



## NOLS ALUMNI TRIP FROM THE MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA- HIKING SCOTLAND'S SPEYSIDE WAY MAY 14-21, 2017

### Features of This Trip

- 8 nights in the “field” at small hotels and country inns
- Eating and sleeping indoors allows us to carry only daypacks
- 5 long distance hiking days, 2 with significant elevation gain/loss, 1 layover day with a visit to a whisky distillery and optional day hike
- One night (paired lodging) on each end of the trip in at the Cairngorm Hotel in Aviemore
- Approx. 61 mile, trailed route, starting in the heart of the Scottish Highlands and following the Spey River to the North Sea
- Group size: up to 10 participants and two instructors

**Cost:** \$2,200

**Minimum Age:** 18

### Trip Description:

The trip begins in the town of Aviemore, in Cairngorms National Park, home to some of Scotland’s most rugged mountains. The first day of the trip will be a day hike or “hill walk” into the Cairngorms. Depending on conditions at the time we may hike up a Corbett (Scottish mountain higher than 2500 feet, but less than 3000 feet); or we may get a chance to “bag a Munro” (Scottish mountain higher than 3000 feet).

The rest of the trip is walking the Speyside Way, a long-distance trail from Aviemore to the sea. We will hike along open pastures, moors, abandoned railroad track, and through forests, to finish along the beach by the North Sea. The first day will be a hike up to 2500-3000 feet. The rest of the hikes will be at elevations of 0-850 feet. There is the possibility for optional pre-trip day hikes and other activities in and around Aviemore for early arrivals, as well as a chance for cultural immersion in small hamlets and villages that dot the route.

This is a “pilot” trip, meaning that although we’ve researched the routes and scouted some elements of the adventure, many specific details will be figured out on the go. This means an extra dose of “Expedition Behavior,” flexibility, and humor will come in handy as our group navigates new paths, lodging and logistics.

Join a small group of NOLS grads, friends, families, and instructors for eight days of exploration and camaraderie in the Scottish Highlands as we hike from the foothills of the Cairngorm Mountains to the coast along the North Sea. This trip will reacquaint you with NOLS backpacking techniques in a convivial, relaxing and visually stunning location. Instruction is geared to your interests, with potential to walk up peaks, visit a distillery, time for journal writing and photography, and more. **Of course, non- alumni friends and family are also invited— this is a great way to introduce NOLS to your sidekicks.**

The route offers a robust level of hiking; and between the potential for weather and the needs of the group, you can expect long days on the trail. The average hiking day is 10+ miles, along a mostly well-groomed trail. For those that want even more, there will be options to do additional day hiking with an instructor. Along the way we will pass working farmland, forests, and small towns that will give us a window into

Scottish country life. Each night at the hotel or inn we will sample Scottish cuisine (more than just haggis!), perhaps sample a wee dram of local whisky, and if we're lucky, we'll get to hear some traditional music. Sleeping and dining (dinner and breakfasts) in comfortable hotels and inns allows us to considerably lighten our packs for our daily hikes along the river, varied mountains, hills, and forests, until we reach the ocean.

The trip spends 8-nights in the "field" at hotels and inns and 6 days hiking. Unlike a standard NOLS expedition, we won't carry cook gear, heavy rations—and of course no tents, sleeping bags or pads. But make no mistake; we'll do "real" trail hiking over varied terrain with our lightened backpacks.

### **The Environment:**

The Scottish Highlands are beautiful. The variation in the terrain is matched only by the variation of the weather, for indeed, such beauty is not formed without weather. There will be wind. There will be rain. There will also be sun. "Four seasons in a day" is a good rule of thumb. And it may be helpful to remember the British explorer Sir Ranulph Fiennes's words, "There's no such thing as bad weather, just inappropriate clothing." Average May highs are in the upper 50s with lows in the high 30s.

The majority of our trek follows well-signed and maintained trails, though there are sections that are less impressive in both aspects. Some of the trail has been converted from disused railway lines, and other bits are single track through field and forest—they can get muddy when it rains. While the walk is, broadly speaking, quite flat, there will be some amount of elevation change every day. And there will be a significant climb and descent on the first day's hill walk.

Scotland is renowned for its summer insect life. Typically, biting midges appear in early June. They are annoying and nearly invisible. A midge-proof headnet and repellants are light and often effective tools if the midge season comes early.

