

# 2021 Wilderness Retreat

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## Introduction

The Wilderness Retreat is provided as a unique opportunity to grow deeper in relationship with Jesus Christ through the intentional practice of silence, solitude, simplicity, and participation in community. Our chosen means is to embark on a week-long trek into a wilderness setting using llamas as pack animals to assist in carrying our gear. We are very intentional to establish a daily rhythm that includes morning prayer together, work (e.g. washing dishes; filtering water; feeding, watering and caring for the llamas; setting up/breaking camp; other chores as needed), physical exercise as we hike, specified times for silence and/or solitude, meals together, and evening prayer. We chose to simplify our lifestyle by eliminating phones and other distractions, limiting our clothing and equipment to essential needs only, and eating a simple diet. Participation in community life through praying, working, sharing, and worshipping together helps us to better understand what it means to be active participants in the Body of Christ.

Our practice of these disciplines and experiences are guided and supported by engaging three books before and during our journey. *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a challenging classic on what it means to live in genuine Christian community. *The Way of the heart* by Henri Nouwen is a practical introduction to implementing these spiritual exercises into our daily lives in a way that will nurture our souls and spirits. *The way of the Pilgrim* is full of wisdom regarding the Christian journey and a life of prayer. As a participant in the Wilderness Retreat, you will be expected to read these books (which we provide for you) and to engage in our conversations as to their content and application.

Because we choose to travel in the wilderness with pack animals, exposed to whatever the prevailing weather may be, each and every trip develops along its own unique path. We must adapt our specific schedule, routes, campsites, and plans based on the conditions that we experience. In general terms, typical hiking days cover 3-5 miles and would seldom exceed 6-7 miles. We do have some layover days in which we stay in one campsite and do not do any extended hiking. In most cases, our weekly mileage is 20-24 miles for the week. The nature of this experience is such that each year we are given the opportunity to see God's care and provision for us as we trust and adjust throughout the journey. We invite and welcome you to join us as we walk with Jesus.

## Backpacks

BACKPACKS ARE AVAILABLE FOR USE IF YOU DO NOT HAVE ONE. DO NOT LET THE COST OF BUYING A PACK DETER YOU FROM THIS RETREAT. PLEASE LET STAFF KNOW OF YOUR NEED AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE AND ONE WILL BE LOANED TO YOU.

### SIZING:

There are typically several factors that should be considered when choosing a backpack. Capacity (how much can a pack contain) and size (how the pack is sized to fit different body types) are two of the most essential with style and individual features as secondary considerations.

Packing with llamas is different than other backpacking trips as the llamas are able to carry much of our gear – tents, cooking equipment, stove, fuel, etc. -- and therefore one does not need the large capacity pack that would otherwise be needed for a 5-6 day wilderness trip. A mid-size pack of 50-60 liter capacity is probably more than adequate for most people. The pack should have a means of attaching/storing your sleeping bag and pad as you will likely carry these.

Backpacks come in two basic styles. External frame packs are essentially a cloth pack that attaches to a frame and internal frame packs have the frame built into the cloth pack. Each has different pros and cons but either style is very appropriate for this trip.

One of the most important considerations is the size of the pack. Torso length, not overall height is the measurement that is most critical to good fit. Torso length can be measured with the help of a friend. Place your hands on your hips so that they rest on the large hip bones (iliac crests) at your sides. Have a friend measure from the prominent vertebrae at the base of your neck/upper back down to the line formed by your hands. This is your torso length. As a general rule sizing based on torso length can be as follows:

Pack Size	Torso Length
Extra small	Up to 15½"
Small	16" to 17½"
Medium/Regular	18" to 19½"
Large/Tall	20"+

There are also significant differences between men’s and women’s packs and it is probably worthwhile for women to look for a gender-specific pack. Most packs have multiple adjustment points and instructions will be given during orientation to help you adjust your pack to fit you best. These adjustments are essential to being as comfortable as possible during the week.

