Backpacking in the Wallowa Mountains

Due to the many variables of outdoor trips, it's impossible to describe exactly what the trip will be like but this will give you a sense of what to expect. Questions? Get in touch at: outdoors@lclark.edu

About the Location:
The Wallowa Mountains in northeastern Oregon shoot up to nearly 10,000 feet and are more similar to the Rockies than the Cascades, with granitic ridges and Ponderosa forests. Named for the nearby Wallowa River (pronounced Wal-OW-ah, meaning "fish trap" in the Nez Perce language), this rugged and remote range is actually the remnant of tropical islands! Its peaks and valleys have been home to Native Americans (including Chief Joseph), miners, and ranchers. There are over fifty lakes here, scoured out by glaciers in the last Ice Age. The Wallowas are gorgeous mountains, often described as the "Oregon Alps". Streams are crystal clear and wildflowers will still be in bloom in late August. The lakes are simply amazing.

What to Expect:
Your trip will begin at a campground on Wallowa Lake, end with a night at Wallowa Lake Camp with the lodge-based Hike & Stand-Up Paddleboard Oregon's Alps Trip group, and you'll spend six spectacular nights in the backcountry. On the last day of your trip, we'll pack up and head back to Portland the evening before New Student Orientation begins. The Wallowas are about an 7-hour drive from Portland, and well worth the trip. You will be carrying a backpack with everything you need, that will weigh somewhere between 30 and 60 lbs., depending on your weight and your physical condition. The trails in the Wallowas climb into the heart of the rugged mountains, so the trails are often steep. You will hike through ponderosa forests, alpine meadows, glacial carved valleys, and camp by mountain streams and remote lakes. As you can expect, not everyone in the group will want to hike at the same speed, so there are probably going to be some compromises made on routes, campsites, and day hikes. On the average, the group expects to hike about 6 miles a day wearing backpacks, with a possible layover day in the middle of the trip.

Vegetation and weather are similar to that found in the Idaho, Wyoming, and Colorado mountains (August weather is typically dry and sunny early in the day). The weather can be a beautiful 80° F at noon, and then be snowing by evening. It's not uncommon to have a little snow in late August in the Wallowas. Afternoon thunderstorms with lightning are common, but tend to be fairly short. It's not unheard of to have a rainy period lasting several days. Nights are generally cool to cold in the mountains, and the temperature can drop below freezing at night. We practice minimum-impact camping techniques such as packing out all litter and food waste, not using soap in streams or lakes, or camping on fragile meadows. We'll go over these practices before we head out. All trips are non-smoking.

New to backpacking?
No problem! This trip is designed for beginners. And we have ideas to help you get ready (read on).

How to Prepare:
- **Prep for the pack:** borrow a pack, fill it with 4-gallon (1 gal. = 8 lbs.) jugs and take a walk! It will feel heavy at first but don't worry - it gets easier!
- **Break in your boots:** new boots + long treks = painful blisters. It is *very important* to break in your boots by wearing them with a pack for extended periods prior to your trip.
- **Get moving**: it's a great idea to walk or run this summer to get yourself into shape.

What will we eat?
We eat well in the backcountry! Some examples of typical meals include: curry, pizza, mac & cheese. Unfortunately, this trip is unable to accommodate a vegan or gluten free diet. We resupply water from streams and lakes. This water needs to be filtered or treated before you can drink it; this is done with pumps and tablets. Our treatment neutralizes Giardia, bacteria, and viruses.

What if I don't have outdoor clothing or equipment?
No problem! Check out our packing lists (located on your trip page) for a description of the essential and optional gear for your trip. If you don't have your own outdoor clothing or equipment, we provide what you'll need for free. You must request the equipment ahead of time using this form: http://tinyurl.com/c4d5g2r

What are the risks?
The most common injuries which could occur on this trip are blisters on feet (don't forget to break in your boots), and burns from not applying enough sunscreen. *These are all preventable with a little caution and common sense.* Yellow jackets (wasps) can be pests at this time of the year, and people with the potential for severe reactions to stings should plan to bring their own anaphylaxis kits. Learn more about possible risks here. All our trip leaders are trained as Wilderness First Responders.

Complete and return the online Health & Diet Questionnaire to inform our trip leaders of any conditions or illnesses that you have.

Have a great summer, and we'll see you in August!