



Course Overview

High Sierra Mountaineering & Rock Climbing

The Sierra Nevada Range extends 400 miles from north to south. It is filled with granite domes, jagged peaks, cool alpine lakes and lush meadows. Atop the domes one can view the jagged profiles of the LeConte Divide, the Ritter Range and the Great Western Divide, all containing mountain peaks and passes up to 14,000 feet in elevation. Referring to the beauty reflected in both moon and sunlight, John Muir called the peaks the “Range of Light.”

We currently use three main backpacking course areas: Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park, the Ansel Adams and John Muir Wilderness. Your specific course could take place in any one of these locations, depending on weather, permit availability and instructor preference.

Alpine Backpacking and Course Terrain

You will travel both on and off-trail. The trails, when present, are of high quality. The off-trail routes can be especially challenging as these routes travel through boulder and talus fields, over granite slabs, sometimes fording waist deep rivers where no footbridges are present. Though the landscape can be demanding, there are few places in the world that compare to the beauty where this backpacking leads.

Rock Camp

The rock climbing section may occur at either a concentrated frontcountry location or a wild and remote backcountry location. During this section your days will include a mix of climbing, peer-mentoring and learning with your fellow students how to climb, belay and rappel safely. There may be opportunities to camp on top of granite domes, experience amazing free-hanging rappels or explore stunning river gorges. With practice and focus, you can become an informed, skilled rock climber. You may experience a wide variety of climbing styles, including crack-climbing, face climbing and bouldering.

Mountaineering

Mountaineering expeditions move through high mountain terrain, typically above tree line. The Sierra is not known for heavy snow in summer but if conditions indicate, you will carry and receive training in snow travel and the use of ice axes. The mountaineering section offers more extensive skills training and students develop higher competency so that more rugged and challenging terrain is explored. Instructors will prepare you for one or more technical peak attempts. See Peak Attempt Below.

Miles Traveled Daily

As a general guideline, expect to travel approximately 3-7 miles a day. Crews may cover 10+ miles per day as terrain and fitness allow.

Physical Fitness

Participants must come prepared for a physically, mentally and emotionally-demanding yet equally rewarding experience. Mountaineering courses are the most physically challenging course type offered by OBCA, please be physically fit on arrival for this course. Alumni often report that the more time they spent preparing for course, the more successful their course experience was.



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Pack Weight

The need to carry ropes and rock equipment for the expedition will add additional weight to packs. Packed backpacks typically weigh 50-70 pounds on this course, ideally this is 40-45% of your body weight. This varies person to person based on size, stature and physical ability.

Instruction and Skills

Previous backpacking or mountaineering experience is not necessary. We will teach you the skills for wilderness travel both interpersonal and technical skills.

Technical skills: how to pack appropriately, load a backpack, set up tarps, camp craft, on and off trail navigation, rock climbing and how to travel on fixed lines, rappel and belay, how to sleep warm in your sleeping bag, and how to cook your group meals over backcountry stoves.

Interpersonal skills: group travel, risk management, weather and hazard assessment, communication skills, and learning how to work as a team.

Training, Main & Final

Fundamental in Outward Bound's educational outcomes is the concept of "Training," "Main," and "Final." Our hope is to transfer leadership and decision-making skills over to students through an intentional progression. As the course advances, Instructors will take on more of a 'coaching' role. This provides a safety net for students to work through their decision-making and risk management development. Read about the culminating Final Expedition below.

Overview

Course Start - There is a 2 to 3-hour drive from the airport to the course start location. You will spend the first day gearing up for the field and meeting the other members of your team. Group gear like food, tarps, kitchen equipment and first aid supplies will be divided up among group members. Depending on your specific itinerary, you may hike a few miles on Day 1. As this is not a guided trip, all group members will pitch in to do camp chores, including cooking, washing pots and setting up tarps.

Peak Attempt – Most groups will attempt to summit at least one peak. These peak attempts often require pre-dawn starts, waking as early as 4am. You will typically launch from a basecamp so that you can leave some of your gear at camp. During your peak attempt(s) you will gain an understanding of terrain management, hazard assessment and weather consideration to make a successful peak attempt. Depending on the skill level of the group, the weather, or other factors, your team may attempt a peak that requires ropes, technical equipment or rock climbing techniques to ascend. For all the effort they require, successful peak attempts are often the most rewarding experiences of an Outward Bound course.

Solo – The solo experience provides an important break from the rigors of the expedition, and a chance to reflect on your course thus far. With an adequate amount of food and sufficient equipment you'll spend time alone at an assigned campsite to rest and reflect. Solo sites are chosen to have as much solitude as possible, within earshot of instructors for management considerations. You will not travel during this time and your instructors will check on you periodically, but you will be mostly alone for the duration of your solo. Solo may last in duration from a few hours to a full 3-days depending on age and course length. Many students are initially nervous about solo but most are ready for a break from the group when the time for solo arrives. This activity may be abbreviated or eliminated as instructors assess the weather, terrain, or other factors that could affect the outcomes of solo.



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Final Expedition – Outward Bound believes that an appropriate amount of independence is a powerful educational tool. In order to deliver that benefit, our Instructors gradually transfer leadership responsibilities to the students culminating with a “Final Expedition.” Near the end of course, if you and your group have demonstrated the necessary leadership, team problem-solving and wilderness living skills, you may be given the opportunity to travel without your Instructors immediately present. This is your opportunity to demonstrate the skills you have acquired in the previous weeks. Final Expeditions can last for one to three days, depending on staff assessment of students’ abilities and terrain. Outcomes are to work together, problem solve, and accomplish a goal independently, while utilizing all the skills they have acquired.

Service – Service is an integral part of the Outward Bound curriculum. We encourage service to the environment in the form of leaving campsites cleaner than we find them and practicing Leave No Trace® ethics throughout the course.

Personal Challenge Event – Outward Bound courses typically end with a Personal Challenge Event—a final, individual, physical effort. This might take the form of a run or a triathlon-style challenge. Expect to participate in a 3-8 mile run.

Final Days - In preparation for your travel back home, the second-to-last afternoon of your course will be spent de-issuing and cleaning all Outward Bound gear followed by a special graduation ceremony. Simple backcountry showers will be offered. Departure from the trailhead will be between 6am and 8am.

Sample Itinerary

The following is an example of what your itinerary may look like. Your actual course plan will vary according to permitting, weather, student skills and abilities, and instructor planning/assessment.

14-Day Itinerary

Day 1	Course Start
Day 2	Intro to climbing, belaying and rappelling
Days 3-5	Training Expedition (Intro lessons: backpacking, camp craft, navigation and rock climbing)
Days 6	Backcountry re-supply
Days 7-10	Main Expedition (building on lessons, backpacking and peak attempt), Solo
Days 11-12	Final Expedition (demonstrating skills, backpacking and peak attempt)
Day 13	Personal Challenge Event, clean and de-issue gear, Graduation
Day 14	Course End and transportation home