



## Welcome to First Ascent, Western Carolina University's Wilderness Orientation Program August 10<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> 2024

Please take the time to review the following materials:

- The **Gear Advice, Preparation, and Gear Checklist** provide you with a good idea of what you'll need to bring and what our program will provide. Please review in detail, as there are required items.
- The **Emergency Contact information** covers the basic plan for your expedition, where and when to meet prior to the trip and where you can be picked up on your return.

The Wilderness Experience trip is designed as an introduction to wilderness living and travel, so beginners should feel right at home. However, it will be challenging to even the seasoned outdoor enthusiast. All backpacking routes in the Nantahala National Forest provide an adequate challenge, the perfect match to help prepare you for your college adventure. I do recommend that you stick to some regular exercise plan; however, your attitude will have the most impact on this trip for you. This is a group experience and the group will define the kind of trip you have. As you are an essential member of this group, your attitude, preparation and participation will play a vital role in defining the experience.

Yours in adventure,

Base Camp Cullowhee Leadership Team

# Wilderness Experience

## *Gear Advice, Preparation and Checklist*

### **Gear Advice**

This gear checklist is a summary of what you'll need for your Wilderness Experience. We've broken things up into four categories; required gear that we can provide, required gear that you'll need to provide, optional gear, and gear not to bring at all. Please feel free to contact us with questions, comments, or concerns.

Generally, during the summer months we have temperatures in the 70's – 80's, with the mercury dipping down into the 50's – 60's at night. However, it is not uncommon to have nighttime temperatures into the 30's or daytime highs in the 90's. So you'll need to bring a *little bit* of everything with you – emphasis on the “little bit.”

When thinking about clothing, think about layers. A good layering system allows you to easily and quickly adjust what you're wearing to match your effort level and current weather conditions. Layers are made up of a thin shirt and shorts against the skin, followed by a thicker, insulating layer that traps air next to you – keeping you warm, followed by an outer layer or shell with your rain jacket – blocking the wind and rain.

When thinking about materials it's best to stay away from cotton. Cotton is comfortable when dry, but it easily soaks up sweat and rain to become saturated, uncomfortable and even dangerous. Cotton loses all insulating properties when wet – making you colder, so stay away from cotton. Synthetic materials such as nylon, polyester, or polypropylene, are a good alternative. These fabrics have become quite comfortable and are available everywhere. They will keep you warm and dry while keeping you cool. Wool is a natural alternative to synthetics, and can also be very inexpensive.

Boots or sturdy hiking shoes are a good investment in your outdoor activity future. Since you will be hiking with a heavy pack, we ***strongly recommend*** a high boot providing ankle support. It is essential that you break-in any new boots, as blisters are no fun. ***We cannot emphasize this enough – it's been the biggest complaint on our backpacking trips. Heed this advice and take care of your feet.*** One other way to prevent blisters is by wearing a sock liner with a thicker hiking sock. This helps wick moisture away from the foot and the two layers of sock rub against each other rather than against the skin.

When thinking about the weather, keep in mind that it's not how the weather deals with you; it's how you deal with the weather that will define your experience. Rain is a fact of life and it happens on every trip at some point. There are small things like good breathable rain gear, a small towel, extra socks, that can make you more comfortable, but the biggest thing you can pack is your attitude. Being flexible and patient in wet weather is an invaluable life skill; it's also a metaphor for dealing with college-life. Sometimes things are sunny and sometimes they aren't, but you have control over how you react to the situation.

## Getting in Shape!

The Wilderness Experience trip is designed for the novice backpacker, but don't underestimate the difficulty of the experience. We recommend that you begin exercising now if you are not regularly active. We will be walking in sometimes challenging terrain with an average of 30 – 40 pounds of gear on your back. If you want some assistance with creating a plan for getting in shape, we are happy to assist you. We encourage you to include the following into your exercise regime to get ready for the trip:

- If you are getting new hiking boots/shoes, buy them ASAP and break them in by walking up and down hills/local trails, etc. Do at least a three hour hike in them to assess "hotspots" – potential blister areas. No shiny new shoes – we want to see dirt on your shoes when you put them on for the first time here in Cullowhee! Walking up and down hills can also be part of your aerobic exercise routine.
- 2-3 hours of aerobic exercise each week – do some of this work with a weighted backpack on so that you get used to the weight and work on your balance. A bag of birdseed in your backpack makes for some easy added weight, and the local birds will appreciate you when you leave it behind.
- Get your abs in shape. You don't by any means need to be "cut," but strong abs are important for reducing the possibility of a back injury when carrying a heavy backpack for many miles at a time: strong stomach = strong back.
- If you have weak ankles, a good pair of boots with ankle support will help, but doing leg raises and other ankle strengthening exercises will help you from turning an ankle over on uneven terrain.
- Stretch. Flexibility is key, both physical and mental.
- Stay healthy – get lots of sleep, eat a balanced diet, drink a ton of water, and try to avoid the multiple viruses going around this time of year!

