

Overview

The Three Sisters Mountaineering course is a great introduction to backpacking, camping and snow-climbing up a non-technical peak over 10,000 feet. The course is a stunning journey through the varying forested and alpine landscapes from 5,000 feet to 10,000 feet in the Three Sisters Wilderness area in the Central Cascades of Oregon. Depending on the time of year and snow-levels, basic ice axe, rope team travel and mountaineering skills may be taught and practiced before a summit attempt is made. It is a very intense experience and students should be prepared to be on the move for all 5 days of the course. You do not need to have any previous experience but students should be highly motivated. We will teach you the necessary skill sets for each activity and each course area. The course also includes an emphasis on leadership, character development, and an ethic of service.

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. Additionally, expeditionary travel can pose significant mental and emotional challenges as students must work within a group of diverse individuals, developing their skills as team-members and as leaders. Past students and instructors agree that arriving physically fit and excited for the opportunity for personal development will enhance your experience and ultimately allow you to take full advantage of the expedition.

Course Area

CENTRAL CASCADES, OREGON – Volcanoes dot the spine of the Cascade Mountains, rising over 10,000 feet above the forests, lakes, and rivers of the surrounding region. These glaciated peaks run north and south and create perfect mountaineering objectives this course. The Central Cascade range is home to the Three Sisters, Broken Top, Mt. Washington, Three Fingered Jack, and Mt. Jefferson. One can find a unique blend of dry east side and moist west side weather conditions which allow diverse types of vegetation to flourish. The area has a complex geologic history that continues today. Active glaciers methodically carve away the mountains and the dramatic traces of avalanches that altered the landscape can be found throughout.

Course Activities

MOUNTAINEERING – The mountain section of this course focuses on setting students up for a successful attempt of a summit. Depending on the time of year and the snow levels, students may learn skills such as snow camping, ice axe use, climbing technique, rope team travel, and self-arrest. Each day presents a different focus, with ample time for experiential learning. The instructor-to-student ratio is never more than 1:5 during this section, allowing for personal coaching on the physical techniques of climbing and mountaineering, as well as catering the curriculum to the specific interests and aptitudes of individual course participants.

PEAK ATTEMPT – If weather, terrain, and student abilities permit, your course may include a peak attempt. Peak attempts are day-long enterprises often entailing pre-dawn starts. Successful peak climbs require patience, efficiency, communication, teamwork, and commitment to skill mastery to reach the summit. On backpacking courses we do not climb peaks that require technical gear or ropes, but the peak hikes we attempt are challenging and beautiful.

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.

SOLO – In order for profound learning to take place, there must be time to reflect on the experience. Within course, the solo is that opportunity. It is a chance to experience solitude in the wilderness without distraction while also taking a break from the physical rigors of course. Students experience time away from their group for short periods of time throughout the course. These “mini-solos” are at solo sites chosen by instructors to provide as much solitude as possible (within emergency whistle-signaling distance of other group members). Participants have all necessary equipment, food and water. On this course, solos range from 30 minutes to no more than 24 hours.

OUTCOMES – This course will introduce students to the ideas of leadership, character development, and service that are integral to Outward Bound. Students will begin to develop these skills in an expedition setting so that they can continue to grow once they return home. Instructors will work to challenge students to try new things and step outside their comfort zones. As a team, each group will work together to complete difficult tasks necessary for backcountry travel.

Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your itinerary may look like. Your actual course plan will vary according to weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor preferences.

Day 1	Course Start: travel to mountain trailhead, welcome and introductions, gear check, course overview
Day 2	Backpacking: Camp breakdown, lessons on how to travel in mountain environment, navigation and map reading, camp craft skills, cooking, self-care, learn how to pack a backpack, water treatment, etc.
Day 3	Snow School: Learn and practice various techniques for climbing mountains, possible topics include, movement on snow, ice axe technique, self and team arrest. Lessons on group dynamics, leadership, and communication.
Day 4	Peak attempt: With strong group cohesion and aptitude for technical skills taught, the group will attempt to summit a peak in the Central Cascades.
Day 5	SOLO
Day 6	Personal challenge event, de-issue gear, de-brief, course end celebration and graduation
Day 7	Travel Home