

The Field Guide to the OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres

On May 5th, 2025,
the OCDSB
Centres will start
registration for field
trips & facility
rentals for the
2025-2026
school year.



Winter 2024-2025

**BILL MASON AND MACSKIMMING OUTDOOR
EDUCATION CENTRES**



Great egret @ MacSkimming Centre taken by Gord Carter on September 2024

Boardwalks within the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre

The boardwalks within the Bill Mason Outdoor Education Centre in Dunrobin, have been approved by the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board (OCDSB) to be replaced and construction will begin this spring and summer.

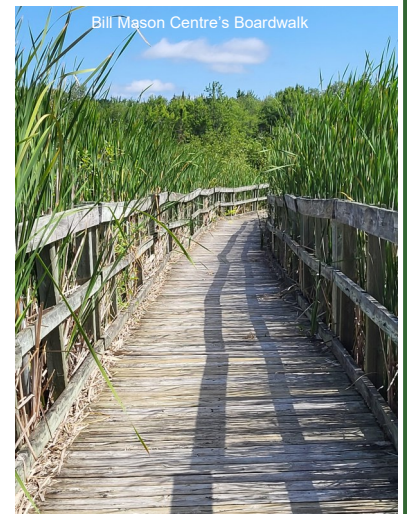
Until construction begins, the south boardwalk will be closed off to everyone so the North boardwalk will be the primary access into the 77 acre classroom.

These boardwalks were built in 1988 by the Carleton Board of Education and all together travel more than 580 metres through the Bill Mason Centre's wetland.

Because of the impact of this construction, the Bill Mason Centre will not be having its annual "Open Trails" (Public access) day this spring but regular educational programming will remain the same for the entire school year.

These boardwalks are heavily used daily by students attending the Bill Mason Centre as well as West Carleton Secondary School classes. Starting January 8th 2025, the North boardwalk will be groomed for cross-country skiing until March 2025. An alternative seasonal trail will be created through the wetland for people to walk & snowshoe.

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this time of rejuvenation!



Bill Mason Centre's Boardwalk

Art work from Trillium Elementary School Students!

Below is just a few of the awesome Nature Journal covers made by Grade 6 students from **Trillium Elementary School**, based on their observations during their Biodiversity field trip on September 24th, 2024 at MacSkimming Outdoor Education Centre.



On September 21st, MacSkimming Centre hosted its annual "Open Trails" day. Over **306 people & families** visited this one day event (not including leashed dogs). Eight new species were identified & added to the Centre's biodiversity project. Thank you to our loyal volunteers & staff for making this day happen.



York Street Public School's Forest School Adventures!

This Fall, Grade 1 students from **York Street Public School (2 classes)** attended MacSkimming Centre once a week for 6 weeks. These Forest School sessions were funded by the **OCDSB Program & Learning Department** and here are the student's adventures:

Week#1-October 9th-Beautiful weather and slightly chilly. Students arrived and picked their own trees which they would visit weekly and named them. One white birch tree was named Birch K9 and an American beech was called, Beech Monjeo. Also instructors talked about using sticks safely and boundaries. Students played in the mud with kitchen tools and cooked bananas & chocolate over the campfire. Fall leaves were in full color.

During the bus drive to MacSkimming Centre, some students thought they were passing the ocean as they drove by the Ottawa River.

Week#2-October 16th-Cool day but sun came out in the afternoon. Checked on K9 and Monjeo, went on a fungus explore & examined a large bracken fungus, handled a large green frog, found a great jumping-off log, collected sticks for next week's art project and cooked bread dough on a stick over the fire.

Week#3-October 23rd-Overcast and some showers. Found fingernail clams, snails, wood frogs and a northern two-lined salamander, made a stick shelter, buried themselves in leaves, worked on their natural loom and roasted apples over the fire. Some leaves still on trees

Week#4-October 30th- Cloudy & chilly day. Discovered a bald-faced wasp inside a log, examined a moose skeleton in the forest, played on a slack line and cooked popcorn over the campfire. All of the trees were bare.

