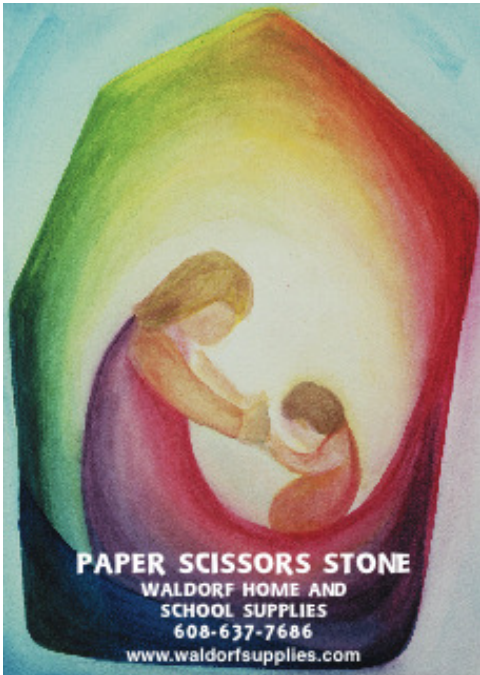


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The Great Outdoors

For most students in America a return to school means a return to long columns of numbered lockers, the effervescent hum of fluorescent lighting, and the smell of pizza burgers wafting through the halls from the cafeteria kitchen. But not for students at the Youth Initiative High School. Every year the first week of school isn't held at school, it is convened instead in the beautiful confines of Devil's Lake State Park in the deciduous woodlands of Central Wisconsin. For twelve years the students of YIHS have begun their school year swimming, canoeing, rock climbing, and cooking meals for one another over an open fire.

This tradition of coming together in the woods is indicative of the importance of the social realm and of the natural world in the education at Youth Initiative. Of course we focus on academics, we're a school—but we



Students enjoy the beautiful amenities of Mother Nature

(Continued on page 2)

Cloudy with a Chance of Learning

By Jacob Hundt

One of the most distinctive aspects of Waldorf education is an approach to teaching science that is "phenomenological," which is a big word for the simple act of making the phenomena of nature—the reality of the world as revealed to us by our awakened senses—the starting point of all scientific study. At the beginning of each academic year, for example, I teach a three week main lesson block on Meteorology with the 11th grade. Meteorology is a wonderful class to teach phenomenologically because it comes so naturally. After all, people already love to talk about the weather. Weather, especially in Wisconsin, is constantly changing and it is happening on a scale in space and time that is within the ordinary human range, unlike, say molecular biology or cosmology.

Thus, in our Meteorology block, the starting point, the basic assignment, is a daily weather journal. Students are asked to pick a time and a place and to spend 5 – 10 minutes each day observing the weather. They are asked to

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Many YIHS students made a 50-mile bike ride a part of their trip to Devil's Lake



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also believe that high school is a place to learn who we are, how we can most effectively function in a group, and the importance of the natural world to our economy, our health, and our souls. The annual camping trip is a powerful symbol of this.

But the camping trip is certainly not the last time we go outside. Our curriculum is flocked with opportunities to venture out from the classroom and into the great outdoors. Whether it is hands-on education in the fields of an organic farm, or the collection and preparation of wild foods, or a rumination on the Transcendentalist environmental ethic, Youth Initiative lives in the heart of nature, breathes and loves the fresh air, and takes joy in the human relationships forged beneath the golden warmth of the sun.

This year will be no different as we continue to redefine the notion of the “field trip”. And, just as in past years, the students, faculty, and parents of YIHS ventured out to Devil's Lake State Park for the first week of school for a week of adventure, camaraderie, and a refocusing of the school's vision and community.

After packing dozens of coolers, tents, sleeping bags, and lashing the canoes to the roofs of a convoy of minivans the school struck out on the road toward Baraboo on a hot, cloudless Monday morning.

During the first days of the trip

As you may have heard, there is no “I” in “team”

and bruised my hands. Not to mention what I did to the walls and ceiling of my apartment; black rubber marks, which stubbornly resist removal, reminded me daily of my nearly constant failure, also known as slow progress. Two years later, after graduating and in an attempt to gain some “chops” by street performing, I pegged a couple of little Mexican children as Forest and I did the “pass around” with 6 clubs. Their faces were scrunched up in fear, but the tears didn't flow until they made it back, safely, to their parents.

Ahh, the memories.

Juggling is touted by education techies as a valuable method for developing your child's brain. One should juggle to build brain capacity. One study found that juggling increased grey matter, previously thought not to reproduce. Cross-brain connections, weaving the right and left lobes, also supposedly comes from throwing and catching various objects in a systematic way: juggling, the key to get your kid into Harvard!

But really, juggling is not productive. It does not *do work* like building a house, writing software, or flipping a burger. Balls, clubs, knives and scarves go up and then come back down. The pet joke of jugglers, after nailing a difficult trick, is, “And I went



to 4 years of college to learn that.” So it's true, time spent juggling is not time spent building one's resume, but rather, it is time spent in the pure pursuit of learning. Juggling is pure learning.

In our postmodern world, we are told that what is valuable is what is material: big houses, small ipods, fancy clothes, efficient cars, and numbers of “friends” on Facebook. And corresponding with this desire for material wealth, we deem useless activities that don't lead to greater material wealth. Juggling, for instance. Maybe not useless, but amusing and entertaining. And this is why I think we as a society can be so cynical. For cynicism comes from a lack of hope, and hope, at its core, is the belief in intangibles.

I love juggling because there is no end to the intrigue. No matter how “good” you are, there's always a trick that you can dream up that you can't do, yet. In life, you are always throwing—plans, ideas, new versions of yourself—and always catching—opportunities, cherished moments, past versions of yourself. So we return to the basics, throw, throw, catch, catch. And say, “To heck with the cynical monsters of modernity!”

Outside the Doors of Everyday: Juggling vs. the cynical monsters of modernity

By Shawn Lavoie

Throw, throw, catch, catch.

Throw, throw, catch, catch. Sounds easy, sounds like the nonsensical meanderings of children playing when they know no one is watching.

Now say it while throwing and catching two juggling balls. Throw, throw, catch, catch. Now it sounds like a mini-drill sergeant in your head, barking out commands to your hands. Throw, THROW, catch, CATCH!

Now relax, smile, and look out the window, beyond your juggling pattern. Throw, throw, catch, catch. If they drop, that just means that gravity is working. Look through the pattern to a spot on the wall, and throw, throw, catch, catch. Your hands will catch the juggling balls without you looking; they know where to go.

From wonder through discipline to vision, juggling encompasses the great journey of learning. It starts with curiosity, moves through technical mastery, and opens up to creativity. I've taught juggling in various classes at the Youth Initiative over the last 5 years, and still love it. I love the moment when students "get it." No matter how un-cool it is to yelp or how potentially awkward-making it is to giggle, learning to juggle elicits genuine joy. No matter how great the cynical monster that hovers over their adolescence, students of juggling practice a truly hopeful and intangible art.

I'm a late-comer to this art. I started as a 2nd year at the University of Chicago, just as the early spring warmth swept through campus and dragged me from the basement of the Regenstein library. My good friend Forest proposed an independent study class on the History of the American Circus, and I joined him, adding that we should learn some real circus skills. When two weeks into our class our advisor (a Comparative Lit prof) flaked on us, we decided to dedicate our class time to cartwheels and juggling pins.

From the outset I knew I was no juggling virtuoso. Practicing 3 clubs every morning before class, shins up against the couch, I broke my glasses, got a nosebleed,



students enjoyed swimming and canoeing in Devil's Lake, hiking the wooded paths of the park, and playing card games and guitar around the campfire. In addition to recreation students prepared dinner for one another, planned rock climbing adventures and service projects, and ringed the campfire each night, discussing the upcoming school year.

These nightly conventions are a way for the student body to come together around their hopes for the upcoming year, the founding documents of the school, and a smoky campfire. Monday night was spent playing ice-breaking games and welcoming new students into the YIHS family.

Tuesday night, in keeping with a camping trip tradition the students reviewed and discussed the Vision and Purpose Statement of the school. This document yearly inspires campers and renews a sense of responsibility and respect in the student body.

Later Tuesday night and Wednesday morning, however, the second of two torrential rain storms hit the camp. Already wet and exhausted from Tuesday afternoon's rain storm, the midnight storm ended the camping trip prematurely, with most campers hobbling home in sippy shoes. A small contingent of campers did stay on until the end of the week with their fearless leader, Jacob Hundt.