#### PACKING:

How you put things into your pack can make a significant difference in your comfort and stability on the trail. In general, for on-trail hiking (most of what we do) placing heavier items higher in the pack and close to your body will help to keep the weight distributed on your hips. (80% of the pack weight should rest on your hips.) For off-trail hiking, keeping heavier items lower in the pack but still close to your body will lower your center of gravity and help you to be more stable. Heavy item placed away from your body will tend to make the pack lean away from your body and increase the weight born by your shoulders and back muscles.

A very helpful way to pack items into your pack is to use ziplock (gallon size freezer) bags for groups of items. i.e. Put underwear in one bag, socks in another, shirts in another, and toiletries in another. The ziplocks can be compressed down to save room and will keep things dry in the event of rain or a fall into a stream. It is also easier to quickly find an item that you need using this method. Rolling clothes is more efficient use of space in your pack than folding.

## **Sleeping Bags and Pads**

SLEEPING BAGS AND PADS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FOR YOUR USE IF YOU DO NOT HAVE AN APPROPRIATE ONE FOR YOUR USE. JUST LET STAFF KNOW IN ADVANCE SO THAT WE CAN HAVE ONE AVAILABLE FOR YOU.

Some helpful tips regarding sleeping bags:

Weather conditions can vary from 25 deg to 85 deg and may include rain, sleet, snow. Sleeping bags should probably be in the 20-30 deg range for your comfort though each individual is different in their needs.

Bags should be able to be compressed down to roughly 10"x12" or smaller. Bags that cannot be compressed down are often difficult to carry in or on your pack.

Synthetic materials retain their ability to maintain warmth even when wet. Down-filled bags are useless when wet. That said, down is very lightweight, compressible and warm, if dry.

Compression sacks are stuff sacks with straps that can cinched down to decrease the size of your bag. They are inexpensive and can help to decrease the amount of room that your sleeping bag takes up in your pack. Several of these are available to borrow if you have need and make that need known. They are also inexpensive if you want to pick up one of your own.

A sleeping pad will help keep you warm, dry, and protected from rocks, bumpy ground, and tree roots. It can be as simple as a yoga mat or other rubber pad. These are inexpensive and fail-proof. Self-inflating pads such as the Therma-rest brand can be very comfortable but can also have holes poked in them and fail leaving one with minimal padding. Inflatable pads or air mattresses that you blow up tend to be heavy and of no benefit if they develop a hole. Regardless of what kind of pad it is, you are required to have one.

A simple pillow can be made by bringing an empty pillowcase and stuffing it with your fleece jacket and clothes that you plan to wear on the next day. Doing this gives you a pillow for your head, keeps your clothes handy and in one place, and your clothes will be warm in the morning when you get dressed!

## **Footwear**

Much of the terrain that we will encounter is rough and rocky or wet and muddy. We have to cross wet, boggy areas, streams, and patches of snow. Sturdy, waterproof boots that are at least  $\frac{3}{4}$  height are recommended. It is very possible that we will get wet feet while hiking and therefore it is a good idea to carry an extra pair of socks or two.

An extra pair of shoes is important for several reasons: a) you may want a change of shoes to wear in camp simply to give your feet a break; b) you may need a change of shoes to give your boots a chance to dry out; c) you may want to get in the river or lake and need a pair that can get wet while still protecting your feet from the sharp rocks; and d) you may develop a problem with your boots and need back-up

shoes for hiking. Choose your second pair of shoes with these potential conditions in mind. i.e. flip flops may be great in camp but not be the best choice as your back-up pair of shoes.

## **Clothing**

The most important principle for selecting clothing is to choose synthetic materials to the greatest extent possible – polypropylene, nylon, acrylic, etc. Socks, underwear, shirts, and pants should be of a quick-drying nature. Jeans take a very long time to dry and, in the event of several rainy days, may not dry out. Likewise, cotton underwear and socks do not dry well leaving one uncomfortable, cold, and at an increased risk of blisters and skin irritation. The second important principle is to choose clothes that you can layer. A T-shirt, long-sleeve shirt, fleece jacket, and rain jacket can be layered to adjust to a wide range of changing temperatures more effectively than a T-shirt and heavy coat can.

Previous participants have found that pants with legs that zip off are very useful for a variety of weather conditions.

