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Pathways

notes from the field

SPRING/SUMMER 2014

“Although it might sound messy, Muddy Sneakers is really fun!” -Aniyah, Hall Fletcher Elementary



Getting children out of the classroom and into the woods to learn science is not always easy. With schools participating in at least six, full-day learning expeditions per school year, it is inevitable that there will be some logistical challenges and uncooperative weather. Regardless of the obstacles, I love working as a Muddy Sneakers naturalist! I love that we take kids to beautiful, protected areas and help them foster an appreciation for the outdoors.

Watching a child's face as we hear and see powerful waterfalls in DuPont is amazing, but so is watching a child jump up and down and shout in utter awe at the man-made waterfall at Lake Powhatan. "You will love the dam," he later writes. I love when the sun radiates its warmth on a cold expedition day, when a group sees a hawk eating a snake during a science lesson, and when a previously unenthusiastic student writes the very next week, "We do stuff that helps

us calm down like take quiet walks down the trail". I love at the end of a day when a fellow instructor describes his expedition as a "joyous day full of wondrousness!" Wondrousness? Yes, please! I love that more and more students are requesting "silent walks" in which we spread out and hike quietly through the woods, each of us having our own unique experience. What touches my heart the most are the incredible things our students have written when asked to reflect on their Muddy Sneakers learning expeditions:

"It is a fun school day in nature. We observe things we wouldn't see in the city. The trees are our walls, the path is our hall, the sky is our ceiling, and the open areas are our classrooms."

-Fiona, Hall Fletcher Elementary

"I love Muddy Sneakers because it is fun and you get to spend a lot of time outside and get exercise at the same time. You get to take a silent walk...so that you can get some fresh air, some quality time to see all the animals and hear all the different cool sounds."

-Chloe, Vance Elementary

"It is an outdoor adventure and a chance to explore the wild and also learn about more science. I think my favorite adventure was today - after learning about ecosystems, then we go and look for living creatures."

-Aydin, Vance Elementary

"I like Muddy Sneakers because of all the sights, sounds, and experiences. I love getting to see the river and the animals...its not everyday you get to go out like this. The fresh smell in the air and the trees arching overhead is very soothing."

-Jake, Vance Elementary

"I like how we spend the whole day outside exploring. It is a great learning experience and I wish I could do it in Middle School too. Thank you for an awesome experience in 5th grade!"

-Isla, Vance Elementary

The students' reflections are powerful and I am so grateful to the schools for their partnership and especially to the supporters of Muddy Sneakers who make these experiences possible. Please know that your contributions are having an incredible impact in providing students the opportunity to connect with nature and gain an appreciation for the sciences!

- Molly Dullanty, Muddy Sneakers Field Instructor



JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

Become A Community Sponsor

With ever-increasing school interest, Muddy Sneakers relies on the support of its Community Sponsors to grow this incredible program and **we need your help!** Sponsors' serve as the organization's annual members, a group of donors committed to ensuring their financial contributions directly translate into more children connecting with the natural world. Visit www.muddysneakers.org to learn how you too can join the movement!



Muddy Sneakers Class of 2014!

We wanted to take a moment to acknowledge our graduating Muddy Sneakers students! We wish you all the best in middle school and hope our time in the woods has left you all with an expanded sense of place, an increased appreciation for the natural world and an understanding that we are but one part of a system much larger than ourselves. We hope you will return to the woods soon, revisit the amazing places you have come to know and hold onto that sense of wonder for it will serve you well on the journey ahead.



Instructor Spotlight: Ben Nelson



What is your background?

I grew up in the mountains of southwestern Virginia, but spent many summers as a camper at Green River Preserve. I moved to western NC after graduating from Davidson College working first at Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy and then at Green River Preserve before becoming a Muddy Sneakers field instructor.

How long have you been a MS instructor?

I've been teaching with Muddy Sneakers since 2010.

Why do you like being a MS instructor?

I can't imagine another job where I would get to see kids grow in so many different directions in such a short time. I love guiding students to safe spaces just beyond their comfort zone, where their confidence in themselves, their empathy for each other, and their connection with the natural world can all expand.

What is one of your most memorable moments on a MS expedition?

During my first season with Muddy Sneakers, a student was resistant to the idea of being outdoors from the very beginning of the day. He was so concerned about what might be lurking in the unfamiliar environment that he wasn't even willing to pick up a stick! But some gentle encouragement, and the example of his peers joyfully building animal shelters in the woods, led him away from his fears and into the experience. By the end of the morning, he had not only built a shelter of his own, but had also gleefully crawled on the ground to spend a few minutes underneath it!

What is your favorite expedition site?

Wintergreen Falls - a beautiful cascade in DuPont State Recreational Forest.

What do you spend time doing when not teaching for MS?

I teach banjo and fiddle at Warren Wilson College and for the Junior Appalachian Musicians program, dance with the Green Grass Cloggers, and call square dances. I'm also a passionate (but decidedly amateur) plant ecologist and fly fisherman.

Director's Report

One month into summer and our staff is just now starting to dry out from one of the coldest and wettest spring semesters in memory. I applaud the instructors, students and teachers for working through the many weather related obstacles this season and can't help but think of Principal Grant of Hall Fletcher Elementary saying, "Of the seven key attributes to student success, 'grit' is arguably the most important!" Like our weather here in WNC, the evolving world of Muddy Sneakers remains dynamic - filled with challenges, surprises and new opportunities.