### **The Lodging:**

We'll be staying in small hotels, inns, and B&B's whose accommodations are "typically Scottish;" comfortable, but not overly fancy. Wifi is often available, but the speed and quality cannot be promised. The same can be said for cell service. We anticipate paired, single-gender rooms, so let us know if you're pals or a couple with someone else on the trip. We're using remote, rural lodging that is comfortable, but not infinitely flexible. Accordingly, and similar to NOLS expedition tentgroup systems, we'll pair you up in single gender rooms. Some properties may have a single room available for an extra charge; however, we will not generally know the options until our arrival. Your flexibility with this system is appreciated. Past participants on similar trips have appreciated switching from trail gear to comfortable evening clothes.

Well-made breakfasts are part of the lodging package. Some lodging will provide group dinners, or we may venture out as a group with NOLS supplying the meal.

### **Curriculum:**

This trip focuses on many traditional NOLS activities, including map reading, hiking, and group travel. The instructors will present information needed for group travel and can present optional topics desired by the participants—including natural history, NOLS' leadership topics, and relevant local human history. Formal "classes" are few and mostly optional. Anticipate a required base level of group management and cohesion—this is still an expedition.

This trip is traversing a well-known and well-traveled route that NOLS has not yet completed. **Practically, this means that the trails, terrain, lodging and logistics may take an extra measure of tolerance, persistence, and "Expedition Behavior."** Anticipate working flexibly as a team to overcome challenges.

Alumni trips, though more relaxed than a typical NOLS course, are not full-on vacations or guided trips. They are self-reliant trips through remote areas where evacuation to modern medical facilities can take several days. Throughout the trip, you will travel outdoors and care for yourself and fellow members of the expedition.

All participants will complete and submit application materials, including a medical history form/exam either reviewed by a medical professional or self-reported. These forms highlight the intersection of your trip's anticipated physical rigor and your current health and fitness status. Your forthright and timely completion and submission of the forms sets you and your trip up for success in the outdoors.

### **Trip Logistics:**

The trip begins and ends in the highland town of Aviemore. Participants should plan on flying in and out of either Edinburgh (airport code EDI), Glasgow (GLA), or Inverness (INV) and then taking the train from there to Aviemore. The train trip is about three hours from both Edinburgh or Glasgow, Scotland's two largest cities and airports. From Inverness the train is only about 45 minutes, the airport is however much smaller, with fewer connections to European hubs that connect to North American cities. Consider staying extra days on either end of the trip to explore Aviemore, Edinburgh, Inverness, or the rest of Scotland!

NOLS has secured lodging for our group (we'll pair couples and pals, and others will be paired in single-gender rooms) at the Cairngorm Hotel in Aviemore on the nights of May 14 and 21. The hotel is located directly across the street from the train station. After a hike up high into the hills on the first day we will then walk from Aviemore north to the sea, staying in inns and guest houses in small towns and rural hamlets, before finally taking a bus and train back to Aviemore.

We will store non-field luggage at the Cairngorm Hotel. The storage is reasonably secure, but highly expensive items (e.g. computers or other electronics) should not be left in your in-town bags. NOLS assumes no responsibility for your stored baggage. Akin to a NOLS wilderness expedition, everyone will carry clothing, toiletries, water, and group lunch items in their packs. There is no luggage or other shuttle between our nightly lodgings.

The lodging includes breakfast. Anticipate trail snacks during the day. NOLS-provided dinners will be part of the hotel stay, or we'll step out as a group to local restaurants. The Spey River flows through world-famous whisky country and a large selection will be available at nearly all of our accommodations. NOLS does not pay for alcohol, so participants should plan to pay for that themselves.

### Location of Aviemore in Scotland:



### Currency:

You'll need cash in the form of pounds sterling for miscellaneous purchases (souvenirs, postcards, bar tabs etc.) throughout the trip. Money change kiosks are handy in most airports, and ATMs (cash points) are everywhere in Edinburgh and Glasgow; there are also several in Aviemore. US credit cards work in most locations, including train stations, but it's a good idea to give your credit card company a heads up that you're traveling internationally. About 100 pounds will be plenty of cash for the field portion of the trip for incidental purchases. It is difficult to predict if our rural lodging will consistently take credit cards.

### Air & Train Travel:

The trip starts and ends in Aviemore (pop ~2,500), an outdoor tourist center in the central highlands. Many flights from the U.S. leave in the early evening and arrive early morning **the next day** in Europe. There are some direct flights to Glasgow and Edinburgh from U.S. points of departure. The most common connecting European hub is London.