For this trip, it is possible to get by with two shirts, one pair of pants, underwear amounts of personal choice and a clean pair of socks for each day with one or two additional pair. A heavy fleece sweatshirt/jacket and a rain jacket poncho round out the essential list. A stocking cap and gloves are recommended as it can be quite cold at times and sleeping with a hat on can do a lot to keep you warmer. Personal preference dictates what you actually bring, but in most cases, people tend to pack more than they need, not less.

## **Phones & Electronic Devices**

The development of relationships among team members is a significant dimension of the Wilderness Retreat. We will participate in team-building activities during orientation and, throughout our journey we will make intentional choices to foster relationships while eliminating those things which distract from them. We also believe that it is extremely worthwhile and necessary to unplug from our normal activities and engagements in our pursuit of a deeper relationship with Jesus. Therefore, team members will be asked to check-in their phones at the beginning of our adventure. These will be returned upon our arrival home. Exceptions and access for travel arrangements will be granted on an as-needed basis. Emergency contact information will be provided for parents and family should a participant need to be reached during the trip. If you plan to take photos during the trip, please plan to use a camera other than your phone. This practice can be a challenging adjustment but has been shown to reap multiple rewards for individuals and the entire team. Many thanks in advance for your willingness to comply with this practice.

## Packing List --Individual Gear

**Before you read this section, be sure that you have thoroughly read the previous four pages.**

The following items are **REQUIRED** for participation in the Wilderness Retreat. This means that it is **MANDATORY** that you bring each and every one of these items. These are not suggestions, they are **requisite** for your participation on this trip. In other words, these items are **essential**; you are **obligated** to bring them; it is **compulsory** to comply; **confirmation** is the **expectation**. **NO exceptions and NO substitutions that are not approved by staff. YOU MUST INCLUDE EACH OF THESE ITEMS IN YOUR GEAR!** Please ask for clarification if needed.

### **REQUIRED**

Sleeping bag

Pad

Back pack

Rain coat or poncho

Fleece jacket or fleece sweatshirt

Boots

Hat (with a brim)

2 Large-mouth, 1 qt. water bottles

Bowl, cup, spoon

Sunscreen

Chapstick

Bug spray

Flashlight

Journal (This is provided for you at orientation)

4 Lg plastic trash bags

Toothbrush & toothpaste; personal medications, other essential hygiene needs

Clothing: 1 pair pants

    1 short sleeve shirt

    1 long sleeve shirt

    Underwear

    Socks

The following items are **RECOMMENDED**. Your comfort and enjoyment may be enhanced by including these items but individual preference is allowed:

Stocking cap/beanie

Sunglasses

Extra shirt

Long underwear (to sleep in and/or for colder temps)

Gloves

Extra pair of shoes

The following items are **OPTIONAL** and up to personal preference:

Camera/batteries (Please plan on using a camera that is separate from your phone)  
Bandana  
Bible (Small)  
Pocket knife  
Hiking poles  
Lightweight stool/chair  
Ear plugs  
Deodorant  
Comb  
Binoculars  
Towel-small  
Rain pants  
Mosquito headnet

***All other needed supplies and equipment are provided***, including an extensive first aid kit. You are encouraged not to bring additional items as we will have what you need. However, you may pack as you see fit and know that *if you bring it, you carry it*. The llamas carry our group gear and occasionally sleeping bags and pads but not extra items that you chose to bring along. Just saying..... You will also need to keep space in your pack for your lunch food and snacks which will be given to you at the beginning of the trip.

## **Outdoor Etiquette and Ethics**

*Then God looked over all he had made, and he saw that it was very good. Genesis 1:31*

*Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later. For all creation is waiting eagerly for that future day when God will reveal who his children really are. Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children to glorious freedom from death and decay. For we know that all creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. And we believers also groan, even though we have the Holy Spirit within us as a foretaste of future glory, for we long for our bodies to be released from sin and suffering. We, too, wait with eager hope for the day when God will give us our full rights as his adopted children, including the new bodies he has promised us. Rom. 8:18-23*

Sandwiched between the creation of our world and the final redemption of all of creation are our time and existence as human beings. As Christ-followers, the way that we think about the world around us and the way that we interact with it should be consistent with our understanding of God's redemptive activity. The Wilderness Retreat is an opportunity to engage thoughtfully our stewardship of the natural resources around us.

