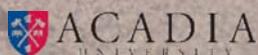




# **EARTH ADVENTURES IN THE NATURAL WORLD AT THE MORTON CENTRE**

A summary of the 2015 Environmental Education Programs  
on Heckman's Island, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia



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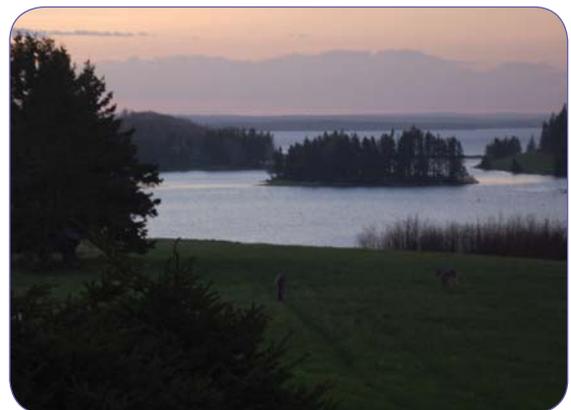
# INTRODUCTION

This report provides a brief summary of the 2015 Morton Centre environmental education programs. Included are a description of the site, a summary of each program, next steps, acknowledgements, and a number of photos. These programs are the result of a partnership between Acadia University and the Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation. Primary funding for these programs has been provided by Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.

## THE MORTON CENTRE

The Morton Centre is located on Heckman's Island, near Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Originally an active farm, the 99-acre property is comprised of secondary-growth mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, two large hay fields, freshwater ponds, a salt marsh, and nearly two kilometers of shoreline. There is a cottage, with amenities to accommodate summer staff and retreat visitors. There are a variety of outbuildings, as well as a 17-foot yurt which provides further programming space in the summer months. A network of trails run across the property.

The Morton Centre was gifted to Acadia University by Dr. Harry and Rachel Morton in 1995. Their wish was to see the property protected and used for environmental research and education. Since then, the Centre has been used primarily as a field station for Acadia student research. In the past few years, Acadia has shifted the purpose of this site to become a place for public environmental education, as well as a professional retreat centre for Acadia faculty and affiliates.



# OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS

The Morton Centre environmental education programs deliver environmentally-themed programs to engage and educate local children and families. Building off the successes from previous seasons, a similar but slightly expanded suite of programs was offered this year. The five programs delivered in spring and summer 2015 were Cycle Savers, Wild Adventurers, Eco Scientists, Pirates' Cove, and a family campfire night. A total of 190 participants attended. All of the programs took place outdoors and were designed to provide participants with opportunities to enjoy experiential learning, science, discovery, and being active in nature. Each day included games, stories, creative projects, exploration and physical activity, as well as hands-on learning related to the theme of the camp.

Members of the 2015 Morton Centre program team included:



*Brooke Nodding*



*Cate de Vreede*

Brooke Nodding (Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation Executive Director), oversaw program management and administration; Cate de Vreede (environmental education consultant) assisted with program design and development.



*Heather Vellend*



*Clare Kellock*

Heather Vellend and Clare Kellock (on-site program coordinators) were responsible for program development, implementation, and facilitation.



*Our enthusiastic high school leaders*

Nine local high school students and two local youth were trained as volunteer leaders for some of the programs.

# CYCLE SAVERS



Cycle Savers is an intriguing, hands-on, earth education program for grade four students based on a mystery code and club theme. It was successfully delivered to two classes from Bluenose Academy (on May 26th and June 4th), two classes from Bayview Community School (on June 8th and 9th), and to one class from Centre Scolaire de la Rive-Sud (on May 28th). We also had 10 high school students who completed the leadership component of this program. In total, this program reached approximately 112 children and youth.

Students deciphered the lost manual of the Cycle Savers Club, which launched them on an intriguing adventure to appreciate, understand, and respect the cycles of life through an action-packed field trip at the Morton Centre. Throughout the day, students completed activities in a natural setting which addressed grade four science curriculum outcomes. They returned home to complete the final code and discover how their household is affecting the environment and what they can do to make a difference.



This program also incorporated a leadership component for high school students. High school students were given two days of program and leadership training, then led the groups of grade fours in pairs supervised by the on-site program co-ordinators.



The program received positive feedback from participants, teachers, and the high school leaders. Grade 4 students were frequently heard exclaiming "This is so much fun!" throughout the program days, and teachers relayed many positive comments. Our high school students were so enthusiastic about the program that many expressed interest in volunteering at the Morton Centre during the summer and again next year.

# CYCLE SAVERS

Cycle Savers is a well-received program. Participants - as well as leaders, teachers, and chaperones - have much to say regarding their experience at the Morton Centre.



"What a fantastic day we all had! You can tell it was just by the fact that the kids didn't want to get out of the rain! Your leaders were awesome and the parents spoke to me about how well they worked with the children and that they also had many ways to keep them engaged and on task." **Grade 4 Teacher, Bluenose Academy**

"What a great thing to put on a resume!"  
**Chaperone (referring to leaders and coordinators)**

"How old do I have to be to volunteer here?"  
**Participant, age 9**



"It went very well, the kids had so much fun!"  
**High School Student Leader**

"The kids were sincerely disappointed that they had to leave!"  
**High School Student Leader**

"You're all real professionals."  
**Chaperone (referring to leaders and coordinators)**



# WILD ADVENTURERS



Wild Adventurers was a week-long full-day camp for children ages 9-12. This program made its debut this year, taking place from July 13th to 17th and engaging 7 enthusiastic participants.