Train is the best way to get from Edinburgh or Glasgow to Aviemore. Both cities have good connections from the airport to the central train stations. And both central stations offer several direct trains per day to Aviemore, and several further options with one change. For train tickets, timetables, and other information please see: [scotrail.co.uk](http://scotrail.co.uk).

We recommend looking at train timetables before departure to plan your travels, but not buying your ticket until you arrive at the station in Edinburgh or Glasgow. While the train tickets are flexible and allow for travel on any train between those two stations on the date of travel, should you be delayed beyond the date on your ticket, the process for changing and refunding tickets is much more complicated than just buying your ticket at the station when you are ready to board your train.

For those arriving in Edinburgh and continuing directly to Aviemore, the best option is to take a tram (<http://edinburghtrams.com>) from the airport to the St. Andrew Square (for Waverley) stop. Waverley Station is the central train station in Edinburgh. From there, purchase your ticket and make your way to Aviemore. Train platforms are often not posted until a few minutes ahead of their departure, so pay attention to the board, and don't be shy about asking for help.

For those arriving in Glasgow and making their way directly to Aviemore, it is best to take the First 500 shuttle direct to the city center, which will deposit you a short walk from the train station. (<https://www.firstgroup.com/greater-glasgow/routes-and-maps/glasgow-airport-shuttle-service-500>) For those arriving in Inverness, you have the option of taking the train or a bus. The easiest way to get from the airport to both the bus and train stations (which are more or less next to each other) is a taxi. At either station you can buy a ticket for the next transport to Aviemore. For bus schedules see: <http://www.travelinescotland.com>

Depending on where you first touch down in Europe, you may either clear customs in that city or in your final destination. U.S. citizens do not need a visa to vacation in the U.K., but immigration/passport control will stamp your passport.

### **Accommodations:**

The trip tuition includes lodging at the Cairngorm Hotel (directly opposite the train station in Aviemore) for the nights of May 14 and 21. If you come early or wish to stay longer, NOLS recommends the Cairngorm Hotel. Aviemore offers numerous accommodation options.

From Aviemore we will walk to the sea, staying in inns and guesthouses in small towns and rural hamlets. At some of these accommodations we will be the only guests, and other times we will be meet tourists from around the U.K., Europe, and the world. Traditional Scottish music will hopefully be an evening staple. Aviemore hotel info: <http://www.cairngorm.com>

### **Suggested Readings:**

*Macbeth* - William Shakespeare  
*The Highland Clans* - Alistair Moffat  
*The Faded Map* - Alistair Moffat  
*The Outlander* series - Diana Gabaldon  
*A History of Scotland* - Neil Oliver  
*Spectacular Scotland* - James Gracie  
*The Munros* - Cameron McNeish

## Itinerary 2017:

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|---------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>May 12</b> | Depending on connections and possible pre-trip plans, many participants will depart the US on this day.                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>May 13</b> | We urge you to arrive in Scotland, if not Aviemore on this day, allowing for jet lag recovery, or any baggage snafus or travel delays.                                                                                                | Lodging: on your own, but if in Aviemore, we suggest the Cairngorm Hotel.                                                                  |
| <b>May 14</b> | For those in Aviemore, we'll loosely organize some optional activities from our hotel—walks or hikes, possibly a steam engine train ride. Our <b>pre-trip group orientation occurs at 6 p.m.</b> in Cairngorm Hotel lounge or nearby. | Lodging provided by NOLS at the Cairngorm Hotel (we'll double up same gender pairs – let us know if you're a couple!). Dinner on your own. |
| <b>May 15</b> | Day hike "hill walk" in Cairngorms NP. 5-8 miles; ~1500 elevation ascent/descent.                                                                                                                                                     | Lodging: Cairngorm Hotel. Paired lodging and dinner provided by NOLS.                                                                      |
| <b>May 16</b> | Pack up. Store in-town luggage. Bus to Boat of Garten. Hike ~11 miles to Grantown on Spey.                                                                                                                                            | Lodging: Garth Hotel                                                                                                                       |
| <b>May 17</b> | Hike ~13 miles to Ballindalloch.                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Lodging: Delnashaugh Hotel                                                                                                                 |
| <b>May 18</b> | Layover day in Ballindalloch. Visit Ballindalloch Distillery; optional day hike.                                                                                                                                                      | Lodging: Delnashaugh Hotel                                                                                                                 |
| <b>May 19</b> | Hike ~10 miles to Aberlour.                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Lodging: Aberlour Hotel                                                                                                                    |
| <b>May 20</b> | Bus to Fochabers. Hike ~10.5 miles to Buckie.                                                                                                                                                                                         | Lodging: Highlander Hotel                                                                                                                  |
| <b>May 21</b> | Take a bus to Elgin, train to Inverness, train to Aviemore. Depending on group interest, timing, and weather, we may stop for an exploratory walk around Inverness.                                                                   | Lodging provided by NOLS at the Cairngorm Hotel. Dinner together as a group.                                                               |
| <b>May 22</b> | Depart Aviemore.                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Breakfast at hotel included                                                                                                                |

