X	X	If you wear them, bring a spare pair of glasses or lenses. Contact-lens wearers should also bring a pair of glasses as backup. Prescription sunglasses are also nice to have in reserve.
Book or e-reader	X	X	A small paperback reading book or lightweight e-reader, such as a Kindle; bring a protective case. Tablet-style e-readers (e.g. Kindle Fire) are not acceptable.
Camera	X	X	GoPros and lightweight digital or 35mm cameras are acceptable; bring a protective case. Avoid elaborate lenses and heavy SLRs. (Please note: you may not bring your smartphone or tablet into the field to use as a digital camera.)
Camp chair	X	\$40-50	Crazy Creek–style, or a sleeping-pad adapter.
Hydration system	X	X	Very handy and popular. NOLS Rocky Mountain does not rent or sell this item.
Locking Carabiner	x	\$10.95	For attaching loose gear (water bottles, day pack) to the watercraft on the river. Does not have to be climbing-certified, but must be locking. <i>Note: once a carabiner has been used on the river, it should never be used again for climbing.</i>
Sunglasses retainer	X	\$5	Chums or Croakies for keeping track of your glasses or sunglasses. Available with NOLS logo
Pocketknife	X	\$20-30	One small knife is sufficient; simple folding knives are popular.
Our advice? Keep the toiletries, pocketknife, camera, optional items and other gear to small sizes. We work to keep our pack weight as low as possible. Saving every ounce is essential!			

Shared Group Equipment—NOLS will supply

Expedition members share both the use of and the responsibility for the group gear that NOLS issues. NOLS charges only for group equipment lost or damaged. Keep in mind that NOLS evaluates gear from a number of perspectives beyond those that an individual user might consider. Performance, durability and simplicity are all contributing factors towards our gear selection.

Tents and shelters
Trowel or shovel
Stoves, fuel bottles and fuel
Pots and pans
Maps and compasses
Bear-resistant food containers
Fishing gear
Equipment repair kits
Reference books
Binoculars
First aid kits
Climbing protection*
Climbing ropes*
Helmets and harnesses*
Ice axes*
Snowshoes*
**if applicable to course type*