

Course Overview

The North Cascades Alpine Backpacking courses are week-long expeditions into Washington State's most remote and beautiful alpine environments. Your course will begin the moment you are picked up at the meeting location, and will continue through your trip into the North Cascades of Washington, where the



real discoveries take place. Your course will include travel through incredible geography carved out by the glaciers, rivers and weather in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest, high on the east slope of the Cascades.

You don't need to have previous experience. We will teach you skills for wilderness travel— set up tarps, cook, backpack, navigate, and more. The course also includes an emphasis on leadership, character development, and an ethic of service. Seek adventure and explore the beauty of disconnecting from technology in the remote wilderness with adults.

From getting up early, packing your bags and cooking breakfast to hiking up a mountain, traveling in the wilderness is demanding. It can take every waking moment to get from point A to point B. Past students and instructors agree that arriving physically fit will enhance your experience and ability to do well on the course and ultimately allow you to take full advantage of the expedition.



Course Area

THE NORTH CASCADES, WASHINGTON – The North Cascades are called the “American Alps” for their rugged beauty and glaciated peaks. They remain some of the wildest and most untrammelled wilderness in the United States. The North Cascades host the greatest concentration of glaciers in the “Lower 48” and are full of high mountain meadows peppered with wild flowers. Our course area hosts some of the most scenic alpine climbing and backpacking routes in the United States. Our Alpine Backpacking courses operate in the Pasayten Wilderness and North Cascades National Park on the east side of the North Cascades and receive significantly less rainfall than the western coast of Washington. Temperatures typically range from freezing to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. This part of our course area is on the eastern side of the Cascades, and thus tends to be moderately dry. Early-season courses (May and June) may spend time camping on snow, while mid-summer courses tend to have more moderate temperatures.

Course Activities

BACKPACKING – Students will work together to explore the high mountain landscape of the North Cascades with a focus on wilderness skills such as navigation, natural history, and backcountry living. Students will learn the essentials of backcountry travel necessary to carry them into remote meadows and high mountain vistas, including navigation with map and compass, Leave No Trace® ethics, first aid and backcountry cooking. Depending on the group and the conditions, an attempt to summit one of the many rugged alpine peaks in the course area can be made.

PEAK ATTEMPT – If weather, terrain, and student abilities permit, your course will include a peak attempt. Peak attempts are day-long ventures often entailing pre-dawn starts and require a high degree of personal and group tenacity. The peaks we attempt are challenging and beautiful, and often require scrambling skills, taught by our expert, experienced instructors. On backpacking courses we do not climb peaks that require technical gear or ropes.



SOLO – In order for profound learning to take place, there must be time to reflect on the experience. The Solo Experience provides this opportunity to reflect, rest and practice the camp-craft skills you have been learning throughout the course. Solo length is based on length of course, weather, student condition, age and instructor preference. You will not travel during this time and your instructors will check on you occasionally, but you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. Instructors will choose your solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, within a safe distance for emergency contact with them, and you will be provided with sufficient water, food, and equipment. Most students spend their Solo time journaling, drawing, reflecting, thinking and resting as they process lessons of the course to focus on their goals for the future. On this course, solo ranges from 30 minutes to no more than 24 hours.

FINAL EXPEDITION – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. To deliver that benefit, Outward Bound purposefully and gradually transfers certain leadership responsibilities to the students, culminating with our “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course, your group may be given the opportunity to travel without your instructor’s direct guidance. Instructors maintain overall risk-management by using check-ins, careful route planning and accurate assessment of group abilities. Many of our students feel this phase of the course is the most rewarding, as the group learns to work together, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills they have acquired during the expedition.

SERVICE – Service to others and the environment is a core value of Outward Bound and is integrated into each course. Participants follow Leave No Trace ethics as service to the environment and do acts of service while leading and supporting fellow participants. Students develop a value of service, seeing the impact of their actions firsthand, and transfer this desire to serve their communities back home. Shorter courses may or may not have an organized service project.



FINAL CHALLENGE EVENT – We typically end our courses with a Final Challenge Event—an individual final physical push. This might take the form of a run or a triathlon-style challenge.

OUTCOMES – Outward Bound believes that creating space and time to unplug, discover new perspectives, step out of routines, and challenge oneself is essential to lifelong development. Our one-week Adult courses are perfect opportunities for you to recharge, develop new skills and explore new strengths among a group of like-minded adventurers. No previous experience is necessary—all wilderness skills are taught from the beginning. Students will only need to be physically fit and motivated to live, learn and work as a team. The expedition may only last a week but the power of the experience will last a lifetime. The expedition encourages students to: remain engaged and present, giving every challenge their best effort, even when the goal seems beyond their reach; form a team and focus on the team effort; share responsibilities, communicate and lead; and find reserves of tenacity and compassion.

Sample Itineraries

Please note that this is an example itinerary, not a specific schedule or guarantee. All itineraries will vary depending on student groups, instructor teams, and environmental factors.

7-Day Course

Day 1	Course start
Day 2	Intro to backpacking, camp craft, and team building skills
Day 3-4	Travel and peak attempt
Day 5	Solo
Day 6	Final expedition, final challenge event
Day 7	Course end and transportation home

Reflection from a NW Outward Bound School Alpine Backpack Alumna:

“At the end of the day, I can’t physically take home the environment that shaped me. But I can pack and practice what it’s taught me: when you hear thunder and you’re getting pummeled by a ferocious hailstorm, get into lightning position. Dirt in your water is always edible as long as you bleach. And last but not least, you can accomplish anything you set your mind to. You are as strong as you believe. And no obstacle is too challenging for you.” - Selena Sok, 2014