Campers became “Wild Adventurers”, adventure-seekers that learned from wild creatures about how to explore and survive in the natural world, and how to live in harmony with our environment. All week long, campers learned valuable survival skills like knot tying, compass navigation, and Leave No Trace principles, and at the

end of the week they used the knowledge they gained to represent their creature at the mysterious ‘Council of All Beings’. The week culminated in an overnight stay where campers put their wilderness survival skills to the test by building and sleeping in their own tarp shelters!

The program received great reviews from both participants and their parents. Many participants expressed interest in coming back for a similar experience in future summers.



“We were very pleased with the simplicity, focus, and quality of the camp. We moved to Heckman’s Island and our daughter has since cultivated her passion for wildlife and the importance of preserving the beautiful environment and habitat that surrounds us. This camp deepened her appreciation for and love of where we live and the importance of respecting all living things that surround us... The camp instructors were lovely. I was so impressed with how well they managed the kids and kept them engaged. Thank you for providing this opportunity! This is her second year attending the camp and she is already inquiring about camp next year”

**Parent of Wild Adventures participant**

# PIRATES' COVE



A perennial favourite, Pirates' Cove was a half-day camp where children were immersed in a week of exploration and investigation to reduce their impact on the natural environment, reuse old materials in up-cycling efforts, learn proper recycling methods, and rethink the ways we use resources and materials. This year the camp took place July 27th to 31st and had 10 campers ages 6-8.

Campers of Pirates' Cove joined our merry band of buccaneers in exploring and discovering nature treasures and finding out what it takes to be a modern-day, earth friendly pirate! Participants spent the week burying treasure, creating maps, and discovering the four 'Rs' (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink) which make up the Pirate 'Arrrrgh'.



The program received great feedback from both participants and parents. By the end of the week many campers expressed disappointment over the camp being over for the year.



"Fabulous!! The boys enjoyed it so much. Ideal location, wonderful instructors and loved that they were learning while having a great time. I will definitely sign them up for other camps in the future."

**Parent of Pirates' Cove participant**

# ECO-SCIENTISTS

Eco-Scientists was a week-long half-day summer camp for children ages 6-8. This year it engaged a group of 7 enthusiastic campers from August 10th - 14th.

Campers used the scientific method and engaged their senses to explore the natural world, and consider how humans impact the earth. Following instructions from the mysterious “Dr. Science”, trainees completed a series of scientific experiments, discovered the life cycle of a plant, and learned about the water and soil cycle, in their quest to become inducted into the prestigious “League of Science”. Participants were encouraged to consider how to use their new science skills to continue exploring and caring for the world around them.



The program was enjoyed by all participants, who gave positive feedback about their experience at camp and an interest in returning for future camps.

“Wonderful! Program leaders were superb. Please do it again next year! Very happy with the whole experience!”

~ Parent of Eco-Scientists participant



# FAMILY CAMPFIRE NIGHT

This year we held our first ever campfire night, on Saturday, August 8th from 6:45-8:45pm. It was a rousing success, with fifteen local community members joining us for our “Sunset Stroll & Campfire” event. As dusk fell, we walked down to the cliff to watch the sunset, and then came together around the campfire for a fun-filled evening of stories, songs, games, and snacks. We had a second family campfire night planned for late August, in conjunction with the Growing Green Festival. We had 25 registrants for this, and were disappointed to have to cancel it due to poor weather. We look forward to hosting many more of these events in the coming years.



# MORTON CENTRE FAMILY PICNIC AND OPEN HOUSE

In its second year, this fun, community-building and awareness-raising event was held on Saturday, July 18th from 1 - 4 pm. We were pleased to have over 40 people in attendance, many of whom were families or individuals from the local area. There was a free BBQ, informational displays, nature activities and crafts for kids, a Lichen Walk and walking tour of the property, and ample opportunities to chat with those involved with the activities at the Morton Centre. This event proved to be a great way to share what's happening on-site with the community.



# LOOKING FORWARD

Overall, we celebrated many successes in the 2015 season. We offered two new programs, both of which went very well. Participant numbers increased about 7%, and the feedback from participants, teachers, and parents continues to be overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. We noticed a number of participants return from last year, and in many cases, those who were new had been encouraged to attend by one of those returning campers. We expect many of those who participated this year to come back again in 2016.



Looking forward to next season, the plan is to re-offer the most successful programs from 2015. Our hope is to enroll 5-6 classes of grade 4's in the Cycle Savers program, and expand our school programs to include one for Grade 2's called "Minpins Forest Quest". Building off the success of our first family campfire night, we hope to offer 2-3 of these and/or other nature-themed events for families. We will continue to offer two or three of the most popular day camps.

With three years under our belt, the Morton Centre Environmental Education Project has learned a great deal about the interest in these programs, as well the challenges and opportunities involved with running environmental education programs in this way. There continues to exist an appetite for these nature-based, adventuresome experiences for children in Lunenburg County, and we will continue to adapt our program offerings to better meet the demands and opportunities available.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank-you to all those who continued to support us in this third year of programming at the Morton Centre. We especially appreciate Michelin North America (Canada) Inc. for the foundational funding that made these programs possible. We also thank our other funding partners, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Acadia University – the Morton Centre Endowment Fund, and NS Student Career Skills Development Program for their support. Thanks also to Michelin Bridgewater for providing equipment and supplies. We acknowledge the curriculum materials shared with us by the Halifax Adventure Earth Centre. We appreciate the training and advice provided by Dr. Alan Warner, Megan Beliveau, and Colin Maguire. Many thanks to the 9 local high school students who volunteered as program leaders. Thank-you also to Nick Amero, Frances Anderson, Jody Conrad, Alexander Kelly, Jacob Kelly, Julie Lohnes, Morgan Mills, Yari Msika, Wendy Page, Tyler Peterson, Eric Spooner, Quinn Stewart, and Kirk Symonds for their volunteer contributions.



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