New Student Trip Description
Backpack the Mt. Adams Wilderness

Mt. Adams is the second highest peak in the Pacific Northwest, shooting up to 12,276 feet. Native American legend says that Mt. Adams, called Pa-Toe by local tribes, battled with Mt. Hood, known then as Wy'East, for the love of a woman named Loowit, who is today known as Mt. St. Helens. Inhabited by Native Americans for at least 9000 years, European explorers didn't see it until 1805, when Lewis and Clark passed by. It received its current name in 1839, in honor of John Adams, as part of an eventually disregarded attempt to name all of the Cascade peaks after U.S. presidents. It is, however, an ancient and beautiful volcano, thankfully believed to be extinct.

The following description does not cover all aspects of the trip, but it will give you a few more 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 Mt. Adams Wilderness is about a 4.5-hour drive from Portland. The first night of your trip you'll camp near the van somewhere close to the trailhead in a campground. On the last day of your trip, we'll pack up and head back to Portland the evening before New Student Orientation begins.

The weather can be beautiful and 80° F at noon, then be snowing by 4 p.m. It's not uncommon to have snow during August in the Mt. Adams Wilderness. Nights are generally cool to cold in the mountains, and the temperature can drop below freezing at night. Rain can blow in from the Pacific Ocean at any time, creating wet, foggy weather. While August is one of the driest months in the Northwest, participants should bring good rain gear. Thunderstorms with lightning are possible. Fire danger is generally high at this time of the year, and participants need to be careful with matches and stoves.

You will be carrying a backpack that will weigh somewhere between 30 and 60 lbs., depending on your weight and your physical condition. If you have never backpacked before, borrow a pack, fill it up with four plastic gallon jugs of water (1 gallon weighs about 8 lbs.) and walk around your neighborhood to try it out. The pack may seem pretty heavy if you have never tried backpacking before but you'll soon get used to it. We suggest that you practice some over the summer. It is also VERY IMPORTANT that you break in your hiking boots if they are new. We find most participants who do these things have fewer blisters and a better time on the trip.

The trails in the Mt. Adams Wilderness are often steep. To see some of the stunning high meadows and lakes, one must hike a series of switchbacks, so it helps to do some running or walking prior to your trip to get yourself ready. As you might expect, not everyone in the group will be able to hike at the same speed, so there are probably going to be some compromises made on routes, campsites, and day hikes. On average, expect to hike about 5 miles a day wearing backpacks, with a possible layover day in the middle.

There are animals that will eat your food unless it is hung from trees. Mostly these are squirrels and chipmunks, but bears are found in the area, too. We have never had a bear bother our camps in the Mt. Adams Wilderness, but participants do need to be careful not to leave food in their packs, clothes, or tents at night. 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.

Common injuries which could occur on this trip include blisters on feet (from people not breaking in their new hiking boots before they come on the trip), people cutting their feet as a result of walking barefoot, people cutting themselves with pocket knives, people burning their fingers by handling pots on a stove without hot pads or gloves, spilling boiling water, and sunburn from not applying enough sunscreen at these high altitudes. These are all preventable with a little caution and common sense. Please note that our trips go to remote areas and medical help is usually at least one day away. Our trips carry satellite phones, but remember satellite service is sometimes not available in certain areas.

Water from streams and lakes needs to be filtered or treated before you can drink it. We have pumps and tablets to do this, which remove or neutralize Giardia, bacteria, and viruses. It's also important to practice minimum-impact camping techniques such as packing out all litter and food waste, not using soap in streams or lakes, and not camping on fragile meadows. Instructors will brief the group on low impact camping techniques at the start of the trip.

Mt. Adams is a spectacular mountain. You'll hear rocks and ice from glaciers tumble off the peak in the distance, and wildflowers will still be blooming in the high meadows. The sunrises and sunsets are simply amazing. It's a terrific place for a New Student Trip. Have a great summer, and we'll see you in August!