New Student Trip Description
Discover the Columbia Gorge

Less than an hour from Portland, the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area is one of the country's great natural treasures. As the mighty Columbia River passed narrowly through the continually rising volcanoes of the Cascades, it carved itself a deeper and deeper channel, made even deeper by huge ancient floods. Only 500 years ago, a huge landslide dammed the river near today's Bonneville Dam, and created what was known as the Bridge of the Gods. Today, these and other geologic events have resulted in a spectacular landscape of epic waterfalls, strange rock formations, and a beautiful wide river with magnificent snow-capped volcanoes on both sides.

This description does not cover all aspects of the trip, but it will give you a few more details about this adventure. Due to the many variables of outdoor trips, it's impossible to describe exactly what the trip will be like. We'll drive from Portland to our base camp near the small town of Corbett, Oregon, in the afternoon on the day you arrive for your trip. It's less than an hour's drive from campus to this camp on the rim of the Gorge. From here, we'll go on daily hiking trips to explore the spectacular scenery within a short drive of the camp.

The trails we'll be hiking are rated easy to moderate, with some more strenuous trails as an option for people who'd like the challenge. If you don't do much hiking, we suggest you do some exercise like jogging or walking this summer to stay in shape. As you might expect, not everyone in the group may want to hike at the same speed, so there are probably going to be some compromises made on routes and day hikes. On average, the group expects to hike about 5-10 miles a day wearing daypacks.

We'll stay in a lodge for this trip, with bathrooms and hot showers. The lodge is modern, with a full kitchen and large fireplace; it is where most of the meals and other activities will take place. There is also a swimming pool with a spectacular view of the Gorge!

Poison oak/ivy may be present in some areas. 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. Ticks and rattlesnakes are not common, but could be present.

Bears and mountain lions may be found in the area we will be hiking, and while sometimes these animals can be aggressive, they are rarely seen and they will generally avoid humans. Skunks and other animals in the area have been known to carry rabies and other diseases, so it's important to keep a clean camp and not feed or try to pet wildlife. Cliffs and rock outcrops can be unstable and dangerous in places.

Fire danger can be very high in August, and the threat of a wildfire is real. Participants need to be very careful with any type of fire. Our trips are non-smoking for this reason. The weather in the Gorge this time of year is usually warm and dry (about 80°F) during the day, dipping into the 50s at night, although hotter temperatures are possible. That being said, it's also possible to have cold, wet weather in the Gorge in late August, so you want to be prepared for both dry and wet conditions.

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 hot water, and sunburn from not applying enough sunscreen. These are all preventable with a little caution and common sense. Please note that our hikes will sometimes go to remote areas and medical help could be hours away. Our trips carry cellular phones, but remember cellular service is not always available in rural or remote areas. Please complete and return the online Health & Diet Questionnaire to inform our trip leaders of any conditions or illnesses that you have.

Water from streams and lakes needs to be filtered or treated before you can drink it. We have pumps and purification drops to do this, which remove or neutralize Giardia, bacteria, and viruses. Usually, though, we'll just get water from the lodge before we go hiking.

The Gorge is an unparalleled, stunning landscape. You'll see the area largely as it has been seen for centuries, by Native Americans and the Lewis & Clark Expedition, watching eagles and hawks trace across the sky by day, and staring at countless stars in the evening. From 600-foot Multnomah Falls and the 360-degree views from Crown Point, to the unique landscape at Beacon Rock and Table Mountain, the area is packed with impressive natural features. More importantly, the memories and friends you make on this trip won't soon fade. Have a great summer, and we'll see you in August!