



ECO News

MARCH

2015

EDUCATING CHILDREN OUTDOORS

- Twinfield Union School
- Union Elementary
- Waitsfield Elementary
- East Montpelier Elementary
- Hyde Park Elementary
- Moretown Elementary
- Calais Elementary



4th grader burning a bowl into a birch log

“Can we do ECO in the summer even though we don’t have school?”
- Waitsfield Elementary Kindergarten Student

The Sacred Order

by Ken Benton

As a part of Vermont’s Framework of standards, 4th graders learn about Vermont’s cultural history. With the onset of winter, we decided it was the perfect time for students at Union Elementary School to explore the cultural practices of the Abenaki and some of the techniques they employed to survive in our Green Mountain State. We wanted to cover some of the most basic needs such as shelter, fire, water, and food. These four things combined make up what is known as the “Sacred Order.”

Of the four, shelter is the most important, especially in a cold VT winter! So this is what we started with. We began by breaking into groups to build a fairly simple, A-frame style survival shelter with sticks and snow. There was a freshly fallen hemlock limb that we were able to tear the branches from and use as insulation from the ground. These survival shelters were only large enough to fit one student. On another day, we built a wigwam style shelter with freshly cut saplings and a tarp. As with the survival shelters, we lined the floor with evergreen boughs (this time from abandoned Christmas trees) to insulate us from the snow. This shelter was able to accommodate up to 9 students!

For the other three elements of the sacred order we spent a day going through station rotations.

At one station we learned how to use a bow drill to produce a coal that could then be used to light a fire. The next station covered our need



4th Graders using team bow drill

for potable water by utilizing fire in the form of a burning ember to burn out a container in which we could boil and purify water. Food was the topic of our third and fourth stations. Like the Abenaki, we weaved duck decoys out of cattail that we could use to entice waterfowl within striking range. At our final station, we honed our skills with a throwing stick so that if our decoys worked, we would possess the accuracy to successfully harvest our food.

These are ancient skills that are no longer necessary in our everyday lives. However, we are inexplicably drawn to them, emboldened by the deep heartstrings they strike. To better understand and appreciate who we are, it is important to understand how we got here. Then maybe we can better choose where we are going. This is why we study history.

Fire Roasted Apple Recipe

by Liza Earle-Centers

This is my favorite food to cook during ECO outings and kids often want the recipe. Have your kid teach you how we make fires out at ECO and together get some good coals built up.

Ingredients/materials

- | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| apples | tin foil |
| ¼ cup sugar | tongs (or 2 sturdy sticks) |
| 1 Tbsp. cinnamon | |

Blend cinnamon and sugar. Quarter the apples. Remove the core and seeds. Sprinkle 1-3 pinches of sugar blend on each slice. Reassemble the apple (minus the core) and wrap tightly in tin foil (approx. 12” X 12” sq. for each apple). Set on top of coals of the fire, and turn every few minutes using tongs. Depending on how soft you want the apple, it will be ready in 7-12 minutes. Let cool slightly before eating.

Our Classroom

by Jennifer Barlow, ECO Parent



TUS student after fox pouncing face first into the snow!

I have two first graders, and have been a parent helper for the past two years during their ECO days. We have headed out in all kinds of weather to explore the natural world on the Twinfield campus. There is something incredibly beautiful and powerful about children being supported in their desire to learn about their world. Children start their lives so curious and passionate about learning and ex-

ploring and it is vital to continue to foster that curiosity through their formal schooling.

I believe the hours we spend turning over rocks in Nasmith Brook to look for stonefly larvae, or using natural materials to reinforce math concepts or the hikes that bring us face to face with our Vermont landscape, support their innate desire to learn and explore. We have

spent cold snowy mornings listening to stories around a campfire, sipping warm maple milk, developing a sense of strong community. We play games of learning and strategy, we sing songs that reinforce scientific principles. Through this program the children of Twinfield will continue to know that their learning is all around them - that the world truly is their classroom.

Teacher-led ECO Implementation @ Barnet School

By Angie Barger



Bird kill found by students at Barnet School

NBNC offered its second summer course to train teachers in the best practices and core routines of ECO over the summer of 2014. Seven of our participants came as a team from the Barnet Elementary School. Without a single site visit or consultation from ECO staff, the 5/6 team made up of teachers, Caroline Adams and Billy Jo Roberts, have singlehandedly established a successful weekly ECO program that imbeds science, literacy and social studies standards.

In early February, I visited their outdoor classroom to a blazing fire and students sitting contentedly using notebooks to write

about a crime scene they had just encountered. The crime scene involves a bird kill lying atop the fresh snow, covered with just a dusting of powder. Students were intrigued and involved, labeling themselves "Bird FBI" and noticing tracking trails leading to and from the food source, "A squirrel highway!"

Adams and Roberts shared their students' enthusiasm for the tracks and the bird kill they found that day. Their implementation of ECO leaves enough space in the day for exploring the incredible woodlands that surround their school.

Congratulations to these ECO Level 1 graduates and the Barnet School for successfully implementing ECO!

ECO Level 1 and Level 2 will be held during the summer of 2015 as week-long 3-credit graduate courses at North Branch Nature Center in Montpelier. We are currently accepting applicants. ECO Level 1 will be held July 13-17, 2015 and ECO Level 2 will be held July 27-31, 2015. Visit our website for more details.

"The rhythm of our experiences remind us that ECO is not in addition to what we do on a daily basis, it is a part of what we do. Our experiences have encouraged us as teachers about the importance of immersing our students in this type of learning." - ECO Level 1 participant and teacher at Barnet Elementary School

Summer Camp Registration is Open!

It may not look or feel like summer yet but it is never too early to start thinking about camp season here at the North Branch Nature Center. That's right, Summer camp registration is open! We are pleased to announce that in addition to our popular preschool and 1st through 4th grade camps, this year we will be offering several new travel camps for older students. Some of the new themes include an overnight base-camping excursion in Groton State Forest and a backpacking

trip along the Long Trail for middle schoolers. We are also planning our first ever fishing and river ecology camp for students in grades 5th through 8th.

For a complete listing of this summer's camp schedule, themes and information on how to register, please visit our website or call us to request a brochure. You can also call or e-mail us to find out about our camp scholarships program.