The Wilderness Retreat will be an opportunity to experience creation in some of our country's beautiful public lands including national forests, wilderness areas, and possibly other areas. We will engage in a "Leave no trace" approach to our hiking and camping adventure. In essence, this means that we will leave nothing but footprints as evidence that we have been travelers on the trail. We want to maintain the land as pristine and safe for the wildlife as possible; we want to allow other adventurers to experience the same beauty without the imposition of our trash; and we want to demonstrate our appreciation of the world that God created for our use and enjoyment.

Therefore, the following guidelines will be in place throughout our trip. Other instructions may be given as situations dictate.

1. Pack it in – Pack it out

All trash will be carried out. If you have food wrappers or other trash you will put it in a ziplock bag and carry it until we are back to an area with trash cans. No trash will be burned in campfires.

2. Stay on trail

When hiking, stay single-file on the existing trail so as not to widen worn areas or increase erosion problems. This will frequently mean hiking in mud, water or rutted areas when it would be easier to walk off to the side of the trail. If we encounter areas where we must go off trail, we will spread out over a wide area so as not to create new trails.

3. Toileting

All toileting will be a minimum of 200 feet from any water source. NEVER URINATE IN THE STREAMS, RIVERS, OR LAKES. For bowel movements, all waste and toilet paper will be buried in a hole 6-8" deep. This is sometimes a challenge in hard, rocky soil, but is essential for the health and safety of all who travel in the area and drink water from the lakes and streams. (Trowel and toilet paper are provided.) IF you choose not to comply with this approach, you have two options: a) use grass and leaves as opposed to toilet paper or b) carry the used paper out in one of your ziplock bags. Digging a hole doesn't sound so bad now, does it?

4. Campfires

We may or may not have campfires depending upon multiple factors at each location and at the discretion of trip leaders. Any fires will be under adult supervision and must be thoroughly extinguished before retiring for the evening or leaving them unattended for even a brief amount of time.

5. Respect Wildlife

Do not feed, chase, approach, or antagonize any form of wildlife. Observe quietly from a distance.



6. Camp in durable areas

We will try to camp in areas that have been used by previous campers so as not to disturb new areas. Additional measures will be taken with the llamas to minimize their impact on an area as well.

7. Leave areas as you found them

We may move an occasional log or rock to sit on, but will minimize our impact on the area leaving it as we found it.

8. Respect others

Respect the right that others have to enjoy the quiet and beauty of nature without the imposition of undue noise or inappropriate behavior. Remember that noise travels easily in the mountains and loud voices are not necessary.

## **Weather and Environmental Considerations**

We will be hiking in the mountains at most or all elevations above 10,000 ft. At those elevations we may experience a variety of extreme weather conditions. Rain, sleet, snow, and temperatures ranging from possible lows in the upper 20's to highs in the 80's are not only possible, but likely. The sun can be quite intense leading to sunburn. Lightning can be a deadly threat during storms. It is essential that you pay attention and trust the experience of your leaders in preparation for and during this trip. Choosing clothes that will dry quickly and can be layered is very important in successfully dealing with the weather challenges and changes that we may meet. As mentioned previously, a sleeping bag that will keep you warm into the low 30's will make you more comfortable. If you are concerned that your bag may not be quite warm enough, a flannel sheet to line your bag will go a long way to help at a very low cost. A rain coat/poncho is required and rain pants are a good option to consider. Safe, relatively comfortable travel on this trip does not require spending a lot of money or packing lots of extra gear. It does require following the advice of your leaders, asking for help or suggestions if you have concerns, and adhering to the safety guidelines given throughout the trip.

## **Health Concerns**

This is a *wilderness* trip. We will be out of cell phone service and a number of miles from other people and sources of help in the case of emergencies. Therefore, good preparation is absolutely essential to safety and enjoyment of the trip for you and the group. This involves several steps.