Don't hesitate to contact us with any comments, questions or concerns. We're looking forward to seeing you this summer!

**Wilderness Experience Gear Checklist:** Please bring this checklist with you when you arrive to Cullowhee.

**Required Gear: First Ascent will provide the following items OR you may use your own**

*We will also provide shelter, cooksets, cooking stoves, cook shelters, fuel bottles, cooking utensils etc. that the group will share. If you choose to bring your own gear, you assume the risk of damage or loss.*

<u>Check</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>
	Backpack	Internal Frame Pack with 5000 cubic inches or larger is preferred, but smaller participants may be more comfortable with a smaller capacity pack.
	Sleeping pad	Closed cell foam pad, or self-inflating "Therm-a-Rest" pad.
	Sleeping bag with stuff sack	Your bag needs to be rated to at least 30 degrees; but not below 15. Synthetic material is required, as down loses loft when wet.

*If you are planning to use Base Camp's gear, let us know what you need by **July 31st** so that we can better accommodate your needs.*

**Required Gear: Provided by You**

*Need some new gear, but don't have a lot of money? Some less expensive places to buy good quality gear are Campmor and Sierra Trading Post. Both of these companies have websites where you can order items on-line. But, when it comes to shoes/boots, it's best to try them on because fit is so important! All clothing items can be found at department stores, no need to drop a fortune at a specialty Outdoor shop – check out the 2<sup>nd</sup> hand store as well.*

<u>Check</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>
	Mid-weight top layer	Light wool sweater, expedition weight polypropylene, fleece, etc. This can also double as a pillow. Cotton is NOT acceptable.
	1 pair of synthetic pants/tights	Quick drying nylon pants, expedition weight or lightweight fleece, lined nylon pants, running pants, or heavy weight tights. No cotton!
	Long underwear top and bottom	Long underwear needs to be made from a synthetic material such as "Capilene", or polypropylene – cotton long underwear is NOT acceptable.
	Rain gear top and bottom	The best kind is waterproof and breathable. (Good rain gear is probably the single most important layer that you can have in the wilderness.) Waterproof/breathable fabrics like Gore-tex are one option but they can be expensive. There are now many options in waterproof/breathable outer-ware with some costing less than others, so shop around. Breathable rain gear also acts as an outstanding wind layer to go over your fleece or pile layer. Plus it's nice to have in WNC year-round.

3 pair wool/synthetic socks (optional: sock liners)	Socks <b>must</b> be made of wool, wool blend, or other wool-like synthetic "hiking weight" material. Sock liners are a thin moisture wicking layer that helps prevent blisters, and are a really good idea.
1-2 pair of shorts	No cotton!
Underwear, as needed	<b>Avoid cotton if at all possible.</b>
2 lightweight, short sleeve t-shirts	50/50 cotton/polyester or 100% synthetic fibers are preferable.
Bathing suit	This is for swimming and other water activities, not so much for sun bathing, so make it comfortable. Synthetic hiking shorts work double duty as swim trunks.
Mid-weight hiking boots/shoes	All-leather boots are not absolutely required, but they are advisable. They can be a long term investment for you and can also be water-proofed quite easily. Boots should fit properly when wearing liner socks in combination with a wool or wool/synthetic sock. The boots should also provide adequate ankle support and be "broken-in" prior to arriving in Cullowhee.
Water sandals, water shoes, or extra pair of tennis shoes that can get wet.	Such as "Chacos," "Tevas," or a cheap aqua sock from the department store. These shoes must have a heel / ankle strap, or cover the foot and ankle completely; they must not come off in the water. Flip flops or Birkenstocks are not acceptable. <b><i>You won't be allowed to start the hike without an acceptable pair of water shoes.</i></b>
Camp Shoes/Sandals	Some comfortable footwear to change into after the day's hiking is done.
Sunglasses with retention strap	Sunglasses should block UVA and UVB rays.
Wide-brimmed hat or baseball cap	For sun protection and hair wrangling!
Wool or fleece hat	For warmth.
1 insulated travel mug with handle	Anything with a wide mouth can be used for drinking or eating.
1 spoon	Heavy duty plastic, "Permaware" for example. Metal is cold and heavy.
1 small bowl	A "Lexan" or "Rubbermaid" bowl works well, it is a good idea that this bowl be "lickable" -- as in easily cleaned out with the ol' tongue.
2 wide mouth, 32oz. water bottles	Internal pack water bladders are very popular, but you still need to bring at least one "Nalgene" bottle in case the bladder springs a leak.
Headlamp	Headlamp should be water resistant. <b>Bring extra batteries.</b>

