

NERDS go winter camping



We had yet another exciting and fun filled week in NERDS. We started off the week volunteering at the hatchery. Then on Thursday the class made a trip to Algonquin Park with Ethan Hunter (of the Algonquins of Ontario) to do animal tracking. He took us on quite an adventure through the wilderness of the park ? among other things, explaining why beavers build dams where they do. On Friday, OPP Constable Ed White took us to Dog Bay Road off of North Baptiste Lake Road, and showed us how to build two types of shelters. We started by making a large pile of snow to create a Quincy shelter, which is a hollowed-out snow fort. We then constructed an A-frame shelter out of a large green-limbed tree about 20 feet long. We used smaller evergreen trees as side supports. The needled limbs create a barrier from the outside cold ? basically, a wall of insulation.

We built the shelter against a rock about three feet tall. A fire against the rock creates not only heat for the shelter but also a place to cook food or boil water. When the frame of the shelter was built, we covered the floor with bows of evergreen to create a layer of insulation from the ground.

Once the shelter was completed we set up green tree poles about 10 feet tall in the shape of a teepee. Halfway up the poles we placed a shelf containing a large bag of birch bark, which we then covered in more evergreen boughs. We lit a small wick of birch bark that hung below the shelf, and the large fire created by the bark lit the evergreen boughs. This sent out a tall plume of smoke ? a signal that could be seen from the air once it rose above the forest canopy. After the signal fire had finished, we hollowed out the Quincy shelter. The cavity inside was almost large enough to fit the entire class inside. It had a small shelf on the inside wall, to get high enough to avoid the frost that collects in the bottom of the shelter.

On Monday, the class travelled to Camp Can Aqua where we got a full tour of the sugar shack, including their vacuum collection system. They have over 3,000 trees; we tapped 50 of them. The NERDS class will return regularly to Camp Can Aqua to collect and measure the sap from these 50 trees we tapped ourselves. This is part of a large province-wide study on the impact of climate change on maple syrup production..

On Tuesday we returned to the hatchery. A group of students cleaned tanks and counted fish, while others went upstairs to tie flies in preparation for our trip to Rockingham.

On Wednesday we travelled to Lenna Minnie's lot to observe an elk herd. We spent the morning feeding elk as we learned about their behaviour and breeding habits.

On Thursday, the class travelled to the Highland Fish and Game Club to set up and clean duck boxes. We'd like to thank Freymond Lumber and Bancroft Home Hardware for providing us with the materials needed to create, maintain, and enhance our duck boxes. When we finished the duck boxes we were given the chance to do some ice fishing! We were very successful, and each student was allowed to keep two trout. We also tested two lakes for late winter oxygen, to determine if the levels were adequate for rainbow and speckled trout survival. Thankfully, we found that the levels were great.

We hope everyone enjoys their break and stays safe!

Submitted by Reilly Sheppard and John Thibadeau