



WHAT TO EXPECT DURING YOUR LEADING EDGE COURSE

Congratulations! You have been invited to participate in an amazing experience this summer. The Leading Edge at the High Mountain Institute was founded in 2003 to provide high school students with an outstanding wilderness and leadership development opportunity. The program uses a classroom-based workshop and an extended wilderness backpacking expedition as forums to talk about and practice leadership. Our goal is to provide students with real leadership experience, skills and self-knowledge they can take back and apply in their homes, schools and communities. To enable this wilderness environment learning, we also provide students with an enriching education in backcountry travel and camping.

What will I learn about myself and leadership?

During the first two days of the program, you will participate in a two-day classroom-based leadership workshop led by faculty members experienced in teaching leadership skills. During the expedition, you will continue to talk about, practice, and have classes about leadership. There are a variety of experiences and curriculum elements used during the Leading Edge. Many—such as journaling, reflection, and instruments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator—are aimed at increasing self-awareness. Others—such as discussions, activities, and hands-on peer leadership opportunities—are focused on the dynamics of a group or team, and how individuals affect it. All curriculum elements are taught in an environment that emphasizes experiential learning and fun.

It is important that you come to the Leading Edge with an open mind and a willingness to learn about leadership. We believe “leadership” can mean many different things. Some students come to the program with experience in formal leadership roles, like student government or captaining a team. Others come simply with a curiosity about the topic and about themselves. All of our students have leadership potential—whether they lead with a strong voice at the front of the group, or influence the group in subtler, more quiet ways.

What will I learn about wilderness backpacking and camping?

A lot! Whether or not you have spent time in the outdoors before, we will teach and review a variety of skills associated with traveling and camping both lightly and in good style. We support Leave No Trace camping ethics, and will teach you how to travel through the backcountry leaving only footprints. You will learn how to cook using a backcountry stove, set up shelters, stay warm when it's cold or raining, navigate on- and off-trail using a topographical map, and (with luck) will have the opportunity to climb at least one peak.

What do past parents & participants have to say about The Leading Edge?

“Mark’s experience at the Leading Edge *more* than exceeded our expectations, and his too. He truly learned so much about himself and his leadership style, and has already used what he learned. As a leadership trainer in major corporations, I was thrilled to hear about the activities. He has skills that he will take with him for life.” – Sarah, Leading Edge parent

“We so appreciate that your program uniquely equips and encourages its students to be proactive and effective leaders in any context.” – Michele & Chip, Leading Edge parents

“This program is life-changing. It is an incredible vehicle as a window into who you are. I consider myself incredibly lucky to be a part of this experience.” – Leading Edge participant

“Not to sound corny, but I routinely recognize how much the Leading Edge program has helped me. From teamwork, to communication, to [feedback], I use the things I learned in this program frequently.” – Thalia, Leading Edge participant, senior class president and two-sport team captain.

“I felt the leadership learned out there was very useful—no one told you, you discovered it yourself.” – Leading Edge participant

“Leadership is not black and white. There is a lot of grey in between. I have learned to incorporate all of the colors into my leadership practices.” – Kevin, Leading Edge participant



THE LEADING EDGE – SAMPLE ITINERARY

Day 1: Once everybody arrives in Denver, CO we'll make the two-hour trip together to the High Mountain Institute's campus in Leadville, CO. Once on campus, we'll settle into the cabins where we'll be staying for the next three nights and start getting to know each other.

Day 2 & 3: For the next two days we'll participate in a two-day classroom-based leadership workshop led by faculty members experienced in teaching leadership skills. We'll learn more about ourselves and start to explore what leadership means to us. In between these classes, we'll get ready for our upcoming trek through the Colorado backcountry.

Day 4 - 14: We'll start our 11-day backpacking expedition through the heart of the Rockies by hiking along the Colorado Trail as we get used to the altitude and our packs. Each morning, the group will select two students to serve as the Leaders-of-the-Day. They'll get the opportunity to practice their leadership skills while guiding their hiking groups over rocky passes and under towering peaks. In the afternoons, after setting up camp in the shadow of Colorado's magnificent "Fourteeners," we'll meet as a group for a game, a class about leadership, or a discussion about the day before cooking a delicious dinner on our backcountry stoves.

Along the way, we'll attempt to summit one of Colorado's famous high peaks. Our views from the summit will extend from Pike's Peak to the rugged San Juan Mountains southwest of Aspen.

As we become more comfortable in the backcountry, we'll travel on more challenging terrain, often navigating and hiking an entire day off-trail. We will begin to focus on the different ways to manage and lead a group. Leaders-of-the-day will ask themselves: Does the group need me to take charge or do I need to step back in order to give the group more ownership?

At the end of our trek, we'll return to the High Mountain Institute's campus, our minds full with memories of the beautiful views, two weeks of laughter, and our growth as leaders.

Day 15: Our final day will be spent on campus. We'll put together all that we have learned about leadership and start to think ahead toward our future leadership roles.

Day 16: Depart from Denver, empowered and ready to lead.

Leading Edge I only: This course will take place in the canyons of Utah. Instead of climbing up and over mountain passes, we'll be hiking in a landscape sculpted by dramatic, colorful sandstone canyons where you can see evidence of ancient civilizations. We'll also get to experience more technical backpacking. In addition, this course will include two days of rock climbing.

Leading Edge II only: This course is slightly longer than other Leading Edge courses. Extra days in the backcountry allow us time to work at mastering our newfound leadership skills. Halfway through the backcountry hike, we'll pause to rock climb for an additional two days with the help of a rock-climbing instructor who will hike in to meet us. We'll learn about top-rope climbing and gain confidence as we attempt increasingly challenging climbs.