	Small towel	For drying off. No cotton! There are numerous “camp” towel products on the market, most are made of a synthetic material.
	Toiletries (e.g., toothbrush, toothpaste, floss, comb / brush, prescription drugs, chapstick, insect repellent, feminine hygiene needs, etc.)	You’re not going out for very long, so bring only the minimum that you need, enough toothpaste for 4 nights, and just the essentials for your hygiene needs. We will bring Biodegradable soap. Make sure you include all prescription drugs that you will bring on your personal medical information form. This is a confidential form and no one other than the trip leaders will view it. In the case of an emergency, it is vital that we know any medications that you may be taking.

**Optional Gear: Provided by You!**

<u>Ckd.</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Description</u>
	Camera	We’ll be taking digital pictures and will share them with the whole group, but please feel free to bring your own.
	“Pelican Case” for absolute water and crush proof protection of your camera.	Given that it can rain quite a bit in the WNC mountains, you may want to bring a fully waterproof case for your camera/film.
	Journal & pen	For personal reflections. Store in a plastic bag.
	Pocket knife or multi-tool	There are many opportunities to use this tool, but I find it also spreads peanut butter very well.
	Deck of cards	Bring this especially if you know some good card tricks!
	Bandana	The uses of a bandana are too numerous to list... just trust me on this!
	Telescoping trekking poles	These really help when you want to keep going, but your knees aren’t as willing!

**Taboo Gear: What not to bring!**

You shouldn’t need to bring anything else than what we have specifically listed above. We ask that you not bring any electronic devices such as CD & MP3 players, cell phones, Gameboys, etc. Do not bring any kind of weapon; large “survival” knife, blowgun, etc. as there is no need for these items.

**First Ascent is a drug, alcohol, and tobacco free activity. Use of any substance other than a prescribed medication from your doctor will result in Immediate Removal from the program.**

# Wilderness Experience

## Emergency Contact Information

### Emergency Response Plan

Base Camp Cullowhee (a part of WCU Campus Recreation and Wellness) has been successfully leading students in adventure activities in backcountry settings for more than 40 years. In the unlikely event of an emergency, this plan will guide all communications between the staff in the field and the student participant's family or contact person(s). Trip staff members are trained in managing a variety of situations and medical emergencies that may occur in the backcountry. We have determined the locations most suitable for evacuation and established emergency protocols. The staff are aware of various locations along the route where land-line phones can be found within 5 miles of the trail.

Base Camp will be contacted by the trip staff regarding any emergencies that may arise in the backcountry. Following notification of an emergency, BCC staff will initiate the Base Camp Emergency Response Protocol; parent(s) and / or guardian(s) will be contacted appropriately.

Once contacted, BCC Staff will consider the following options for contacting the group;

1. Contact the group via cell phone
2. Send an BCC staff member into the field to locate the group
3. Contact Emergency Services if needed (Rescue Squad or Sherriff's Department)
4. Contact Nantahala Forest District Ranger Station

If you want to contact your student, please carefully consider the following:

1. Contacting the group could take up to or exceed 24 hours
2. Contacting the group may be disruptive to the group experience
3. BCC staff members will ultimately decide if contact is appropriate

If you feel that contact is necessary, call WCU staff members in the order provided below

*(All area codes for below numbers are 828)*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Office</u>	<u>Cell</u>
Jeremiah Haas, Associate Director of Base Camp	227-8805	828-713-0845
Martin Jacaruso, Assistant Director of Base Camp	227-8804	336-213-0769
Brandon MacCallum, Director of CRW	227-8803	828-557-4590
University Police	227-8911	
<b>On-Campus Emergencies</b>	<b>227-8911</b>	
<b>Off-Campus Emergencies</b>	<b>911</b>	

For all non-emergency's feel free to email Jeremiah Haas at [jhaas@wcu.edu](mailto:jhaas@wcu.edu)