

Who Goes There? A Gilmanton Ecosystem Is Explored

**An Article by 7th Grade
Gilmanton School Students
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In early September, Gilmanton science teacher Mary Fougere and her 7th grade students explored nearby Cogswell Mountain over two full days. This experience allowed students to practice the skills of field scientists and to better understand their community. Fougere credits recent training from PLT and its partners for giving her the inspiration and confidence to undertake this ambitious effort.



The 7th grade students at Gilmanton School are working on a project on the Cogswell Mountain Conservation Area (CMCA) trail. The project was called “Who Goes There?” and was a good way for us to become field scientists and explore the ecosystem that exists across the street from the school. There were three groups investigating three different questions that had to do with the CMCA. The investigations included:

- What evidence is there that humans have used this area?
- What evidence is there that animals have used this area?
- What do the trees and the lay of the land tell us about CMCA’s past?

Each group had one of these investigations and had to find evidence along either the Beaver Pond Trail (0.3 miles) or the trail leading to the summit (1.6 miles) to help answer it. When the group found evidence to support their investigation, one person would use the GPS to mark the spot and provide the longitude and latitude so that someone else could find the spot again. Another person would then take a picture of the clue while someone else sketched it just in case the photo was lost. Another person would then record data on a piece of paper describing the evidence being observed, its physical location, as well as the number of the camera that was used, and the number of the picture.

Reporters from each class—Sierra Juneau, Nicholas Waring, Haleigh Patch and Dylan Tiede—asked students from each group about the investigation they were working on. One of the questions students were asked was, “Have you seen anything interesting?” Over the course of time the three groups discovered some very interesting clues such as a horse print, several types of scat including moose and dog, a beaver lodge and a clump of fur on a rock. The ground was very dry and so there were not many animal tracks seen. The “human use” group discovered trees and a rock that was grazed over by a snowmobile as well as old rock walls that were once used to keep the cattle in the pasture and mark the land boundaries. Now the rock walls that were used so long ago are surrounded by trees and forest land and that became evidence of the land changing for that group. These are just some of the clues that the groups had found along the trails.

Some of the evidence collected through this project may be used in the future to teach CMCA visitors about the ecosystem of the CMCA and how humans are a part of that ecosystem too. The lands that compose the CMCA (about 519 acres) are owned by four different landowners. They are conserved by conservation easements held by the Town of Gilmanton acting through its Conservation Commission, or the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests (SPNHF). The CMCA also has a brand new kiosk and map at the beginning of the trail where some of these clues may be displayed and changed throughout the year.

Everyone interviewed had been on the trail before but no one had been this far on the trail. There were not a lot of actual animals seen, but groups did see some red-spotted newts and a couple of eastern chipmunks. One group found several geo-caches in many different places along the trail. A fun time was had by every student while working on this project.