



# IWLS

International Wilderness Leadership School

## 26-DAY YUKON BACKPACKING AND WHITEWATER

### Course Information



### Course Location

IWLS is based in Haines, Alaska; a small community located ninety miles north of Juneau, (the state capital) at the top of the Inside Passage. Haines borders Glacier Bay National Park. The Park and the adjacent 27 million acres, including Wrangell-St Elias National Park, comprise the largest protected wilderness area on the planet. It is an extremely jagged, glaciated, mountain landscape that includes the world's largest non-polar ice caps, pristine fjords, and wilderness rivers. This terrain is amongst the best in North America for learning climbing skills, and the sea kayaking, rafting, trekking, and skiing here are world class.

Our expedition center in Haines is an outstanding gateway for accessing the unrivaled wilderness areas of the Yukon. A few hours' drive leads us to mighty rivers, broad alpine lakes and valleys, and rugged peaks that make up the wilderness of the interior.

### Course Goals

- Students will gain technical competence and skills regarding backcountry canoeing and backpacking.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to professionally deal with emergency scenarios while in the field and the considerations therein.
- Students will be able to use and teach state-of-the art minimum-impact camping and travel techniques to move a group through a glaciated terrain with minimum impact.
- They will be able to exercise good quality judgment and decision-making skills within a leadership position to help avoid potential accident and survival situations and develop a comprehensive understanding of safety considerations in the wilderness environment.
- They will be able to recognize their own leadership abilities and limitations within the context of a group.
- Students will be able to demonstrate the ability to make decisions and lead small groups in the wilderness environment.

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## Course Itinerary

*This is a flexible trip itinerary that shows the general progression of the trip. Our exact schedule will depend highly on the weather, strength of the group, and time of year.*

**Day 0:** Pre-trip meeting at 6:00 PM (unless otherwise directed) at the IWLS office in Haines. After a brief meet and greet with your instructors and fellow students, we will discuss the course and students' goals and expectations.

**Day 1:** We'll spend this first day preparing for our trip in the IWLS Expedition Center. This will include packing food, packing gear and going over general course logistics. In the afternoon we will drive to the Blanchard River and set up our base camp.

**Days 2 - 7:** We'll begin the course with Swift Water Rescue training and certification on the Blanchard and Tatshenshini Rivers, returning to base camp each night. This is a Rescue III international training course and will prepare everyone for rafting skills later in the course. After the course we'll transition into the Yukon Raft Guide training program. This course will teach you everything you need to know about running a raft safely in water up to class IV.

**Days 8 - 10:** We will spend 3 days rafting the Upper Tatshenshini River. This will be the perfect combination of our developed rafting skills and expedition camping skills. Once we have finished the river, we will hike out Squaw Creek to Dalton Post.

**Day 10:** We will transport from our base camp to the Tutshi River and prepare for another overnight river trip.

**Day 11 - 12:** We will raft the Tutshi River, which is mostly Grade III with a few sections of Grade IV and V.

**Day 12:** We'll return to Haines and have a few down days to prepare for the backpacking segment of the course.

**Day 13 - 14:** OFF

**Day 15:** We'll prepare for the backpacking portion of the course. Students will learn about expedition planning, food/nutrition planning and equipment packing. We'll depart mid morning and head to the trailhead.

**Days 16 - 25:** The backpacking is along the Donjek Route in Kluane National Park. We start the backpacking course in the Burwash Uplands of the Yukon and hike through abundant wildflowers and wildlife. Routefinding across this wild country will test our navigation skills. We will practice Leave no Trace ethics and Bear Safety. Along the way we have the opportunity to pass by a calving glacier and the impressive heights of the St. Elias mountain range. We will also have mid-course evaluations where your instructors will assess students' level of involvement and assessment rubrics associated with the IWLS curriculum.

**Day 26:** We will drive back to Haines and unpack our equipment. Instructors will assess students on their understanding and completion of the IWLS curriculum, along with a self and peer-assessment.