### Contact Information:

The NOLS alumni office is located at the NOLS Headquarters in Lander, Wyoming. We can be reached at (800) 332-4280. Email is also an option: [alumni@nols.edu](mailto:alumni@nols.edu). If you have any **problems on arrival** day, please leave a message for us at 800-332-4280.

### Registration and Payment:

To reserve a space on this trip, please submit a non-refundable deposit of \$200 per person to the NOLS Alumni Department. Mastercard or Visa works via phone (800.332.4280), or mail a check to: NOLS Alumni Department, 284 Lincoln St. Lander, WY 82520. The remainder of the tuition and all application forms are **due by March 15, 2017**.

## Equipment:

Clothing-wise you'll need: up top, a base layer (could be a t-shirt, could be long sleeves), two or three insulating layers, plus a rain-proof layer. On the bottom, you need hiking pants or shorts, an insulating layer if you get cold, and rain pants. All clothes must fit comfortably over each other so they can be worn at the same time. Footwear should be sturdy hiking shoes or boots. Plan on at least two pairs of socks. Gaiters will be nice when we encounter muddy sections of trail. You'll need a backpack to carry it all, plus a football-sized amount of group food. If you tend to get cold easily, add a fleece vest, or second puffy jacket; and maybe an insulating layer for your legs (long johns, fleece pants) that will fit under your rain pants. Past participants on alumni trips have appreciated having a dry set of clothes to wear in the evening. Call (800.332.4280) with questions!

## Equipment List

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| <b>NOLS provides:</b>              | Maps, First Aid Kits, Emergency Communications, Water Treatment, Emergency Shelter, Trail Food, hand sanitizer                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Bring these items with you:</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 1 set of light or medium synthetic long underwear (especially if you tend to get cold)</li><li>• comfortable medium or lightweight hiking boots (contact us for additional boot fitting information)</li><li>• hiking socks (2-4 pair)</li><li>• water bottle (wide mouth quart or liter size plastic)</li><li>• flashlight/headlamp and batteries</li><li>• sunglasses</li><li>• medium-sized backpack- large enough to fit your personal equipment and lunch.</li><li>• <b>contractor (heavy mil) trash bag to waterproof items inside your pack</b></li><li>• underwear (1-2 pairs)</li><li>• sneakers or similar non-hiking shoes to wear in hotels</li><li>• warm puffy or pile jacket</li><li>• toiletries- ear plugs suggested</li><li>• rain jacket &amp; pants</li><li>• mosquito head net (optional- finest gauge possible)</li><li>• gaiters<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• wool or fleece gloves</li></ul></li><li>• hiking shorts/pants<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• hiking shirt (long sleeve or t-shirt)</li></ul></li><li>• sun hat/ball cap<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• warm hat</li></ul></li><li>• sunscreen/lip balm/insect repellent</li><li>• lightweight change of clothes to wear in town/hotels/to dinner in the evening. These do not have to be fancy. A change of dry, public-presentable clothes to wear at the end of the hiking day is wonderful.</li></ul> |
| <b>Nice touches:</b>               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• camera with waterproof bag</li><li>• extra pair of prescription glasses or contact lenses</li><li>• personal reading book or journal</li><li>• hiking poles (collapsible) - takes hiking stress off the knees</li><li>• casual shirt/slacks – lightweight options for dinner/lounging at the hotel.</li><li>• Pack cover, additional smaller plastic bags or dry bags — all for waterproofing your pack &amp; contents.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <b>Notes:</b>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Some US cell phones work in Europe. Check with your carrier for details.</li><li>• Depending on the exact items you bring, packs are likely to be in the 18-25 pound range. Plan a pack that is 3-4,000 cubic inches. Everyone helps carry lunch supplies.</li><li>• Boot fit is key. You can use fairly light boots because of the light packs and trail travel.</li></ul>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |