



EXPLORERS CLUB

Newsletter

JULY 2025

KAYAKING
CRADLE OF FORESTRY

2025 SEASON
ISSUE I



FOREST
INSPIRED
NATURE
DISCOVERY™



EXPLORERS CLUB NEWSLETTER

Dear Explorers Club Families,

Thank you for being such an important part of this program. We truly appreciate your support, your communication, and the trust you place in us. It means a lot to see families so engaged and invested. Every Explorer brings their own energy and spirit to the group, and it's been a real privilege to get to know each one of them.

We're looking forward to the adventures ahead and all the new places we'll explore together. As we visit these natural spaces, we'll continue to talk with the Explorers about how to move through them with care. Respecting the environment is a core part of what we do, and we'll be practicing the principles of Leave No Trace so that we help protect the wild places we enjoy.

After each trip, we'll be sending out a short newsletter with updates, photos, and highlights. We hope it gives you a good window into what your child experienced and learned. Thank you again for being part of this. We're excited for what's to come!

Diogo DeAssis

Explorers Club Coordinator
FIND Outdoors



Upcoming Trips

JUL 26

Cradle of Forestry
"Connecting with Nature"

AUG 2

Fly Fishing
"Dispose of Waste Properly"

SEP 6

Rock Climbing
"Durable Surfaces"

SEP 20

Panthertown
"Respect Wildlife"

OCT 11-12

Overnight Camping
"Be Considerate to Others"





CLUB DE EXPLORADORES

A look back at least year

El Club de Exploradores (Explorers Club) has led over 90 young adventurers on more than a dozen excursions through Pisgah National Forest. We hiked, climbed, and swam, learning along the way about *Leave No Trace* principles and the natural beauty just beyond our backyards. In partnership with local organizations, non-profits, and businesses, we explored the outdoors in new and meaningful ways. These experiences help our club members see for themselves that “these forests belong to you too!”

Explorers Club is a free, bilingual outreach program for middle school aged students in Transylvania County and surrounding areas, providing opportunities to go on adventures in Pisgah National Forest.

YOUR ENTHUSIASTIC AND DEDICATED WORK IS INVALUABLE, BOTH FOR PROMOTING ENVIRONMENTAL CARE AND FOR THE PRACTICAL BENEFITS OF CONTACT WITH NATURE.

– LOURDES CAROLINA INOA
PAST EXPLORERS CLUB PARENT



PAST EXPLORERS CLUB MEMBERS

Leave No Trace Principles

The Leave No Trace principles are a set of guidelines that help us enjoy the outdoors responsibly while protecting the natural world for future generations. At their core, these principles encourage mindfulness and respect for the land, wildlife, and other visitors. Whether hiking, camping, or exploring, the goal is to minimize our impact and ensure that nature stays as wild and beautiful as we found it.



1 Plan Ahead and Prepare

Being prepared helps ensure safety and minimizes damage to natural areas. Know the rules, weather, and terrain before you go.

2 Travel and Camp on Durable Surfaces

Stick to established trails and campsites to avoid damaging fragile ecosystems. Choose rock, gravel, or dry grass when setting up camp.

3 Dispose of Waste Properly

Always clean up after yourself. Throw away trash in the right place and leave nature cleaner than you found it.

4 Leave What You Find

Leave rocks, plants, and other natural objects as you found them. Avoid disturbing historic or cultural artifacts.

5 Minimize Campfire Impact

Use a camp stove when possible and keep fires small. Only build fires in designated areas and burn only small sticks found on the ground.

6 Respect Wildlife

Observe animals from a distance and never feed them. Secure food and trash to prevent attracting wildlife.

7 Be Considerate of Other Visitors

Keep noise levels down and yield to others on the trail. Respect the experience of those seeking peace and solitude.

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KAYAKING THE FRENCH BROAD RIVER

We kicked off our season with a brand-new adventure, made possible by the generous support of **Headwaters Outfitters**. For our first outing of the year, Explorers had the chance to kayak and snorkel right here in the French Broad River. Headwaters donated a guided trip for our group, and we couldn't have asked for a better way to start things off.

Our guide, Danielle, led us through the basics of kayaking and made sure everyone felt safe and supported as we got on the water. For many of our Explorers, this was their first time paddling, and she did a great job helping them get the hang of it.

We also partnered with **Oxbow River Snorkeling** for a closer look beneath the surface. Kevin from Oxbow met us at the river and introduced the group to river snorkeling; something totally new for most of us. He brought a calm, curious energy that helped make the experience approachable and fun.

