

Weeks Forest Carriage Trail and Guilforts

BY TENZIN MATHES

Lately, in the field of education, there's been a movement for outdoor classrooms, mainly to teach younger kids in preschool or kindergarten about the woods and nature but also to introduce teamwork and perseverance to the kids. The idea behind the Guilford Forest Thursdays is to do that, but with older kids. The program's leader is Guilford's sixth grade teacher, Jennifer Kramer. She originally started bringing kids to the forest three years ago when she taught middle school, at first occasionally and later on a more regular basis. The middle schoolers eventually formed clans and built forts. They enjoyed it so much that it turned into a program for the sixth graders when the middle school moved from Guilford to BAMS.

Every Thursday of the school year, we, the Guilford 6th Grade, walk about a mile to the Red Brick schoolhouse on Carpenter Hill Road, where we have a short meeting. The meeting is usually about safety and the schedule for the day. Then we walk down the Weeks Forest carriage trail. Once we reach the old mineral spring dam we cross the river to Guilforts. There is a stretch of flattish land directly across the river. Behind that is a wall of steep hills, which lead to a meadow. Most forts are built on the flat stretch of land. The class is divided into 3 or 4 clans. The clans of 2016 were the Raccoon Clan, the Bobcat Clan, the Otter Clan, and the Gray Fox Clan.

The sixth grade goes all year round during all weather, unless it's hunting season,

or if the weather is dangerous. Guilforts is a place where sixth graders can build forts, make fires (fires are only allowed during winter and they cannot be made by anyone other than the sixth grade), cook food, and explore. Our personal favorite activities are freeroam time and firemaking. One of our favorite memories is going to the forest in winter, when the ground was one big sheet of ice. To cross the river we had to climb across logs, holding onto the root system of an uprooted tree. Once we got to the bank we formed a human ladder in order to scramble up the icy slope. We try to be as safe as possible and we also try to have a good balance between academics and freedom. For instance, we have free time but we also make maps and write survival journals. We have also done research on Weeks forest in the classroom and we incorporated math when we measured the distance from the school to Guilforts. Before we leave Guilforts we always do 'thanks and appreciations' around the campfire. Some examples of thanks and appreciations are thanking someone who helped you up the river bank or helped your clan gather bark for your fort. Thanks and appreciations is a closing ceremony and it's a time to calm down.

The sixth grade aren't the only ones using Guilforts though. Linda Lembke from the Guilford Conservation Commission came and talked to the sixth graders about making a trail in Weeks Forest, where Guilforts is located. The commission made a map of the trail, as well as brochures and informative signage. They have installed a map/

signboard outside the trail and made new parking. There was a grand opening for the trail July 2. You can find out more at the Guilford town website.

The Weeks Forest is a wonderful place where everybody can have fun. It has lots of old history to share with generations of sixth graders to come and the townspeople of Guilford.

The Chimney Doctor
Chimney & Stove Care

Whole System Service

- Cleaning
- Repair
- Installation
- Relining
- Year-round Service
- CSIA Certified

(802) 387-6037
Putney, VT
chimdoc@comcast.net
www.vtchimneydoctor.com

Eddie Charbonneau
PAINTING

Specializing in the Highest Quality
Interior & Exterior Residential Work Since 1992

802-254-4003
cell: 802-579-9432

**Schoolhouse No. 10
Bed & Breakfast in
Guilford, Vermont**

2 BR, 1BA, full kitchen,
living room, hot tub on
deck. Open April - Dec.

For reservations and information,
call 802-257-0003 or email susan.bonthron@gmail.com