Though the trip was cut short by the vicissitudes of the very "Great Outdoors" we had come to celebrate, the camping trip was once again a memorable adventure creating memories and bonds that will energize and inform us throughout the upcoming year.



"Even in a time of elephantine vanity and greed, one never has to look far to see the campfires of gentle people." ~Garrison Keillor



Two downpours reminiscent of the book of Genesis stranded students on rock outcroppings, turned tents into ineffective rafts, drenched every piece of fabric in the campsite, made everyone temporarily miserable, and provided an excellent opportunity for community building.



Off the Fat

Looking Back to

Photos and Articl

The first main lesson block of my senior year was preceded by a great deal of forethought and planning; this was because, rather than consigning myself to the usual historical curriculum, I had decided to explore something more natural, more practical. By this I mean *wild foods*, the fruits of nature’s garden.

This garden is populated by a bounty of edibles, medicines and useful plants. Trees straddle the local hillsides, bearing fruits, nuts and edible bark (the inner bark of the willow tree contains the natural chemical analog of synthetic *aspirin*). Herbs and shrubs sprawl over the countryside, producing flowers, fruits, greens and roots. Fungi sit perched atop decaying logs or emerging from beneath layers of detritus, some containing potent toxins, but others containing rare nutrients and valuable medicinal compounds.

All these things grow naturally, by no design of man, and can be harvested for free. It is unsurprising; this is the way man was meant to subsist. It is my opinion that it is each person’s duty, as a self-reliant human being, to become familiar with edible flora and to learn to differentiate between similar species. After all, what is more self-reliant than to go back to nature? Everything is provided, and with the right knowledge you need not depend on any

man but yourself. It was for this that I decided to fashion my own study in wild foods.

I was not alone in doing so; Josh Lantro, my fellow senior, was with me from the start, discussing class structure and writing study proposals long before the school year ever began. Keegan King also joined the class near the beginning and helped to refine its direction. The resulting independent study was an introductory excursion in nature, a plunge into real, primal knowledge with a focus on edible wild flora.

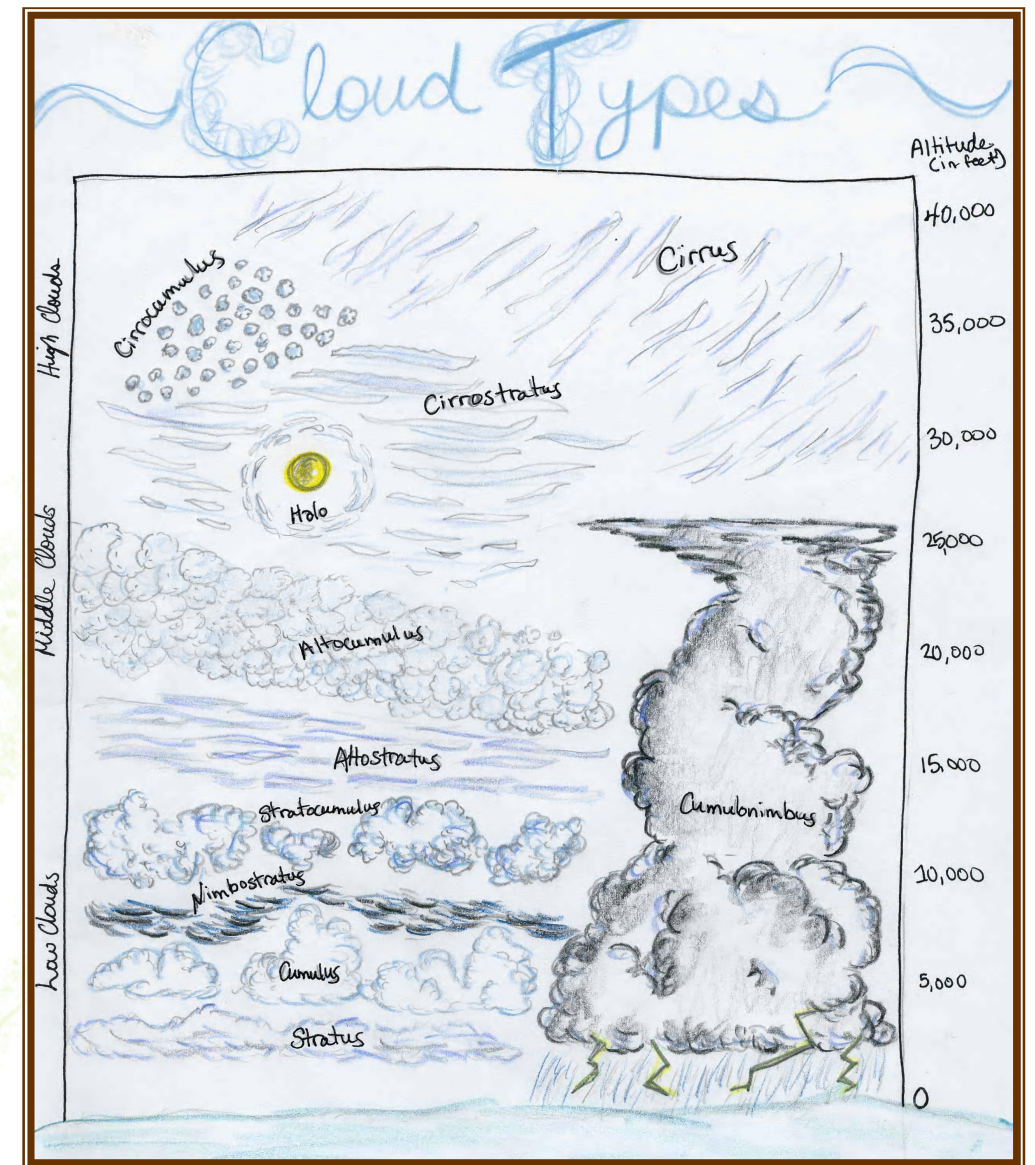
At the start of the class, we were uncertain and

