2026 Hotspot Geology Course – Yellowstone National Park

June 13 – 25, 2026

What is the Athens Academy's Hotspot Geology Course– Yellowstone National Park?
The Hotspot Geology Course provides rising 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students an opportunity to explore America's volcanic center by traveling and hiking in the states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. The 13-day summer course is an intensive, yet fun-filled study of western geology, geomorphology, and ecology. Course topics include comparing various 'hotspots' around the world, investigating the role of the North American Hotspot in the formation of the Snake River Plain and Yellowstone National Park, local stratigraphy and structures in southwest Montana, and researching the effects of reintroducing the wolf into the Yellowstone ecosystem. The course is designed to be academically challenging and physically rigorous with numerous hikes around the Yellowstone area. Also, a ½-day tubing on the Madison River may be included. The course is taught at an upper school advanced level, and students will earn a semester's credit in upper school science.

What are the goals of the course?

1. Explore geology/nature through real-life science experiences, removed from the traditional classroom/textbook education.
2. Provide a youth trip full of memories to cherish for the rest of their lives.
3. Successfully complete a summer science experiential course that can be a defining asset to their high school transcript.
4. Gain knowledge of the workings of our planet to develop an awareness first, a love for our Earth second, and a desire to be its future stewards third.
5. Remove ourselves from technology to enjoy relationships and wilderness.

Who are the course instructors? Mr. Skip Trimpe is the Course Coordinator and Lead Instructor. Mr. Trimpe teaches at Athens Academy and has taught physical and earth sciences for 32 years. He earned his master's degree in Geology from Georgia State University. His thesis was on the mylonitic rock/structures that define the Chattahoochee fault in northern Georgia. He also taught an historical geology course at the University of North Georgia for 15 years. Mr. Trimpe has led many field geology courses while at The Westminster Schools (in Atlanta) and at Athens Academy. Other chaperones from the Athens Academy community will be hired in the fall.

Who may participate in the course? Any student in the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades in the fall of 2025 can enroll. **Current 11th graders have priority for student openings since this is their last year of eligibility.** The course will be limited to 20 students. **The Course Coordinator, in consultation with the Athens Academy administration, reserves the right to approve all applicants for acceptance.**

What will we study? We will study basic topics in geology, such as plate tectonics, rock types, faults, the geologic time scale, stratigraphy, geologic structures, and weathering/erosion. Specifically, we will explore hotspot behavior in oceans or on continents; past volcanic eruptions from the North American Hotspot and its effect on the surrounding western landscape; geology of geysers and hot springs; ecological succession; and how an apex predator, such as the wolf, affects an ecosystem. The topics will be studied through readings, field problems, discussions, presentations, and primarily through hands-on student exploration. Students will be evaluated through labs, field studies, journaling, quizzes, and a final exam.

What is the course schedule and itinerary? The first three days of the course will be spent in Georgia exploring the Appalachian Mountains and the granite region of northern Georgia (Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve); understanding deciduous forest ecosystems; and researching animals/plants living in the Yellowstone area. The bulk of the course will be in the western states of Idaho, Montana and Wyoming. We will fly to Boise, Idaho and begin exploring the geology of the Snake River Plain in Idaho. In Yellowstone National Park, we will discover the North American Hotspot's effect on geology and wildlife within the area. The final detailed itinerary will be given out later. **Hotspot Geology classes will meet Saturday, June 13th through Thursday, June 25th, 2026.**

What kinds of activities will we do? In the Hotspot Geology Course, students will research and deliver an oral report on an important species in Yellowstone, conduct field problems, map basic geology, hike and explore wilderness areas, create a naturalist journal, and conduct ecosystem studies to name a few of the activities. Students will need to be in great physical condition to hike long distances at relatively high elevations. We will cover an average distance of 6 miles a day with the longest hikes being 9 miles with steep elevation in Wyoming. We may also do some tubing down the Madison River in Montana. Students will need to manage their time well while learning/studying in vehicles during the day and completing work in the hotel rooms at night.

Do students earn course credit? Upon successful completion of the course work, students will earn 0.5 credits (equivalent to a full semester) in upper school science for taking the Hotspot Geology Course. The course will appear on their transcripts when applying to colleges. Students can show universities how they took the initiative to further their education in the summer and benefitted from an experiential science course. Please consult your advisor or Mr. Trimpe to be sure this is an appropriate course to take.

Is the course recommended for all students? The Hotspot Geology Course is offered to rising 10th, 11th, and 12th graders and is taught at an advanced level. **It is an academically challenging and physically demanding course!** Students that have a solid academic performance in honors and advanced courses, a good disciplinary record, and a great interest in outdoor learning through many hands-on activities are recommended to apply. The course is taught at a rigorous pace, and students are expected to use their time well in cars and hotels for completing work and studying. Overall, student selection for the course will be based on their academic/discipline record at Athens Academy, physical fitness level, and their interest in science. Remember, rising 12th graders who never took a Trimpe Trek course before have priority for student openings since this is their last year of eligibility. From there, it will go rising 11th graders and then to rising 10th graders who never took the course. If students have participated before and want to take Trimpe Trek again, they will be considered last in descending order of grade.

What is the tuition for the course? The tuition is $3300, which includes all expenses on the trip except souvenirs.

How can parents find more information about the Hotspot Geology Course? Besides the information on this handout, a **parents meeting will be held in the Bertelsmann Presentation Hall at 7pm on Wednesday, September 24th.** Parents may also call me at 706/254-3248 (cell) or email me at strimpe@athensacademy.org for more information.

When are applications and 1st payment due? Parents can register their child by filling out an online (formstack) application beginning at 3:00pm Thursday afternoon, September 25th until 3:00pm on Friday, September 26th. An electronic announcement on SpartanNet will be made on the group pages for the Classes of 2027, 2028 and 2029 with a link to the formstack**.** Accepted students will be notified by e-mail to parents and students, and the 1st payment of $1650 will be required at that time. If needed, a waiting list will be generated afterwards.