

Backpacking in the Wallowa Mountains

New Student Trip (NST)

About the Location:

The rugged 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. These are the traditional homelands of the Nez Perce tribe, who named the mountains 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 are home to Indigenous people (including Chief Joseph), miners, and ranchers. There are over fifty sparkling alpine 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.

What to Expect:

Your trip will begin at a campground on Wallowa Lake, spend six spectacular nights in the backcountry, and end with a night at the summer camp with Hike & Stand-Up Paddleboard Oregon's Alps Trip group. 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 a 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 40 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. 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 hiking pace, routes, campsites, and day hikes. Most days you'll hike 3-5 miles, and one day you'll have the challenge (and accomplishment!) of hiking nearly 10 miles over Polaris Pass. Depending on your route, you may enjoy a layover day in the middle of the trip with options to relax at camp, or explore on day hikes.

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, 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, pizza, and mac & cheese. Unfortunately, **this trip is unable to accommodate a vegan or gluten free 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 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 at your expense.

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.

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