

# Wilderness School **EXPEDITIONS**



Wilderness School students on an Appalachian Trail

Since 1974, the Wilderness School has offered Expedition courses for adolescents from CT.

The purpose of the Wilderness School's Expeditions are to:

1. Provide the student with an experience that promotes self-improvement, specifically in such areas as self-esteem, responsibility and interpersonal skills
2. Help the student achieve goals that are attainable
3. Relate the achievement of course goals to the student's transition home, including pursuit of Follow-Up goals

The Expeditions are designed to confront the participant with a new and challenging environment in addition to a new group of individuals with which to co-exist. Success or failure is found to be dependent upon the extent of one's willingness to try. Our programs are based in action where experience is the medium for learning cooperation, self-reliance, decision-making, and the rewards of achieving goals.

Wilderness School Expeditions are enrolled in single gender groupings according to the open enrollment of the course. When courses are over-enrolled with either male or female students, mixed gender groupings may be considered upon the discretion of the Wilderness School Director.

## Philosophy and Methodology:



**Small Group Process:** Through discussion and experience, the group learns teamwork, problem solving, and decision-making. The group is expected to advocate positive values such as respect and compassion, and to develop an ability to perform with increasing self-direction.

**Processing of Experience:** Course experiences are discussed and processed by the individual and the group for the course's impact to be made relevant. On wilderness courses, a major emphasis is placed on briefing and debriefing each day and activity, and on relating these subjects to meaningful examples from the student's life.

**Graduated Challenges:** The course consists of a series of graduated, achievable challenges intended to establish a pattern of success. These require continually increasing effort and produce related feelings of accomplishment.

**Use of Natural Consequences:** The natural consequences of one's actions or inactions are used to a safe and reasonable degree. The simplified environment of the course dispenses immediate, impartial consequences that may be utilized as learning experiences for students.

**Experiential Learning:** Learning by doing is emphasized in skills instruction. Group members are active participants in lessons and are given the responsibility to learn the skills necessary for the successful completion of the course.

**Twenty-Four Hour Programming:** Programming twenty-four hours per day provides an intensive experience resulting in an eventual confrontation with one's limits. This experience produces opportunities for students and the group to expand limits and gain positive self-awareness.



20-Day Expedition participants engage in group initiative activities, backpacking, canoeing, rock climbing and rappelling, ropes course activities, a community service project or trail maintenance, a solo experience, running, and group discussions.

5-Day and 7-Day Expeditions offer a canoe or backpacking expedition and the opportunity for a high impact activity such as the ropes course, rock climbing, white water canoeing or caving.

Wilderness School activities are not viewed as an end in themselves but as a means of attaining positive self-awareness, respect for others, and self-reliance.

For 20-Day Students: Families and agency staff are expected to attend the Graduation, which is a special recognition of the student's experience on the course.

On the course, students spend all or part of the first day at the program base camp, then depart for course activities on the rivers and mountains of Northwestern Connecticut, in addition to neighboring areas of Massachusetts and New York State.

Students are able to receive family and agency support through letters and (as necessary) through contact with the Wilderness School in the event an individual needs greater encouragement or should a crisis situation take place.

For 20-Day Students: Families and agency staff are expected to attend the Graduation, which is a special recognition of the student's experience on the course.

