

# Backcountry Marmot Research in Olympic National Park

## New Student Trip (NST)

### About the Location:

On our only NST that goes to a national park, you'll find yourself in Olympic National Park in southwest Washington. Here you'll see a vast array of breathtaking ecosystems, including old growth temperate rain forest, high glacial peaks, wild coastline, and unique wildlife. Olympic National Park occupies the traditional lands of the Lower Elwha Klallam, Jamestown S'Klallam, Port Gamble S'Klallam, Skokomish, Quinault, Hoh, Quileute, and Makah, for whom the majestic landscape and wealth of resources have supplied both physical and spiritual sustenance. Tribes work with the park to protect natural and sacred resources, especially the bountiful fisheries of salmon, trout, and mountain whitefish. In the park, you will be in one of the country's largest wilderness areas, where diverse wildlife and striking landscape features are at every turn.

### What to Expect:

On the first day of the trip, you will drive to 5.5 hours Olympic National Park and camp in a campground. Before heading into the backcountry, you will be trained by a National Park Service Wildlife Biologist on how to conduct marmot surveys as part of critical ongoing [park research](#). You will then backpack to a remote part of the park, where you will spend days conducting marmot surveys in rarely visited mountain landscapes, exploring the wilderness, and camp at a backcountry campsite beside a sparkling alpine lake. On the second-to-last day of your trip, we'll hike out and head to the coastal section of the park, to camp by the ocean before we head back to Portland the evening before New Student Orientation begins.

The Olympic Marmot is a large gregarious mammal which is endemic to the park, meaning that this species is not found anywhere else in the world! You will learn about biological field data collection methods and contribute to important wildlife research as part of the efforts to save the Olympic Marmot from non-native predators and climate change.

You will be carrying a backpack that will weigh somewhere between 40 and 60 lbs., depending on your weight and your physical condition. The trails are rated moderate to strenuous, with elevations ranging from 2000 - 6000ft. On the average, the group expects to hike about 4-12 miles a day wearing backpacks. Expect rugged off-trail hikes in steep terrain to the marmot sites, and plan to work hard to collect high quality research data. We'll work together to prepare meals, carry group equipment, and perform camp tasks. For sleeping accommodations, we provide your choice of single-person tents, 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 directly in streams or lakes, and not camping on fragile meadows. We'll go over these practices during the trip.

August weather in the Pacific Northwest is usually beautiful, but in the mountains the weather can be sunny and 80° F at noon, then be snowing by 4 p.m. Nights are generally cool to cold in the mountains, and the temperature can sometimes drop below freezing at night. While August is one of the drier months in the Pacific Northwest, it's possible to experience significant storms for several days, so participants should bring good rain gear.

### New to backpacking?

No problem! This trip is designed for beginners and perfect for any adventurous spirit who is interested in biological research.

New Student Trip Description

Questions? Email us at: [outdoors@lclark.edu](mailto:outdoors@lclark.edu) Or by phone: 503-768-7116

Updated 1.08.21

### 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. If you borrow hiking boots from College Outdoors, our boots are synthetic leather, fairly lightweight, and tend not to cause many blisters.
- **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, pizza, mac & cheese. Unfortunately, this trip will not be able to accommodate a vegan diet.

We'll resupply water from streams and lakes and use filters and treatment to neutralize 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. 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 6 ft. 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 (EpiPens).* [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 or satellite phones, but remember service is not always available in remote areas. Trip leaders are trained as Wilderness First Responders.

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