1. Please be thorough and honest in completing the health form prior to the trip. We need to know of existing or potential health concerns that you may have.

2. Please speak with your family physician about the possibility of using the prescription medication Diamox (generic: acetazolamide) to prevent altitude sickness. We will be above 10,000 feet for the entire hiking trip with only one day to acclimate. Being fit does not prevent altitude sickness! Please do not think that you are immune to this just because you may be an athlete or in good fitness. If you begin to experience altitude sickness, the only option is to get to a lower altitude. This will mean hiking out and being driven down to a lower altitude ending your trip and placing the rest of the group at risk. It is a much better choice to prevent the possibility than deal with it if it occurs.
3. While you do not need to be an athlete to be successful and enjoy this trip, being physically prepared is very important. Walking, cycling, running and other physical exercise will help prepare your body for the trip. Walking with a weighted pack is even better as it will help your body adjust to the weight and you will have a chance to make adjustments before embarking on the trail. If you have questions on training for this trip, please ask and we can help guide you.
4. An extensive first aid kit is one of the things that we carry. We are prepared and will have the supplies to deal with most any emergency that we are could encounter. You do not need to pack your own first aid supplies though you may do as you wish. The one exception is epi-pens or other emergency medication that you may have for a specific allergy or health condition. You will need to bring these and to let us know where you are carrying them in case you need assistance.
5. We will be filtering all of the water that we need for drinking, cooking, and washing dishes. It is essential that we maintain cleanliness during this process and ask that you not share bottles or put anything except filtered water in your bottles. You will learn more about this during orientation or on the first day of the trip.

## **Physical Training**

Being prepared for this experience mentally, spiritually, and physically will reward you with an increased capacity to adapt more readily to the many challenges that you will encounter, to absorb more of what God is trying to show or teach you, and to enjoy the physical dimensions of the adventure. *If you are not working out at a fairly intense level on a regular basis, it is strongly recommended that you engage in some disciplined training in advance.* A very basic assessment of your level of preparedness is your ability to walk 3 miles in 45 min on a relatively level path without your backpack. Your ability to meet this level of fitness would indicate that you have some basic cardiovascular fitness. It is a basic goal that all participants should attempt to meet as our fitness levels impact the entire team and are not just an added individual challenge.

Walking on hills, stairs, or sandy roads is a good activity. Cycling and running are other options. Weight training for improving lower body and core strength can be very helpful. This might include exercises such as lunges, squats, step ups, and calf raises which can all be done at home without having to go to a gym. Adding weight to your backpack and wearing it as you walk or do some of the exercises will come close to replicating what you will be asking your body to do on the trip. You do not have to be an athlete to do well on this retreat but being prepared adds to your enjoyment and does go a long way for you and the group. No previous participant, athlete or not, ever said that they were physically over-prepared for this trip; most have acknowledged that they wish they had done more physical training!

## **Packing with Llamas**

Llamas are part of the camelid family which also includes camels, alpacas, guanacos, and vicunas. Llamas originated in the Andes in South America and were domesticated as pack animals, for their fiber, and for meat. There are essentially no llamas in the wild today. They are still essential to many people groups in Peru, Bolivia, Chile, and Ecuador for those same purposes.

Llamas make good pack animals for several reasons. They are very intelligent and easy to train. They have soft pads and two toes on each foot. This configuration is easy on trails and does not lead to erosion problems in the way horses and mules can impact the environment. They are browsers like deer and when pastured properly will not damage the plants and landscape. They are typically gentle, easy to manage, sure-footed, and able to carry a good amount of weight compared to their body weight.

While we are on the road, we will need to stop occasionally and allow the llamas to stretch their legs. This is a group effort that requires everyone to help unload/walk/load the llamas and refresh their water if needed. We will always care for and feed the llamas before we eat or address our own needs. This applies in camp each day as well.