the natural world as the ancient tomes of Aristotle and Eratosthenes.

The conventional way of teaching science today is precisely backwards from the process in which actual scientific discoveries are made. The work of scientific discovery begins in a world of mystery and wonder and in a researcher who is truly awake to the details, peculiarities, and miracles within the evidence flooding in from the sense world. The paradigm-changing scientist is especially attuned to, and deeply interested in, the oddities, the exceptions to the received understanding, the bits and pieces that don’t seem to fit. Textbook science, on the other hand, is interested in textbook examples—in generic, typical cases that illustrate the theoretical model being presented. And, of course, most of the empirical evidence, the raw material of scientific discovery, is presented second or third hand, meaning that from the student’s perspective it is not really empirical at all, but once again received knowledge handed down from the past.

This conventional approach to teaching science has been successful in producing a scientific culture that it is good at advancing discoveries along already established lines of reasoning and at pushing existing technologies towards their logical conclusions, albeit oftentimes heedless of the ethical or ecological consequences. On the other hand, it is also an approach which succeeds in turning off most students who don’t have an inclination towards strictly abstract conceptual thinking, thereby cutting off many of the most creative, sensitive thinkers from the world of scientific discovery. It also produces such absurdities as high school or college graduates who can work expertly with the Calculus—invented by Newton to mathematically describe the motions of heavenly bodies—but who are nevertheless unable to use ordinary language to describe, much less explain, the cycle of the phases of the moon or the motion of the sun in the sky over the course of the year.

When you set aside received theories and preconceptions and examined the natural world carefully, filled with wakefulness and openness to the phenomena, one of the things that becomes evident is how fluid and alive the world is. Rigid boundaries rarely hold true for long and one manifestation of nature can frequently be seen melting seamlessly into another. To try this for yourself, go outside on a nice sunny day with a scattering of fluffy cumulus clouds, lie down in the grass, and pick one of the clouds to watch for a few minutes. We are accustomed, in spite of what we “know,” to think of clouds as solid, objectively-existing things, like sheep or pillows, and in this case they even have a solid-sounding Latinate scientific categorization: “cumulus.” If you actually take the time to quiet your mind and open your eyes, however, you will observe an astonishing thing. After a less than a minute you will become aware that the cloud is quite rapidly disappearing, apparently fading away into “thin air.” If you watch long enough—on average less than 10 minutes—the cloud will fade away entirely. Miraculously, though, while you were otherwise occupied new clouds have appeared, somehow and from somewhere, to fill the sky and the soul as well.