We'd also like to thank Jessica from Headwaters, who played a big role in organizing the day behind the scenes. As Operations Director, she helped bring all the moving parts together and made sure the trip could happen.



Safety First

We began our day at the **FIND NEST** with a short safety video that covered the basics of kayaking and water safety. It helped set the tone for the day and gave everyone a general idea of what to expect. Once we arrived at Headwaters, our guides gave a more hands-on safety talk and answered questions about the equipment, the river, and how to stay safe while paddling and snorkeling. The guidance was clear and easy to follow, which helped the group feel prepared and ready to start the day.



Explorers gear up for their first trip!

At every event, safety is something we plan for long before the day begins. Our staff are First Aid and CPR certified, and we bring multiple fully stocked first aid kits and sunblock to every outing. We check our gear, stay aware of weather conditions, and communicate clearly with all participants. These steps allow us to focus on what really matters: helping our Explorers try new things, stay engaged, and enjoy the outdoors with confidence. A safe day is a fun day, and that is always our goal.



Danielle teaches the Explorers about safety on the river.

More Memories



Jace is feeling accomplished



Soliana & Rowan spot tiny minnows



...and away we go!

Although a few Explorers felt a bit unsure when we first started, they quickly gained confidence as they practiced paddling and steering their kayaks. With support from our guides and encouragement from their peers, everyone found their rhythm on the water. It was rewarding to see how fast they adapted and began to enjoy the experience.

Our group paddled an 8-mile stretch of the French Broad River. This section is rated Class I, meaning it has a gentle current and very few obstacles, making it ideal for beginners. The slow-moving water gave everyone a chance to focus on learning the basics of kayaking without feeling rushed or overwhelmed.



▲ Keilah & Vivan confidently paddling their kayaks ▼

Lincoln, Sebastian & Kirill pose for the camera

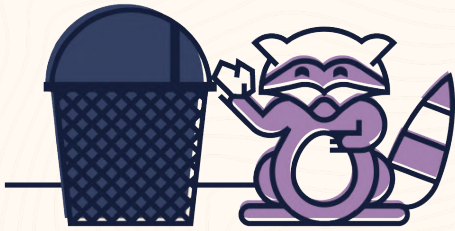


The scenery along the river made the trip memorable for everyone. The forested banks, clear water, and peaceful surroundings created a beautiful backdrop for the day. Whether it was a first-time paddle or a familiar route, the river welcomed each Explorer with plenty to see and enjoy.



Snorkels Up!

Just before lunchtime, we stopped at a wide, calm section of the river where the water was clear and deep in some areas. This made it a great place for both snorkeling and swimming. The group took a break from paddling to cool off, float around, and enjoy the water. For many of our Explorers, this was their first time swimming in a river like this, and they were excited to jump in and explore.



We were especially on the lookout for darters, aquatic invertebrates, and the eastern hellbender, a large and salamander that only lives in clean, cold rivers. Kevin explained how these species are indicators of river health and how their survival depends on us keeping the water clean. This connected directly to the Leave No Trace principles, reminding us that even small actions like leaving rocks in place or packing out trash can make a big difference.

Kevin from Oxbow River Snorkeling helped us get ready for the snorkeling portion of the day. He passed out masks and snorkels, gave a quick overview of what to look for, and guided the group into the deeper spots where fish and other river life like to hide. With his help, Explorers started spotting small fish darting between rocks and noticed patterns in how the riverbed changes from place to place.



▲ MATTHEW, JACE & SEBASTIAN
COLLECT GEAR FROM KEVIN



▲ LINCOLN SPOTS A BIG ONE



▲ KIRILL DEMONSTRATES PROPER DIVING TECHNIQUES



▲ ROWAN, KEILAH & SOLIANA ENJOY THE COOL RIVER TEMPS

Wrapping it up...

By the end of the day, our Explorers had paddled miles, snorkeled in deep river water, and learned firsthand about the wildlife that depends on clean, healthy ecosystems. Many faced new challenges and came out of the experience with more confidence, curiosity, and a better understanding of what it means to care for the places we explore

We are incredibly proud of how our Explorers showed up, supported one another, and stayed engaged throughout the entire trip.

We're grateful to Headwaters Outfitters and Oxbow River Snorkeling for making this adventure possible, and to all the families who helped get their Explorers ready for the day. This was just the beginning of our season, and we can't wait to see where the next trip takes us.

