

Fossil Hunting, Paleoclimates, & Painted Hills Cabin Trip

May Trip

About the Location:

We'll head east of the Cascade Mountains to Oregon's famous John Day Fossil Beds National Monument! We'll be on the traditional lands of the Tenino, Northern Paiute, and Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, where the dry, high-desert ecosystem reveals the gorgeous and fascinating geologic past of our region with colorful cliffs and abundant fossils. At the Painted Hills, you'll hike through colorful fossilized layers of soil and sediment, called paleosols, which form otherworldly red, yellow, and black striped hills. At another location, Blue Basin showcases badlands topography where volcanic ash, now turned to intricately eroded blue-green stone, contains numerous vertebrate fossils. Several of these have been preserved in place for you to see from the trail, including a saber-tooth tiger! If you want to find your very own fossils that you can keep, we'll dig into the flakey shale rocks that, 33 million years ago, were the muddy bottom of a lake. Numerous plant and insect fossils can easily be found by even the most inexperienced paleontologists, most notably those of Oregon's state fossil: the Metasequoia tree!



We also plan to visit the renowned Thomas Condon Paleontology Center where you can watch paleontologists at work. At this impressive visitors' center, you'll see interpretive displays about the 50 million years of geology exposed in the region, view over 500 fossils, and learn about prehistoric terminator pigs, bear-dogs, and giraffe-deer. We'll stay at Cottonwood Canyon State Park along the John Day River where several striking geologic layers are visible right from camp and the sunsets are breathtaking. This beautiful high-desert landscape is home to striking desert wildflowers, fragrant sagebrush and juniper trees, jackrabbits, and plenty of sunshine.

What to Expect:

On the first day of your trip, you'll drive about 2.5 hours to Cottonwood Canyon State Park, where we've reserved rustic cabins, tent sites, and a group meeting center. For sleeping accommodations, we provide your choice of either single person tents, or shared cabin space (cabin sharing is available if you're signing up with your "pod"). The cabins have bunk beds, electricity, heating, and air conditioning. In a separate building from the cabins are men's and women's restrooms with flush toilets, or single-user pit toilets. There are also heated showers in single-user (gender neutral) rooms. The picturesque group meeting center is brand new, and will be where we work together to cook, eat meals, and hang out. There is a large indoor space where we can gather socially-distanced in the evenings, as well as a charming outdoor patio with a view of the river. Cell phone service is not normally available in the park, but we'll drive through areas with service most days.

Each day of the trip we'll either hike from camp, or drive to one of the amazing sections of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. The different "units" of the monument are spread out, so each day we'll focus on a different area. The trails we'll be hiking are rated easy to moderate, and the group expects to hike about 2 to 6 miles a day wearing daypacks. On the last day we'll depart early and head back in Portland on Wednesday morning, leaving you time to travel home that same day.

New to Hiking?

No problem! This trip is designed for beginners and fun for anyone who wants to explore. For accessibility accommodations, email outdoors@lclark.edu.

What will we eat?

We eat well on this trip! Some examples of typical meals include: pizza, burritos, and mac & cheese, lots of different salads, and delicious snacks while out hiking during the day! This trip can accommodate most dietary restrictions and allergies, as long as you let us know about them ahead of time in the online Health & Diet Questionnaire. Potable water is available at Cottonwood Canyon State Park.

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 cookware. 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, and practicing "leave no trace" in the outdoors. Policy violations may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from trips.

You are welcome to join a trip with your best friends or significant other, we just ask that you refrain from "cliques" or other social behavior that may make others feel excluded. This will help us build a fun, inclusive community for everyone on the trip, and you might even make some new best friends!

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.* If you plan to borrow boots from College Outdoors, you can check them out a couple weeks early and wear them on campus to make sure they fit you well. Stinging insects and other allergens can be present this time of the year, and *people with the potential for severe reactions to allergens must plan to bring their own anaphylaxis kits (EpiPen).* [Learn more about possible risks here.](#) Please note that our trips will often visit remote areas and medical help could be hours away. Our trip leaders generally carry cell phones, and in some cases, satellite phones, but service is not always available in rural or rugged, remote areas. Trip leaders are trained as Wilderness First Responders.

What about Covid-19?

We expect that we will still be managing the Covid-19 situation in May 2021, so we are planning all May Trips to follow Oregon's guidelines for Phase 1 of reopening. Visit our website for up to date plans, protocols, and expectations: https://www.lclark.edu/programs/college_outdoors/covid-19-mitigation-for-may-trips/

More questions? Just ask! We LOVE to talk about trips!