

Backpack the Deschutes River Canyon

May Trip

About the Location:

The Deschutes River Canyon may be famous for whitewater rafting, but it is also a spectacular backpacking destination. Above the river lies the remnants of an old railroad grade – the rails are long gone, and now the route along the canyon wall offers views of a dramatic and diverse landscape. You'll be hiking on the traditional lands of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs, and in a few large side canyons, with a careful eye, you can still find pictographs drawn by the original inhabitants of this wilderness.



The river carves a path through ancient Columbia River basalt flows, exposing the impressive column-structure of the rocks. The clear, cool Deschutes river is home to salmon, trout, and waterfowl, and the water nourishes a rich riparian ecosystem of alder trees – which provide welcome shade in the sunny arid climate. Spring is the best time to visit the canyon, when temperatures are mild and bunches of bright yellow balsamroot blooms dot the hillsides. It's also a time when wildlife is active, so bald eagles, mule deer, and rattlesnakes are out. Although it is common to see rattlesnakes in May, they are not aggressive and no one on a trip has ever been bitten. Remember, they are afraid of you, and they'll even provide a helpful rattle to warn you if you challenge the rattlesnakes' boundaries.

What to Expect:

On the first day of your trip you'll drive 2-3 hours (depending on which trailhead your group uses) and head down the trail for your first night camping in the backcountry. For five days you will backpack through the canyon, take in striking views of the impressive cliffs above and fierce river below, and relax amongst the wildflowers. You will be carrying a backpack that will weigh somewhere between 30 and 55 lbs., depending on your equipment and your physical condition. The trails are rated easy to moderate, with elevations under 1,000 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. Once we set up a basecamp, people interested in logging more miles can go on day hikes to explore side canyons, or if you're in a more meditative mood, relax by the river at camp. 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 night of the trip we'll camp close to the trailhead so that we can be back in Portland on Wednesday morning, leaving you time to travel home that same day.

We'll work together to prepare meals, carry group equipment, and perform camp tasks. For sleeping accommodations, we provide your choice of either single person tents, or a shared tent space (tent sharing is available if you're signing up with your "pod"). You can even choose one of College Outdoors' single person 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 directly in streams or rivers, and not camping on fragile meadows. There are no restroom facilities in the wilderness, but you can [check out this video about pooping in the woods](#). We'll go over all these practices.

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.

What will we eat?

We eat well in the backcountry! Some examples of typical meals include: curry, burritos, 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 in the online Health & Diet Questionnaire.

We will resupply water from streams and lakes throughout the trip. Our treatment methods (filters and 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, 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!