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2025 EXPLORER



More Memories

Sebastian looks for aquatic life



Vivian enjoying a dip in the river





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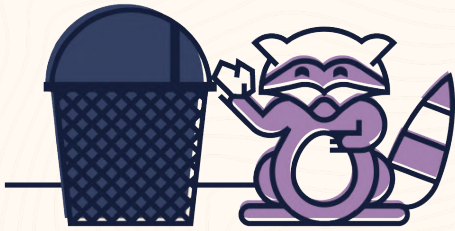


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Cradle of Forestry in America



CLUB DE EXPLORADORES

What is "The Cradle"?

Tucked away in the Pisgah National Forest, the Cradle of Forestry is the birthplace of professional forest management in the United States. This historic site marks the location of the first forestry school in the country, founded by Carl Schenck in the late 19th century. His efforts laid the groundwork for sustainable forest practices that are still followed today. The surrounding land, once heavily logged and degraded, became a classroom for conservation, where young foresters learned to balance ecological health with responsible resource use.

It's more than just a museum. The Cradle of Forestry is a place where the legacy of American forestry continues to inspire people, reminding them of the enduring importance of caring for the land through thoughtful and informed management.

Today, the Cradle of Forestry stands not just as a monument to the past, but as a living educational center. Visitors can explore restored buildings, interactive exhibits, and scenic trails that showcase the forest's resilience and the early methods of stewardship that helped revive it.





PREP WORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK

We started our day at the FIND Outdoors NEST, where we prepared for the full day ahead. Mrs. Angela, Maddie & Allison helped us prepare all of our materials & gear for the day.

This week, we were happy to distribute brand new Columbia boots to each Explorer. Now, everyone has the same comfortable boots to help us through our adventures! Not only that, but each Explorer got their own hiking stick with emergency whistle as well.

As we settled in, we played Nature Trivia to set our sights on all things WILD. The Explorers got to show off their vast knowledge of the outdoors! It was a real treat seeing how brilliant these young minds are.



Allison poses for a photo

Fun & Bonding

We had some time to spare in the morning, so we also played our new favorite game, "Poison Dart Frog". We all had a blast in the NEST outdoor seating area as we tried to figure out who the Poison Tree Frog was. Those who found out too late were "stunned" and out of the game!



We were greeted by Ash and Lauren, our expert guides for the day. In just a few hours, they transported us through more than a century of history, bringing the past to life with stories, insight, and enthusiasm.

Welcome to the Cradle

As we arrived at the Cradle of Forestry, just a 20-minute drive from FIND Headquarters, we took in how truly magical this place is. After all, it's not just any forest, it's the Cradle of Forestry in America. Standing in the very place where American forestry took root was both inspiring and humbling. More than 100 years later, we're still benefiting from the forward-thinking practices that started right here.



Explorers are welcomed to the Cradle by Ash & Lauren.

Bringing stories to life

Before heading out on the trails, the Explorers gathered in the theater to watch a short film about the origins of forestry in America and the founding of the Biltmore Forest School. The documentary-style film blended historic moments, reenactments, and narration to tell the story of how forest conservation began, and why it still matters today. It was powerful to see these events play out on screen. What might have felt like distant history suddenly became real and tangible.



Hiking through History

Our first trail of the day was the Biltmore Campus Trail. It is a quiet, shaded path that winds through what once served as the original training grounds of the Biltmore Forest School. Founded by Dr. Carl Schenck in 1898, this was the first forestry school in the nation.

As we moved from building to building, we imagined what it might have felt like to study and live here over a century ago. We passed through recreations, actual historic houses, and student quarters, pausing to reflect on how these early students shaped the future of forest management in the U.S.

Ash and Lauren helped paint a vivid picture of life at the school: young men studying tree growth, soil health, fire prevention, and sustainable harvesting.



The Explorers doing what they do best... exploring!

More Memories



More Memories



More Memories



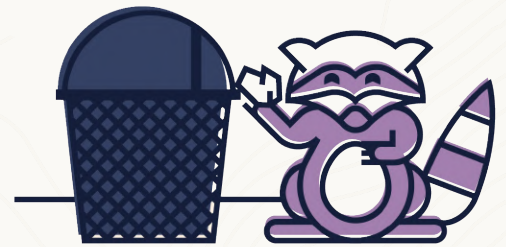
The most awaited time of the day, lunch!

After our first wonderful hike on the Biltmore Campus trail, our Explorers worked up quite the appetite. Sandwiches, wraps and chips have never tasted so good! It was a nice moment of rest and refuel before we embarked on the rest of our day's journey.



