



Course Overview

High Sierra Alpine Backpacking & Rock Climbing

The Sierra Nevada Range extends 400 miles from north to south. It is filled with granite domes, jagged peaks, cool alpine lakes and lush meadows. Atop the domes one can view the jagged profiles of the LeConte Divide, the Ritter Range and the Great Western Divide, all containing mountain peaks and passes up to 14,000 feet in elevation. Referring to the beauty reflected in both moon and sunlight, John Muir called the peaks the “Range of Light.”

We currently use three main backpacking course areas: Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wilderness. Your specific course could take place in any one of these locations, depending on weather and permit availability.

Alpine Backpacking and Course Terrain

Alpine courses will travel both on and off-trail. The trails, when present, are usually of high quality. The off-trail routes can be especially challenging as these routes travel through boulder and talus fields, over granite slabs, sometimes fording waist deep rivers where no footbridges are present. Though the landscape can be demanding, there are few places in the world that compare to the beauty where this backpacking leads. Note: Terrain covered and peaks attempted on our alpine backpacking courses do not require roped travel or use of technical equipment.

Rock Camp

The rock climbing section may occur at either a concentrated frontcountry location or a wild and remote backcountry location. During this section your days will include a mix of climbing, peer-mentoring and learning with your fellow students how to climb, belay and rappel safely. There may be opportunities to camp on top of granite domes, experience amazing free-hanging rappels or explore stunning river gorges. With practice and focus, you can become an informed, skilled rock climber. You may experience a wide variety of climbing styles, including crack-climbing, face climbing and bouldering.

Miles Traveled Daily

As a general guideline, expect to travel approximately 3-7 miles a day. Crews may cover 10+ miles per day as terrain and fitness allow.

Physical Fitness

Participants must come prepared for a physically, mentally and emotionally-demanding yet equally rewarding experience. Alumni often report that the more time they spent preparing for course, the more successful their course experience was. One of the best ways to enhance your experience and set yourself up for success is to arrive physically fit.

Pack Weight

Packed backpacks typically weigh between 40-60 pounds, ideally this is 30-40% of your body weight. This varies person to person based on size, stature and physical ability.



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Instruction and Skills

Previous backpacking experience is not necessary. We will teach you the skills for wilderness travel both interpersonal and technical skills.

Technical skills: how to pack appropriately, load a backpack, set up tarps, camp craft, navigation, rock climbing included how to rappel and belay, how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag, and how to cook your group meals over backcountry stoves.

Interpersonal skills: group travel, risk management, weather and hazard assessment, communication skills, and learning how to work as a team.

Training, Main & Final

Fundamental in Outward Bound's educational outcomes is the concept of "Training," "Main," and "Final." Our hope is to transfer leadership and decision-making skills over to students through an intentional progression. As the course advances, instructors will take on more of a 'coaching' role. This provides a safety net for students to work through their decision-making and risk management development. Read about the culminating Final Expedition below.

Youth Courses

For younger travelers, Outward Bound may be your first time away from home. Others may be veteran travelers. We plan our Youth courses to set you up for success no matter where you are on the spectrum of backcountry experience. The mental, social, and physical challenges you will encounter are very real and meeting them is a genuine accomplishment. Instructors will create a highly structured environment with clear expectations and a daily routine including community roles such as Leader of the Day.

Overview

Course Start – There is a 2 to 3-hour drive from the airport to the course start location. You will spend the first day gearing up for the field and meeting the other members of your team. Group gear like food, tarps, kitchen equipment and first aid supplies will be divided up among group members. Depending on your specific itinerary, you may hike a few miles on Day 1. As this is not a guided trip, all group members will pitch in to do community tasks including cooking, washing pots and setting up tarps.

Peak Attempt – Many groups will attempt to summit a peak. These peak attempts often require pre-dawn starts, waking as early as 4am. You will typically launch from a basecamp so that you can leave some of your gear at camp. For all of the effort and teamwork they require, successful peak attempts can be one of the most rewarding experiences of an Outward Bound course.