Looking forward, we remain focused

on developing a sustainable economic platform while continuing to grow to serve increasing school demand. With such aspirations, funding challenges are inevitable. It brings me great pleasure to recognize some key supporters that helped make the 2013-14 school year our largest programming season to date while equally supporting our efforts to implement a formula for growth. First, we would like to thank the NC and SC Duke Energy Foundations for each providing separate grants geared towards growth and strategic planning on both sides of the state line. Muddy Sneakers was also honored to receive its first-ever, multi-year gift from the Judith Haskell Brewer Fund dedicated in memory of a woman that cared about protecting significant natural places and who was deeply committed to youth education. Finally, in January, we were greeted with a surprise "give back grant" from Native Eyewear as the company capped off a six-month project focused on Brevard, NC, their selected Mountain Town of the Year. As part of this annual 'Locals Only' project, the sunglass company chose Muddy Sneakers as the Brevard non-profit that best aligned with their focus on outdoor recreation and



Muddy Sneakers now turns to the year ahead and sees tremendous opportunity as we expect a high degree of school continuity and staff retention. We also have recently received confirmation that both Saluda Elementary and Lake Lure Classical Academy will join our roster beginning fall 2014. On the development front, we believe community support, at all levels, is critical and remain committed to diversifying our business/corporate relationships. Soon we will be announcing a 'Business Sponsor' program with the goal of recognizing those for-profit and non-profit entities that believe in our work



and would like the opportunity to direct their support towards the school or district of their choice. We also see tremendous opportunity to expand our Community Sponsor network across the region and truly appreciate the word-of-mouth support. An enormous, heartfelt thank you to all existing Community Sponsors - it is because of your annual commitment that we are here and blessed with the opportunity to bring experiential education to children that may otherwise never be introduced to the wonders of nature.



Muddy Sneakers Receives Prestigious NC Conservation Award

On April 28, at the annual Land Trust Assembly gathering in Pine Knoll Shores, 24 NC land trusts presented Muddy Sneakers with the award for "Conservation Community Partner of the Year". The nomination stemmed from a 2013 grant awarded to Carolina Mountain Land Conservancy by the Conservation Trust of NC and Z. Smith Reynolds in support of our organizations' growing education partnership. The Community Partner award recognizes Muddy Sneakers' commitment to supporting conservation and the unique opportunity to introduce students to private land protection at a young age. Muddy Sneakers looks forward to expanding its work with the land trust community, a non-profit sector equally committed to investing in a future generation of conservation-minded citizens connected to the natural world.



North Carolina's
LAND TRUSTS
Saving the Places You Love

Muddy Sneakers Instructors Soon To Be Certified Environmental Educators



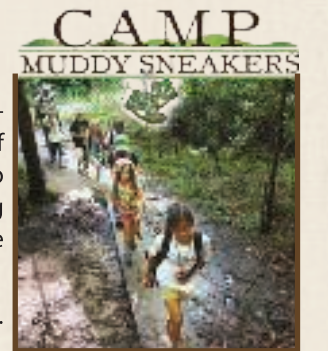
Educators in NC are privileged to have a very well respected Environmental Education Certification program managed by the Office of Environmental Education and Public Affairs. Established in 1993 to "increase environmental literacy and natural resources stewardship in North Carolina", the program has certified approximately 1,000 environmental educators to date. Muddy Sneakers recently decided to make certification a requirement of employment and currently all instructors, not already certified, have enrolled in the 200-hour program.

To learn more, visit: <http://www.eenorthcarolina.org/index.asp>.

An Adventure Awaits This Summer!

As the school season comes to a close, we are gearing up for another summer of Camp Muddy Sneakers! This year we have expanded our service area to include multiple weeks of programming in Transylvania, Henderson, Buncombe, and Polk Counties. Camp Muddy Sneakers is a co-ed, day camp for rising 4th - 7th grade students focused on inspiring curiosity, learning about the environment, connecting with nature and exploring the incredible forests of WNC. Week long summer sessions run June 9th - August 15th.

To register, please visit www.campmuddysneakers.org or call Camp Co-Director Lindsay Green: (828) 862-5560.



Muddy Sneakers Welcomes New Board Members

Muddy Sneakers is pleased to announce three recent additions to our excellent Board of Directors:

Gene Bell is the current CEO of the Housing Authority of the City of Asheville. In addition to a diverse professional resume, Gene brings extensive board experience including previously serving as the Chair of the Asheville City School Board for over seven years. Gene is invested in improving the quality of life for Asheville and Buncombe County residents while securing a positive future for our youth.

Terri Trimble, a former teacher, is a registered nurse and works for Blue Mountain Medicine in Brevard. Terri is a committed volunteer in the Brevard community. She joined the Muddy Sneakers Board because of her belief that kids deserve the opportunity to develop a love of science and nature through hands-on learning in the natural environment.

Townsend Birdsong owns Camp High Rocks for boys in Cedar Mountain. She is a firm believer in outdoor, experiential education. Spending 25 years as a camp owner and director, she has seen the benefits to connecting kids with nature. Townsend believes that giving kids the opportunity to explore is a vital part of learning.

To learn more about the Muddy Sneakers Board of Directors, visit www.muddysneakers.org/board.