Lunch time is always a great opportunity to teach "Leave No Trace" principles.

After lunch, we often find ourselves talking about the importance of cleaning up. It becomes clear how easy it is for things like wrappers, bottles, or plastic bags to be left behind or carried off by the wind. When a chip bag inevitably drifts into the bushes, it is an unplanned but perfect moment to talk about how even small bits of trash can affect the environment. The Explorers paid attention to what they brought and made sure nothing was left behind.



Silly faces at lunch time from Jace, Mrs. Angela and Matthew.



Journal Time!

Next, we took some time to slow down and connect more deeply with the forest through nature journaling. Lauren led us in a guided session, sharing simple techniques that helped the Explorers sharpen their observation skills and engage with the landscape in a more personal way.

We focused not just on what we could see, like the shapes of leaves or patterns in tree bark, but also on what we heard, felt, and wondered about. Lauren encouraged us to ask questions, explore curiosity, and write or sketch not only what was in front of us, but also how it made us feel. This time of reflection reminded us that nature isn't just something we learn about, it's something we can build a relationship with and observe in real time.



We passed around items the Explorers could observe right in front of them. Items included pieces of wood, snakeskin, antlers and even turtle shells. It was all very interesting!



More Memories



More Memories





Ending the day...

As we wrapped up the day, one of the highlights was when each Explorer had the chance to ring the bell on the old logging train on the Forest Festival Trail. The train is a real Climax locomotive from 1914, the kind that was used to move logs through the mountains during the early years of American forestry. It gave us a small but meaningful way to connect with the work that was done here so long ago.

Inside the museum area, we explored different exhibits and joined in a scavenger hunt. The goal was to find small animals hidden throughout the space, which kept everyone engaged and moving around.



One of the most popular stops was the real, full-size helicopter exhibit. It's the same type used to help fight wildfires from the sky and teaches visitors about how crews respond to fire in forested areas.

By the time we got ready to leave, it was clear that the day had made a real impact. We learned a lot, had fun, and left feeling more connected to the forest and the stories it holds. Until next time!

In Other News...



AUG 9, 2025

Every year FIND Outdoors has the great honor of celebrating **Smokey Bear's Birthday** here at the Cradle of Forestry. Help us celebrate his 81st Birthday!

Join us at the Cradle of Forestry as we celebrate Smokey Bear on his 81st Birthday! We'll be celebrating from 11 a.m. – 2 p.m. including:

Smokey Bear meet & greet	Obstacle Course
Smokey Bear Story Time	Crafts & Activities
Food Trucks	

Admission is free of charge for this special event.

Location: Cradle of Forestry in America, 11250 Pisgah Hwy, Pisgah Forest, NC 28768



SEPT 27, 2025

National Public Lands Day is also a "Fee-Free Day"—one of only five days a year when entrance fees are waived at national parks and other public lands. Enjoy the Cradle of Forestry for **FREE** this day!

Come explore our exhibit hall, film, gift shop and over 3 miles of paved hiking trails featuring seven historical buildings from the time of the first forestry school in America.

SOCIAL MEDIA

In addition to leaving no trace, you can make a difference by simply liking the FIND Outdoors Instagram page and following us and each of our managed sites on Facebook. At each of these social media channels, we offer engaging information which you can share with others and bring attention to our mission of stewardship, educational opportunities for all and exceptional outdoor experiences.

@FINDOUTDOORS



REMINDERS

Please make sure your Explorer brings their orange Explorers Club backpack to every trip, with their Adventure Journal packed inside. They should also wear their purple Explorers Club shirt each time we meet. These items help us stay organized and build a sense of team and identity during our outings. Wearing the shirt is especially important, so please help your Explorer remember to put it on before each trip.



LEARN MORE!

To learn more about FIND Outdoors and for a complete list of events, please scan this QR code or visit gofindoutdoors.org/events.



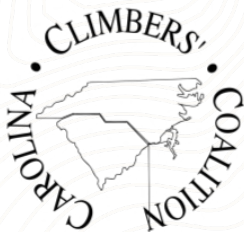
THANK YOU TO OUR 2025 EXPLORERS CLUB PARTNERS

Our community sponsors play a vital role in helping FIND Outdoors bring people together. Through their generous support of events, these partners help us create meaningful outdoor experiences, foster environmental stewardship, and strengthen connections across the region.

We're grateful for their continued investment in our mission!



JUSTICE
OUTSIDE



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