Week#5-November 6th- It was a warm, windy day with some sunny periods. Looked at fungus under a electronic microscope, found some raccoon scat and cooked hot dogs over the fire.

Week#6-November 13th- Beautiful cold and sunny day. Went for a big hike, played the camouflage game (students were the mice & the teachers were the owls), made mud soup and had hot chocolate and s'mores around the fire.

Here are some appreciations from York Street students:

- I loved Mother Nature
- I loved making popcorn on the fire
- I loved making the soup with my friends
- I loved finding salamanders
- I loved being in the forest
- I loved climbing on trees

Eastern newt @ MacSkimming Centre, taken by Bill McMullen in September 2024



The OCDSB's Shared Learning Space

What happened this Fall at the Centres?

On September 10th, Grade 4 students from **Wazon Public School** found an adult Eastern newt in the forest while building shelters during their Outdoor Skills program at the Bill Mason Centre. Also during their map reading activity, two raccoons emerged from the forest and quickly ran back, realizing they were spotted by the students



On September 23rd, Grade 7 students from **Vincent Massey Public School** found four species of salamanders (*Eastern red-back*, *blue-spotted*, *spotted* and a *northern two-lined salamander*) while exploring the forest during their *Interactions within the Environment* program at MacSkimming Centre.

On September 24th, teacher candidates from the **University of Ottawa** visited MacSkimming Centre to practice the benefits of experiential learning, engaging students in nature and research-based approaches. They applied these practices with an investigation on beech blight aphids.

On September 26th, Grade 6 students from **Regina Street Alternative School** attended the *Biodiversity* program at MacSkimming Centre. They were excited to go off trail to explore and found flowering beech-drops, Canadian flat-back millipede, White-lip globe snails, orange jelly spot fungus, amanita and parasitic lobster mushrooms. This field trip was sponsored by the **Ottawa Field-Naturalist Club**.

On September 27th during their Professional Development Day, all of the staff from **Ridgemont High School** attended MacSkimming Centre for a chance to collaborate together, learn new skills and spend some time in nature. All of the teams were successful in building a fire without matches during their teambuilding challenge.

During their *Forest Explore* program at MacSkimming Centre on October 7th, 2024, **Robert Hopkins Public School**'s kindergarten classes were overwhelmed with excitement, catching knots of wood frogs.

On October 17th, Grade 4 to 6 students from **Cambridge Street Community Public School** explored a canyon within MacSkimming Centre and found a four-toed salamander which played dead for them. This was their fourth Forest School session at the Centre and they found five species of salamanders in total.

On October 30th, Grade 1 students from **W.E. Gowling Public School** during their fourth Forest School session at the Bill Mason Centre, made a seesaw out of two fallen trees and played on it for over an hour. Also they fed black-capped chickadees, caught frogs, made leaf rubbings and found a *Pholita lenta* (species of mushroom).

On October 31st, Grade 7 students from **Emily Carr Middle School** with instructor Violaine Archambault, were very excited to get a close look at a perched red-tailed hawk during their *Interactions within the Environment* program at MacSkimming Centre.

On November 5th, Grade 3 students from **Robert E. Wilson Public School** found swamp fingernail clams in the forest while they were exploring during their last Forest School session at MacSkimming Centre. This discovery created so many inquiry-based questions and discussions from the students.

On November 20th, **OCDSB Indigenous secondary students** had their monthly session of "*Learning on the Land*" within MacSkimming Centre with the OCDSB Indigenous Learning Team. During this session, they tried making cooking fires using magnesium and ate caribou meat.

On November 25th, Grade 7 students from **Cedarview Middle School** were very excited to find a white-tailed deer antler while they were playing a food chain simulation during their *Interactions within the Environment* program at the Bill Mason Centre.

