

Backpacking in the Cascade Mountains

New Student Trip (NST)

About the Location:

This trip travels to one of the spectacular backpacking destinations in the Cascade Mountain range of Northwest Oregon or Southwest Washington. Trip locations may include Mt. St. Helens, Siouxon Creek in the Gifford-Pinchot National Forest, and the Badger Creek Wilderness in the Mt. Hood National Forest. You will be assigned a specific trip destination before your trip start date, based on trail conditions, wildfire danger, and other considerations in late August.

At each of the backpacking areas you will get to hike away from civilization and into temperate forest ecosystems on the flanks of one of Oregon or Washington's majestic volcanic mountains. Expect to see towering Douglas Fir trees, sparkling alpine lakes, and sweeping mountain views. Pacific Northwest forests are famous for their dense understories of ferns, huckleberry, and rhododendron. Keep an eye out for black-tailed deer, eagles, and the legendary spotted owl as you explore some of the natural treasures within just a few hours of campus.

What to Expect:

The first day of your trip you'll drive about 2 hours to the trailhead and head out down the trail for your first night camping in the backcountry. For six days you will backpack through forests, take in striking views of the seemingly endless cascade mountains, and play in cool mountain streams. You will be carrying a backpack that will weigh somewhere between 40 and 60 lbs., depending on your equipment and your physical condition. The trails are rated easy to moderate, with elevations ranging from ~2,000 to 6,000 ft. On the average, the group expects to hike about 4-8 miles per day carrying full backpacks, with a possible layover day in the middle. Not everyone in the group will want to hike at the same speed, so we'll do what is best for the group when it comes to routes, campsites, and day hikes. On the last day of your trip, we'll pack up and head back to Portland the evening before New Student Orientation begins.

We'll work together to prepare meals, carry group equipment, and perform camp tasks. For sleeping accommodations, we provide shared tent space or personal "bivy sacks," which allow you to stay cozy and dry while sleeping out under the stars. We 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. We'll go over these practices before we head out.

New to Backpacking or Camping?

No problem! This trip is designed for beginners and perfect for any adventurous spirit who wants to explore, bond with a small-group of peers, and see some of the Pacific Northwest's most spectacular trails.

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. This trip is rated as *high* physical rigor.

What will we eat?

We eat well in the backcountry! Some examples of typical meals include: curry, burritos, or mac & cheese, and we love our snacks! This trip can accommodate most dietary restrictions and allergies, as long as you let us know about them ahead of time. For vegan and other non-medical specialty diets, there is an additional \$5/day meal charge. There is no extra cost for vegetarian diets or medical allergy restrictions.

We will resupply water from streams and lakes throughout the trip. Our treatment methods (filters or tablets) neutralize Giardia, bacteria, and viruses so we can stay hydrated and healthy.

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. We provide all the group gear such as tents, stoves, and water filters. If you don't have your own outdoor clothing or personal equipment, we provide what you'll need for free, as long as you *request the equipment ahead of time* using the online form found on our website.

What are the policies?

Participants on College Outdoors trips are expected to follow all [Lewis & Clark College conduct policies](#). All trips are tobacco, drug, and alcohol free, including vaping, medical cannabis, and tobacco products. Nicotine patches and gum are permitted.

College Outdoors has specific policies and procedures to mitigate risks on trips, which are outlined in the [policy brochure](#) and will be explained by your trip leaders. These policies include: Respecting others, food sanitation practices, requiring the use of Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs, sometimes referred to as lifejackets), requiring close-toed shoes, staying 6ft away from cliff edges, practicing "leave no trace" in the outdoors, and not engaging in exclusive or sexual relationships during trips. Policy violations may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from trips.

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.](#) Please note that our hikes will sometimes go to remote areas and medical help could be hours away. Our trip leaders generally carry cellphones, but remember cellular service is not always available in rural or remote areas. All our trip leaders are trained as Wilderness First Responders.

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