

SPECIAL  
EDITION!

FEBRUARY 19TH, 2014

# TURTLE TRACKS

A WEEKLY EMAIL NEWSLETTER FOR THE VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL COMMUNITY

## WINTER ENCOUNTER WEEK



# BOSTON

This winter, the 8th Grade class ventured south to historic Boston, Massachusetts for their annual class trip. Led by faculty guides and Social Studies teachers Peter Gilmore and Heather Moore, the students visited such city landmarks as the Boston Common, the Freedom Trail, Quincy Market, Fenway Park, and other famous locales.

Be sure to read all about their adventures on their blog at <http://vcsboston.blogspot.com>. Special thanks to Matthew and Rebecca Coll for their wonderful hospitality throughout the week!



# VOLUNTEERING

*From faculty guide Mark Keegan:*

For this adventure, twelve students and faculty guides Mark Keegan and Adriana Comtois took to putting the power of giving to work at a number of local organizations. The week started off with a day at the VNA Family Room as part of their MLK Day of Service, participating in a top-to-bottom cleaning and reorganization of the Family Room's facilities. We also made two visits to the Ronald McDonald House, where we prepared a meal and desserts for families staying at the House. In the middle of the week we paid a visit to the Humane Society of Chittenden County to learn about the Society's role in our community and the needs they have. Students then spent the rest of the week using the VCS cafeteria to construct and then donate an outdoor shelter for larger dogs in the Society's care. It barely cleared the largest door at VCS on its way outside!

It's very satisfying to know that our work will be a lasting source of comfort for future generations of animals passing through the Society's doors on their way to new owners.



# VOLLEYBALL

*From faculty guide Peter Goff:*

On Monday, the Volleyball group introduced our four volleyball-rookies (Meika, Emma, Jack, and Aiden) to the game. Our student co-leader, Anna Leffler, and I paired our group to match experience and ages as much as possible. On Tuesday, we traveled to the NorthEast Kingdom to work with the coach of the Lake Region Union HS Volleyball team (who acts as the Albany Middle School PE teacher). We worked with 40 students in two hour-long classes of 5th - 8th graders. On Wednesday, we traveled to Georgia MS to run eight 45-minute classes for a total of 240 kids! Thursday was a day at Essex MS (which included a great Pasta lunch!), 4 classes for a total of about 120 students. Friday was a double-dipper; working with Williamstown in the morning and Crossett Brook after lunch (a total of 6 classes served about 200 students).

Over the four days, we ran 20 clinics that served more than 600 Vermont Middle-Schoolers! Some highlights include our seventh graders (Raz, Meika, Emma, Aiden, and Fiona) working with older students (even some high schoolers). Our high-school crew; Amira, Ryan, Josh, Jack, and Eli followed the lead of our stellar student co-lead and represented VCS incredibly well.



# ANIMAL TRACKING (AKA SUBZERO SURVIVAL)

From student-tracker Lauren Howe:

Frozen. Frozen for so long we've almost forgotten the time we weren't a part of the ground. Almost forgotten the days when sunny-hot hands passed us from tree trunks to shady piles. Almost forgotten how the air grew light then dark and always colder. And colder. And colder. Then cold enough so that our very existence became one with the frozen ground.

Broken. Broken from the only reality we know. Broken from the ice. Freed from the false identity to which we were attached. And so, we move from frozen ground to frozen hands and become wood again. The ice and snow hangs off us like the memories of what we once became.

Burning. Burning down every part of our being that defined us. Every fiber breaking under the intensive heat of flames. All we are, all we know, all we were, blackening down into ash and amber. For now we are the fire. We are the flames that lick away the cold and frozen world. We are the heat that breaks down all you know like an unasked question to a common idea. We are the smoke. The soot. The orange light. The good and the bad. And most importantly,

We Always Change.

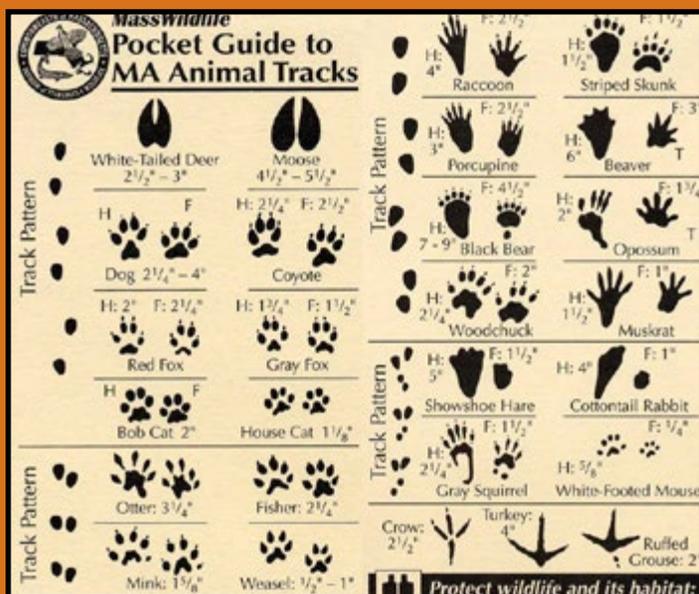


From student-tracker Anna Hulse:

An owl swooshes overhead, barely sounding as it presses on through the dusk, completely fascinating my eight year old brain.