While each person tends to find one or two llamas that they bond with more than the others, we will take turns leading the llamas as we hike. As we hike, we will encounter a variety of obstacles such as downed trees to jump over, creeks to cross, snowbanks to traverse, low hanging limbs to duck under, dogs, and other people walking, cycling, and on horseback. You will be given some instructions about each animal's tendencies in each situation. Some want to jump across creeks rather than step in. Some are more high-strung when encountering new experiences. Some are very willing but cautious and want to look obstacles over before stepping forward into it. It is important that you do your best to remember and understand your llama's tendencies so that you can lead them in a way that keeps you and your llama safe. We will try to practice some of these maneuvers during our orientation session or prior to the trip to aid you in being familiar with the basics before we hit the trail.

It is tempting to be lulled into looking at your surroundings or talking with friends and forget about your 4-legged friend who is following you. Please be very attentive to what is happening around you at all times and try to anticipate potential dangers or issues. If/when things get sketchy, please just stay calm and do your best to follow the instructions that you are given.

Never put your safety at risk in trying to control your llama. If they are nervous and going to jump or run, let them go. They are strong and outweigh you so do not risk injury. They really are gentle animals but, like you and I, do not always think clearly when they are nervous or upset. Also, llamas do not respond well to negative feedback or discipline. They do best when they are lead with confidence and patience. If you are scared, they know it. If you are calm and confident in your approach they will follow your lead and respond accordingly.

When we take a longer rest break or reach our campsite, we will go through a process that works best when we partner with one another. One person will hold two llamas while the other removes their backpack and sets it off to the side. Then trade roles until everyone has their own packs off and out of the way. You will then work together to remove the llamas' panniers (packs) and place them where instructed. The same process occurs with the saddles. You will be taught how to tether the llamas and be sure that they have grain and water. Then and only then, do we start eating lunch, setting up tents or whatever else is called for. It's a bit of a zoo the first day as we learn how to do this efficiently, but it quickly settles into a fairly smooth process.

Breaking camp in the mornings takes some coordination and patience, as well and is a time when each of us needs to be responsible to take care of our own needs and gear in a timely manner. First and foremost will be attention to our daily rhythm of prayer and worship. This should be the focus of your attention until we conclude or you are given other instructions. Packing up your sleeping bag and backpack, cleaning out and packing your tent, and helping to pack up cooking and other community gear needs to be an early task so that your guides can pack the panniers appropriately. You will be taught how to load the panniers on the llamas when they are ready. When everyone works together, this is a smooth and simple process.

There is a protocol for those times when we meet other backcountry users along the trail. When meeting horses, we need to step off the trail to the lower side if possible, hold the llama on a short lead (near the halter) and wait for the riders to pass by. If you are near the front of our group and don't think that riders have seen us, alert the riders to our presence by calling, "Llamas up." Horses are often very fearful of llamas and we don't want anyone to have an accident. Cyclists should dismount and allow us to pass by but this doesn't always happen. Typically, other hikers want to stop, ask questions, and pet the llamas. This is a great time to share what you have been learning with others! The llamas may or may not be nervous about dogs so you will just have to be very attentive and anticipate any potential problems. In all of these cases, you will have more control of your llama if you are holding the lead up near the halter.

Llamas are quite intelligent, have great vision and awareness of their surroundings, and are usually quite manageable. Sudden movements, loud noises, or other abrupt activities can spook a llama and create a difficult situation. Think about this when you need to take your coat on or off while hiking, when interacting with others, or doing anything else along the trail or in camp. Do speak quietly and in an encouraging manner to your llama, especially as they encounter a challenge or when they do as you ask them to do. Llamas are typically quite “head shy” meaning they don’t like to have their heads/ears touched. Petting their neck and speaking kindly is the best way to let them know of your appreciation.

The llamas make our job of carrying gear much easier as we trek up and down the trails. They are very aware of their surroundings with great vision and will notice animals and other activity that we might otherwise miss. They will alert us to the presence of other animals along the trail or in camp during the night. And they teach us lessons about life and leadership. They aren’t perfect and each llama has his own personality quirks and needs. Like us, they have good days and bad days. All in all, though, they add a depth and richness to this wilderness experience that most folks never get to experience. May you experience the llamas as do the natives of Peru who call the llamas their “Silent Brothers.”