Service – Service is an integral part of the Outward Bound curriculum. We encourage service to the environment in the form of leaving campsites cleaner than we find them and being mindful of our impact.



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Solo – The solo experience provides an important break from the rigors of the expedition, and a chance to reflect on your course thus far. With an adequate amount of food and sufficient equipment, you'll spend time alone at an assigned campsite to rest and reflect. Solo sites are chosen to have as much solitude as possible, within earshot of instructors for management considerations. You will not travel during this time and your instructors will check on you periodically, but you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. On middle school courses, the solo will not be overnight and could range from 2 to 8 hours. On all other courses solo may last in duration from a few hours to a full 3-days depending on age and course length. Many students are initially nervous about solo but most are ready for a break from the group when the time for solo arrives. This activity may be abbreviated or eliminated as instructors assess the weather, terrain, or other factors which could affect the outcomes of solo.

Final Expedition – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. In order to deliver that benefit, our instructors gradually transfer leadership responsibilities to the students culminating with a Final Expedition or challenge of some kind. Near the end of course, if you and your group have demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem-solving and backcountry living skills, you may be given the opportunity to travel with more independence, or participate in another kind of culminating challenge as a group. This is your opportunity to demonstrate the skills you have acquired in the previous weeks. Final Expeditions can last for one to five days, depending on staff assessment of students' abilities and terrain. Outcomes are to work together, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills you have acquired.

Personal Challenge Event – Some Outward Bound courses end with a Personal Challenge Event. This may take the form of an individual physical effort such as a 3-8 mile run. It may also take other forms such as an obstacle course, or instructors may facilitate a different type of challenge to better match how the students want to grow.

Final Days – In preparation for your travel back home, the second-to-last afternoon of your course will be spent de-issuing and cleaning all Outward Bound gear followed by a special graduation ceremony. Simple backcountry showers will be offered. Departure from the trailhead will be between 6am and 8am.

NOTE: Outward Bound courses are physically and socially demanding. Students who are unmotivated or struggle with inappropriate behaviors on course may be dismissed. Students who are dismissed are not eligible for a refund. Please see our [Payment, Cancellations & Admissions Policies](#) and the Behavior Agreements in your application materials for more details. You and your family should be prepared to make a commitment to being in a challenging, formal educational setting for the entire length of the course.

**See next page for sample itineraries!*



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Sample Itineraries

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

10 Day Course Itinerary

Day 1	Course Start – review gear, meet and greet group/instructors
Days 2-3	Rock climbing camp: top-roping and belaying
Day 4	Rappelling
Day 5	Hike into base of alpine peak
Day 6	Alpine peak attempt
Day 7	Solo
Day 8	Final Expedition (backpacking)
Day 9	Personal Challenge Event, clean and de-issue gear, Graduation
Day 10	Course End and transportation home

14-Day Course Itinerary

Day 1	Course Start – review gear, meet and greet group/instructors
Days 2-5	Hike to backcountry climbing sites. Introductory lessons (rock climbing, rappelling, and camp craft)
Day 6	Backcountry resupply
Days 7-10	Main Expedition (backpacking, solo, and peak attempt)
Day 11-12	Final Expedition (backpacking)
Day 13	Personal Challenge Event, clean and de-issue gear, Graduation
Day 14	Course End and transportation home

22-Day Course Itinerary

Day 1	Course Start – review gear, meet and greet group/instructors
Days 2-5	Rock section (climbing technique, belaying and rappelling and camp craft lessons)
Day 6	Front country resupply of food and gear
Days 7-13	Main Expedition (backpacking section and peak attempt)
Days 14-15	Solo
Day 16	Backcountry resupply
Days 17-19	Final Expedition (backpacking)
Day 20	Group Hike/Service
Day 21	Personal Challenge Event, clean and de-issue gear, Graduation
Day 22	Course End and transportation to airport