Where did it come from? Where will it go? Thoughts spark the natural light of imagination and leave me standing baffled, heart racing. At the time, the first logical idea that danced into my mind was to hide under the rusty red wheelbarrow filled with garden weeds and month old goat bedding, directly followed by the idea of saving the 16 already safe chickens from the owl, turned to a dragon by my mind.

The owl silently glided to the dark shadows of the nearby woods, maybe hiding from man and life, or maybe searching for another meal in this barren fall abyss. Its search just beginning.



# WINTER HIKING

Talk about the perseverance of our students!

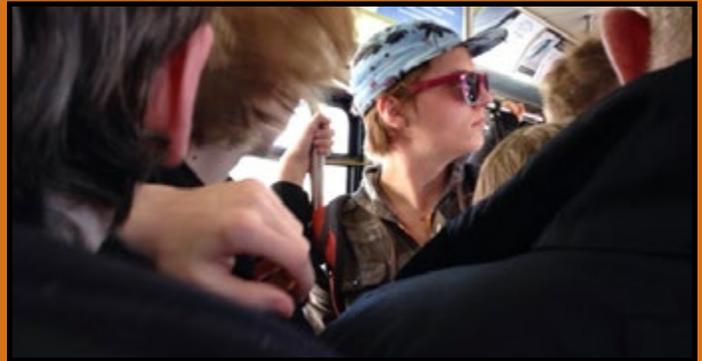
Nine brave Flying Turtles, accompanied by faculty guides Chance Cardamone-Knewstub and Jess Redmond, braved the wretched cold of Winter E-Week and dared to tackle Vermont's terrain. Beginning the week with a scaling of Mt. Elmore, the young juggernauts were forced to scale back their tenacity mid-week, though were still able to easily scale Mt. Philo in Shelburne. Spending their nights at VCS' yurt in Huntington, the high temperature on Wednesday did not exceed -5 degrees Fahrenheit, but the adventurers refused to be deterred. As the thermometers clambered for positive numbers towards the end of the week, the hikers were able to tackle Mt. Molly Stark before returning to VCS.



# BIG TRIP! SUNDANCE FILM FESTIVAL

Ten students, with faculty guides Cara Simone and Ben Patrick, took to the skies (in two planes!) and made their way to Park City, Utah, for the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. Staying in a lovely lakeside condo, the adventurers spent their week in the midst of the beautiful Rocky Mountains rubbing shoulders with famous actors, influential directors and producers, rock stars, comedians, and indie hopefuls. All while viewing some of the most intriguing (and often bizarre) new films, including such titles as *I Origins*, *The Trip to Italy*, *Mitt*, *20,000 Days on Earth*, *Boyhood*, and many more.

Be sure to read about all of their adventures, and take a gander at more amazing photos, on their blog at <http://vcssundancekids2014.blogspot.com/>. Even if you aren't a film buff, it's an adventure to remember!

The logo for the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. The year '2014' is written in a large, grey, sans-serif font. The zeros are replaced by two red circles, each containing the word 'SUNDANCE' in white, uppercase, sans-serif font. The '1' is a simple grey vertical bar, and the '4' is a grey shape with a white outline, resembling a stylized number.



# BIG TRIP! BELIZE

*From student-adventurer Seth Evans-Diffenderfer:*

Twelve adventurous VCS students traveled to the Central American country of Belize. Their first night was spent surrounded by the hellish whispers of Howler Monkeys in the Belize Zoo. Seeing their fear, a few friendly jaguars offered to hold their hands (only partially because they were enticed with meat from the tour guide). The next few days were spent in the middle of the jungle, hiking with wise jungle guides, learning how to harvest coffee beans and cacao, and swimming in the legendary Blue Pool. They left the research & education center that was their temporary home with their clothes caked in mud from the long dirt path leading in and out, and were welcomed into a Mayan village, where Team Commons broke off into groups of two for their home stays. They spent some time with the local school children, teaching them how to sing "Here Comes The Sun" and "We Will Rock You," while learning a couple of local favorites from the Mayan children. The trip ended with a few relaxing days snorkeling the reefs and learning from marine biologists, staying on a tropical island dotted with cottages.





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