On November 29th, during their Professional Development Day, **Adult High School's** education and administrative staff worked together as a team by using maps and compasses to orienteer through the forest at MacSkimming Centre. No one claimed to get lost!

On December 3rd, Grade 1/2 students from **Queen Elizabeth Public School** explored the red maple swamp and found an Eastern white pine tree swallowing an American beech tree. During every visit of their Forest School weekly session, these students go on a hike and explore a different part of the forest within the MacSkimming Centre.

On December 10th, Grade 2 students from **Charles H. Hulse Public School** loved exploring for animal tracks in the fresh snow during their fifth Forest School session at the Bill Mason Centre. As they were following white-tailed deer tracks through the meadow with instructor Raven Nordstrand, a deer suddenly jumped out and ran past the students.

On December 16th, Grade 7 students from **Longfields-Davidson Heights Secondary School** encountered swarms of snowfleas (*A.K.A. springtails*) and learned about woodpecker tongues during their *Interactions with the Environment* program at the Bill Mason Centre. Many students bravely overcame their fears & fed the black-capped chickadees with their hands.

As of December 16th, the Centres' Office Assistant **Megan Verbeek** will be on maternity leave. **Lorina Levesque** has taken the term position & will be your main contact at the Centres until July 2026. **Welcome Lorina!**

Comet C/2023 As taken by Bill McMullen over MacSkimming Centre in October 2024

Students Letters to the Ottawa Field-Naturalist Club!

On September 26th, Grade 5/6 classes from **Regina Street Alternative School** were able to take part in a hands-on Biodiversity program at MacSkimming Centre through funding from the **Ottawa Field-Naturalist Club & Ms. Violetta Czasak's family**. Here are some letters written by students & teachers, on their learning experience.

Today we went to MacSkimming. I enjoyed looking at the trees, bones, the prettiness of the forest and more!
My favorite part was the tree ID scavenger hunt and I want to give a huge thanks to you guys for sponsoring this trip. It was very fun. I learned a lot about biodiversity. I love catching wood frogs and salamanders. Overall 8/10 road trip!
Thank you! Kai

Today we went to MacSkimming. When we went there I observed frogs, mushrooms, lots of different types of salamanders, wood frogs and so much more types of frogs, slugs, types of fungi, centipedes, oak trees, eastern white pine trees, beech trees, hemlock trees, birch trees, cedar trees and spruce trees.
I would go on and on and on but I'll stop there for now.
Unknown

I want to thank you for sponsoring our trip to MacSkimming. The day was amazing! I wish I could thank you in person. Me and my friends had so much fun, thanks to you. We named a salamander Salad. I have a song stuck in my head. I can't help but thank you. So with that being said thank you.
Viola Joy Dutoit!

To the Ottawa Field-Naturalist Club
We want to thank you for the support of our trip to MacSkimming Centre. We were treated to perfect weather and excellent instructors. The students were encouraged to move throughout the forest turning over logs and seeking out fungi, salamanders, insects and frogs. They were active in searching for and observing the different things they found. They were then encouraged to use the provided resources to identify the things they were discovering. MacSkimming is a wonderful educational setting that provides fantastic opportunities.

Sadly young people are losing the opportunity to engage in the natural world. The less they visit and learn about the importance of nature, the less likely they will be to stand up and protect it. Your sponsorship of classes provides an excellent opportunity for students to engage with the natural world and develop an understanding of just how vital nature is.

We want you to know that our school continues this important work taking each class to Mud Lake once a week.
Thanks again!
Teachers-Marisca Hogeterp & John Perks



OTTAWA-CARLETON
DISTRICT SCHOOL BOARD

OCDSB Outdoor Education Centres-
Bill Mason and MacSkimming Centres
Email: outdooredcentres@ocdsb.ca
Website; www.ocdsboutdooreducationcentres.ca
Phone # 613-833-2080
Youtube: @ OCDSBOutdoorEducationCentres
Instagram @ OCDSBOutside



Barred owl @ MacSkimming taken by Bill McMullen in September 2024