## A Typical Day

A typical day starts around 7am with breakfast and hot drinks. While water is heating you will most likely be preparing for the days' adventures. After breakfast we'll get ready to hit the river or hit the trail!



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You will play an integral part of the expedition team by setting up camp, cooking meals, or carrying a portion of the group gear. You may be leader of the day, responsible for planning the day, accomplishing objectives, or facilitating a lesson plan.

The day's activities will vary depending on weather, location, and progression of the course. We may work on developing your technical skills set, learn about different leadership styles, or get an alpine start and climb a large peak in the area. Regardless of the day's activities, it will be full of learning and adventure.

Dinner could be anything from pasta to backcountry pizza. Students often walk away from our courses with a newfound love for cooking good and original food.

The day will finish with a debrief session where we'll discuss the day's events, what you learned, and how you'll be able to use your newfound skills in the near future.

## Course Curriculum

The International Wilderness Leadership Schools' educational model nurtures leadership development and creates an awareness of the guiding mentality that is essential for leading safe, fun adventures on the water. The combination of technical skills training, experiential education and practical leadership experience make the IWLS curriculum world class.

We believe that experiences drive our learning and therefore we use formal and informal classes taught by both instructors and students. Instructors are eager to help facilitate the learning process but ultimately, how much you learn will be dependent on the amount of effort you put into the course.

A detailed curriculum will be provided at the beginning of the course. Below is a partial list of curriculum points that will be covered throughout your course.



## IWLS General Curriculum

- **Leader of the Day:** Opportunities to lead the group will be abundant and you'll have the time to learn and practice multiple styles of leadership.
- **Situational Based Decision Making:** Over the course of 12 days, we'll discover ways to make effective and safe decisions in the field.
- **Focused and "Big Picture" Awareness:** Learn to identify objective and subjective hazards in a backcountry setting.
- **Logistics:** Develop the ability to efficiently plan and pack for an extended expedition in the backcountry.
- **Communication Skills:** Learn to communicate to a wide variety of audiences and provide constructive and appropriate feedback during daily group debriefs.
- **Teaching and Lesson Plans:** You'll have the opportunity to develop lesson plans, teach in front of the group, and learn the importance of progressions for teaching technical skills and leadership.

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- **Expedition Behavior and Group Dynamics:** As this course is a true wilderness expedition, interactions between group members need to be supportive and contribute to the efficacy of the group. Learn the finer points of teaching these facilitation skills.
- **Camp Set-up and Maintenance:** Mastering these essential skills will prove valuable whether you are pitching a tent in gale force winds or melting snow for drinking water.
- **Nutrition and Cooking:** A healthy diet is vital for maintaining energy throughout an expedition. Learn to appropriately prepare nutritional and tasty backcountry meals.
- **Navigation:** Learn how to take a bearing, read a topographical map, triangulate your position, and navigate in a whiteout.
- **Weather:** Will the storm arrive in the next 12 hours, or the next 48? Understanding weather patterns and trends will help you plan successful trips in a wilderness setting.
- **Leave No Trace® Ethics:** As adventurers in some of the most pristine environments on the planet it is our duty to respect the natural world.
- **Natural and Cultural History:** Having a strong understanding of cultural history, flora, and fauna is an integral part of leading people in an outdoor environment. You'll learn some of the botany, ecology, and geology that apply to this remarkable area.

## IWLS Backpacking Curriculum

- **Pre-trip Activities:** Learn how to plan and prepare for an extended wilderness expedition. We'll cover everything from technical camping equipment to group and personal expectations.
- **Backpacks:** Proper packing and fitting of backpacks improves efficiency and helps avoid injury.
- **Bear Safety:** How high should you hang your food? Is it a curious bear or a defensive bear? Learn to keep bears and humans safe by being bear aware.
- **Tents:** Staying dry in the wilderness is an essential survival skill. You'll learn how to repair a damaged tent, how to set up camp in high winds, and techniques to secure your dry space for the night.
- **Stoves and Campfires:** The ability to repair a broken stove, make an emergency fire after being submerged in an icy river, and melt snow efficiently for water are key components for leading a group in the wilderness.

