New Student Trip Description Rafting the Deschutes River

The Deschutes River Basin is found in the rain shadow of the Cascade Mountains, and its high desert landscape provides a wide variety of outdoor enthusiasts nearly endless opportunities for recreation, education and pure enjoyment. Since 1855, much of the upper Deschutes has served as the border to the Warm Springs Indian Reservation, the largest reservation in the state and home to several Native American tribes. The Deschutes River is known for its exciting whitewater, as well as peaceful flatwater floating opportunities. You'll be rafting through canyons of golden hillsides with green alder trees lining the riverbanks. While sagebrush and juniper trees are common companions, there are also occasional glimpses of ospreys, mergansers, beavers, and deer. Participants will all get the chance to enjoy the calm serenity and work on their suntan, as well as gear up for the Class III (and the occasional Class IV) rapids. There will be plenty of chances to get wet!

This description does not cover all aspects of the trip, but it will give you a few quick details of this adventure. Due to the many variables of outdoor trips, it's impossible to describe exactly what the trip will be like. The Deschutes River is about a 3- to 4-hour drive from Portland. We expect to spend the first night at the launch site. On the last day of the trip, we'll arrive at the pickup point and head to Portland the night before New Student Orientation begins. All other nights will be spent at camping sites along the river route.

In addition to the pleasures of the river, a typical day will include many opportunities to participate in the everyday activities of camp: preparing meals for the group (rafting trips are well stocked when it comes to food--you may never have eaten this well on a camping trip!), setting up camp, loading and unloading the boats, journal writing, hikes up to the rimrock cliffs, and, of course, just hanging out.

The most common injury on this trip is sunburn from people not applying enough sunscreen. Other possible injuries include blisters on hands from paddling, blisters on feet from new hiking boots, people cutting themselves with their pocket knives, people burning their fingers by handling pots on a stove without hot pads or gloves, spilling hot water and people cutting their feet as a result of walking barefoot or stubbing toes if wearing open toed sandals (like Tevas) which is why we do not allow open-toed sandals on our rafting trips. All of these can be avoided with a little common sense. Please note that this trip goes to a remote area and medical help is often at least one day away. There is no road access to much of the river. Our trips carry satellite phones, but remember satellite service is sometimes not available in certain areas. Please complete and return the online Health & Diet Questionnaire, to inform our trip leaders of any conditions or illnesses that you have.

The Deschutes is an extremely high fire danger area due to the dry grass and brush everywhere at this time of the year. No open flames are allowed on shore, with the exception of white gas and propane stoves and lanterns. Even these pieces of equipment must be handled very carefully to avoid starting a large grass fire.

Yellow jackets, wasps, or hornets are very common at this time of the year, and people with the potential for severe reactions to stings need to carry anaphylaxis kits with them. Mosquitoes and flies can be plentiful or non-existent, depending on how cold the nights are and how dry the season has been. Usually the mosquitoes are not troublesome, but West Nile virus has been identified in the Pacific Northwest, so avoiding mosquito bites by using insect repellent and clothing to cover up bare skin is always a good idea. While not common, Black Widow spiders and scorpions can be found under logs and rocks, and occasionally in outhouses. Check out the situation before sitting down!

Rattlesnakes are found in the canyon and will generally leave you alone. Remember, you weigh more than 100 times as much as a snake--they're fairly intimidated by humans, and will almost always slither away if given the chance. We have never had anyone bitten by a snake on a College Outdoors trip, but people have seen the critters. Stomping around (the vibrations let the snake know you're coming so they can get out of your way) and not putting your hands or feet in places you can't see are two good ways to avoid rattlers.

Weather is generally warm and dry, but desert nights will get cool. Thunderstorms and lightning can occur, typically in the afternoon or evening. Rainy days are possible, even though this is the desert. Swift water and rapids do present hazards, and the river is a force to respect. Participants are required to wear lifejackets at all times when they are rafting. Trip leaders will cover river safety issues at the beginning of the trip, and repeat them as needed. Participants will learn how to paddle rafts and what to do in case they fall out.

The Deschutes offers a great setting for a rafting trip. Listening to a coyote howl at night, being serenaded by a colorful oriole in the trees above your raft, watching a red tail hawk circle in the blue desert sky, and being splashed by a huge native trout jumping next to your boat are things not easily forgotten. Have a great summer, and we'll see you in August!