

Course Overview

The Northwest Sea Kayaking & Alpine Backpacking course is an expedition through two of Washington's most beautiful and diverse ecosystems: the San Juan Islands and the North Cascade Mountains. Your



course will begin the moment you are picked up at the Seattle-Tacoma airport, and will continue through your trip into the San Juan Islands and the North Cascades of Washington, where the real discoveries take place.

You don't need to have previous sea kayaking or mountain experience. We will teach you skills for wilderness travel—how to pack appropriately,

paddle kayaks, set up tarps, backpack, climb, and navigate. The course also includes an emphasis on leadership, character development, and an ethic of service. Disconnect, explore, and reflect with other adults in the beautiful San Juan Islands and remote wilderness of the North Cascades.

From getting up early, packing your bags and cooking breakfast to paddling a kayak or 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 Areas

SAN JUAN ISLANDS, WASHINGTON – Nestled between Vancouver Island and the North Cascades, the San Juan Islands are a unique coastal cruising ground with large expanses of sparkling water and mountain scenery. During your journey you will encounter coastlines with a combination of sandy and rocky beaches, shallow and deep harbors, placid and reef-studded bays. Knotty, twisted Madrona trees grow along much of the shorelines while evergreen fir and pine forests cover large inland areas. Sightings of harbor seals, porpoise and eagles are common as well as the rare glimpse of an Orca whale. The islands get less average rainfall than the surrounding area due to the rain-shadow effect of the Olympic Mountains. Summertime high temperatures are around 70 degrees Fahrenheit while lows could be in the 40s.



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 untrammeled 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 areas in the Pasayten Wilderness and North Cascades National Park host some of the most famous alpine climbing and backpacking routes in the United States. Temperatures typically range from freezing to 80 degrees Fahrenheit. The Alpine Backpacking portion of our course area is on the eastern side of the Cascades, and thus tends to be moderately dry; however, rain and thunderstorms are not unusual. Early-season courses (May, June) may spend time camping on snow, while mid-summer courses tend to have more moderate temperatures.

Course Activities

SEA KAYAKING – The sea kayaking section will allow you to explore some of the 400 islands and inner coastal channels of Washington. You will paddle with your group, seeking out beaches to sleep under the stars and get acquainted with the fascinating natural and cultural history of the Pacific Northwest coast. The overall technical emphasis of this section is to learn paddle strokes, self and assisted kayak rescue techniques, marine navigation, and weather/sea state assessment. Instructors will teach you the teamwork and communication skills necessary to travel as a group in a working waterway. You may also have the opportunity to do a service project with a local land agency, hike to an island vista, or just comb the beach.



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 – The solo experience provides the opportunity to reflect, rest and practice the campcraft skills you have been learning throughout the course. Solo length is based on length of course, weather, student condition and age and instructor preference. Instructors will choose your solo site to offer as much solitude as possible, within a safe distance for emergency contact with them. 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. During solo you will be provided with sufficient water, food, and equipment.

FINAL EXPEDITION – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. In order 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—if you and your group have demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem solving and wilderness living skills—you may be given the opportunity to travel without direct instructor 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 goals 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. Groups follow Leave No Trace ethics as service to the environment and engage in acts of service while leading and supporting fellow students. Designated service projects are coordinated with land managers like the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, and National Park Service to collaborate on land restoration projects. Additionally, students may have the opportunity to work alongside select social service agencies like nursing homes, hospitals, and organic farms. Students develop a value of service, seeing the impact of their actions firsthand, and transfer this desire to serve their communities back home.

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 – This course provides an opportunity for students to learn and practice the ideas of leadership, character development, and service that are integral to Outward Bound. Students will develop and apply these skills in an expedition setting so that they can continue to grow once they return home. Instructors will work to challenge each student to try new things and step outside their comfort zones, as

well as provide feedback that can be acted upon before course end. As a team, each group will work together to complete difficult tasks necessary for backcountry travel and expedition living.

Sample Itinerary

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

Day 1	Course Start
Day 2	Intro to sea kayak skills such as wet exits, rescues, and basic paddling
Day 3-6	Explore the San Juan Islands by kayak; continued kayak and camp craft skills
Day 7	Switchover
Day 8-10	Backpacking and navigation skills
Day 11	Peak attempt
Day 12	Solo
Day 13	Final expedition
Day 14	Final Challenge Event & Service
Day 15	Course end and transportation home