Day 1 9/7/10 Le: 55^{PM} 7:10 location Southeast corner of Viroqua
 latitude → 43.551938 longitude → -90.885537
 It is 57° outside. There doesn't seem to be much wind although some leaves sway gently everywhere and then. There is no current precipitation. → the breeze is coming out of the ~~the~~ north westerly direction. With an average velocity of 4 mph. There are a few tufts of clouds moving pretty fast towards the SE corner of town. They are light, ~~and~~ wispy and thin, but they are in small clumps. I assume them to be pretty close to the earth, because they are moving so fast. They are tinted orange because the sun is about to set. There are some denser clouds in the eastern part of the sky, but are moving to the south. They are ~~skewing~~ and parallel to the horizon. The clouds form a strip across the horizon. They have lots of bumps on them. They are more bumpy on the top of them and smoother and flatter on the bottom.

Sample pages from student main lesson books

(Continued from page 1)

describe the clouds and winds and record the temperature and possibly any precipitation. Each day in class we compare notes. What has changed since yesterday? Since the beginning of the school year? What do students living in the valley observe differently from those on the ridge, or from those living in town? To underline the importance of spending some real time actually observing, I also require the students to complete at least three sketches of clouds or skies during the block. During the first week of the block these discussions often occupy a solid third of each 100 minute class session, and I eventually add observations from above—real time weather satellite and Doppler radar images—to the observations students make on their own. These empirically grounded discussions form the bedrock for a class that eventually covers the Coriolis effect, Hadley Cell Circulation, the internal dynamics of hurricanes and tornadoes, atmospheric thermodynamics, and other highly conceptual material.



The vast success of the modern scientific method has been made possible in large part by the application of a phenomenological orientation—empiricism—by the pioneers of the early modern scientific revolution. Copernicus, Galileo, Kepler, and Newton succeeded in changing the way humankind understood the natural world because they began by setting aside what had been passed down to them from the ancient past and returned to the evidence provided to them by their physical senses. Thus, while their contemporaries were debating the interpretation of ambiguous points in the works of Aristotle and Ptolemy, these scientific pioneers were out actually looking at the planets or observing the movements of objects in physical space.

This radical reorientation, away from received theories and traditional conceptions and towards the attentive experience of natural phenomena through the senses, allowed the early modern scientists to literally reshape the universe and lay the groundwork for all that has followed since. How ironic it is, then, that most conventional science courses today begin by filling students' minds with completed theories, with the crystallized conceptions of scientists and thinkers working in the past. The conceptual images may now be those of Einstein and Darwin, of Mendeleev and Watson and Crick, but for the first-time learner, these ideas are equally far from the phenomena of

of the Land:

Nature

By Brendan Heberlein and Josh Lantro, YIHS Seniors



apprehensive. We wondered if we could pull it off. However, it proved to be easier than anticipated; it was so engaging and interesting that we devoured the material as fast as we could. Throughout the block, we learned to recognize edible species such as goldenrod, milkweed, lamb's quarters, wood sorrel, plantain, dock, burdock, spearmint, dandelion, chicory, cow parsnip, chickweed, wild carrot (and its deadly cousin poison hemlock), black nightshade, wild grape, oxeye daisy, cattails, amaranth, cherry, oak, hickory, walnut, sumac, puffball mushrooms, shaggy mane inky caps, chanterelles, and still others.

Throughout the block we took several excursions to identify these species in the field; this served to enforce what can be called the 'search image' — the mental image a forager keeps handy for field identification. The search image is constantly refined and improved upon, and should reflect subtle nuances in form and habit. As we walked through nature, we became familiar with the plants we studied to the extent that we could recognize very particular and subtle characteristics, knew the specimen's habitat and anatomy, and could recognize it at different stages of growth.

This is the spirit of botany for foraging: a close and extensive relationship with the plants you harvest, which we have only begun to develop. It is a long process and to begin it is all we could have hoped to do; it has been a good beginning, though, and we will be returning to finish it in the spring, when the snow melts and the shoots reach up from the earth, and the cycle begins anew.

Burdock Stir Fry was proudly shared with all.



Capturing Nature



One of the original pieces of our curriculum is our black and white photography course. Cultivated by the generosity and hard work of the Julee and Ben Agar family these courses have taught YIHS students not only the techniques of black and white photography but also the skill of looking at the world around them in a different and more focused way.

Photography as an art form is nothing more nor less than the search for profound beauty in the things that surround us. Often the students will train their lens on the great outdoors and in doing so will interact with nature in a thoughtful way, dialectically giving and receiving meaning from the natural world.

All these images (and countless more) were taken by students over the fifteen year history of this program.