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- **Cooking:** Sometimes in the backcountry, the meal makes the day. Whether cooking oatmeal or Thanksgiving dinner, you'll develop your skills at making tasty treats.
- **Lightning Hazards:** Learn how to read weather patterns and avoid exposure, and how to manage a group in an emergency situation.
- **River and Stream Crossings:** In river crossings, attention to detail and safety are #1. You'll learn and practice safe techniques for wading across a small stream or doing a Tyrolean traverse across a raging river.
- **Travel on Scree and Talus:** The term 'talus' originated from a Greek name for a giant who throws rocks. Learn how to safely travel on this potentially dangerous terrain.
- **Geology:** From plate tectonics to granitic batholiths, you'll learn the history of the land you are exploring and how these forces create and influence the environment around you.
- **Objective Hazards:** River crossings, bear encounters and "widow makers" are examples of objective hazards. We'll learn how to effectively deal with or avoid these hazards.
- **Subjective Hazards:** Among other things, dehydration, fatigue and personal pride can be detrimental to group safety. Learn how to implement measures to mitigate these potential hazards.
- **Timing:** This is a key component of group management. You'll develop this awareness and how it affects all aspects of a day on an expedition.

## IWLS Whitewater Curriculum

- **Rafting Equipment:** From identifying a boat's carrying capacity and rigging a raft with appropriate lines to packing a throw bag and repairing a punctured thwart, you'll learn the ins and outs of whitewater rafting equipment.
- **River Rescue:** What do you do when you find yourself swimming in a Class IV rock garden? How do you extract a pinned raft from strong current? You'll learn and practice the techniques to carry out a safe and efficient rescue on the river.
- **Hydrology:** Rivers are a powerful force of nature. An understanding of river hydrology helps us to identify and assess features on the river for safe navigation. You'll learn the fundamentals of pourovers, eddies, holes, standing waves and more.
- **Maneuvering a Raft:** Whether in a paddle raft or an oar rig, the ability to steer a raft and avoid obstacles is vital for having a safe and fun rafting experience. You'll have the opportunity to practice both types of rafting and develop a strong skill set for maneuvering down a Class III/IV river.



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- **Oar and Paddle Strokes:** Maneuvering the raft requires effective strokes. You'll learn and teach these skills as you practice your safety talks and captain a boat down the river.
- **Paddle Captaining and Commands:** The captain of the paddle raft communicates to paddlers how to maneuver the raft. Learning how to paddle captain requires managing a group of paddlers to provide a safe, fun, and rewarding experience on the river.
- **River Signals:** Generally, the roaring noise of a rapid makes it difficult to be heard. Learn and practice the signs and signals for effective visual communication.
- **Group Management:** Learn how to distribute resources for effective risk management, designate a lead boat for scouting and keeping the group together, and establish a sweep boat with critical rescue equipment

## Journal Writing

Keeping a wilderness journal can help students to record, reflect, and gain from experiences throughout the expedition. The following are examples of topics that may be assigned throughout the course: First-Aid SOAP notes, incident management forms, leadership analyses, trip reports, lesson plans and decision making analyses.

## Evaluation and Grading

Students who take this course for credit will receive a letter grade. Grading is a measurement of one's knowledge of material, participation, written and oral communication, and one's judgment and awareness. Students will be evaluated on their skills, level of participation, their knowledge and awareness of their own abilities as outdoor leaders, their level of judgment as applied to decisions, and written projects assigned during the trip. Students that don't take the course for credit will receive a written instructor evaluation in place of a grade.



## Certifications

Upon completion of the 24-day backpacking & whitewater leadership course, students will be eligible for the following certifications:



**24 Day Guide Training Certificate of Completion**  
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*Rescue III International*

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