

MUD LAKE SELF-GUIDED TOUR

Mud Lake Information

At Regina Street Public School, we're fortunate to have the Mud Lake - Britannia Conservation Area located about 200 metres from our back doors. Here's what the National Capital Commission - the government body responsible for the area - has to say about it:

"A patch of wilderness in the middle of an urban setting, Mud Lake is an amazing area of forest and wetlands. Located in Ottawa's west end, Mud Lake is home to hundreds of species of wildlife, with raccoons, frogs, turtles and foxes, to name but a few. This ecologically significant urban natural landscape is also prime birding territory, with thousands of birdwatchers coming each year to observe hundreds of different species. A walk through this easy-to-access urban jungle provides an exciting escape from city life."

Tour Directions

This tour departs from Regina Street Public School. Please ensure that your students use the washroom before they leave, as there are no facilities in Mud Lake. The duration for the tour is approximately 75 minutes (although it can easily be extended or shortened based on your time limits). Students require proper clothing and footwear for the conditions (closed-toed footwear is required according to OPHEA guidelines). Teachers also require a cell phone and emergency first aid kit. If you have adequate supervision, splitting your class into smaller groups makes for a better experience. In this case, do the first two stops together and then have one group head to Stop 6 and work backwards, while the other group proceeds to Stop 3. Please familiarize yourself with outdoor learning by reading the suggested **best practices** later in this document.



Stop 1 – Schoolyard Pavement

Focus - Activating Prior Knowledge and Creating Interest

- Form a circle and make predictions about what you anticipate seeing in Mud Lake
- Silently stand in place and use senses to make observations (2 minutes)
 - What did you see, hear and smell?
 - Was the origin of observations natural or human-made?

Stop 2 - Tree Before Bike Path

Focus - Reviewing Expectations

- Stay on the path and yield to other Mud Lake visitors (remember to smile and say hi)
- Don't touch anything unless you ask an adult
- Walk (don't run) as quietly as possible
- Leave no trace
- Look carefully before crossing the bike path

Stop 3 – First Fork in Trail

Focus - Looking for Birds

- Black-capped chickadees will likely greet you as you enter the trail
- Other birds that you are likely to encounter year-round in this area include: nuthatches (watch them walk down tree trunks), woodpeckers (downy - small, hairy - medium, pileated - large)

- You'll frequently see crows, ravens, red-tailed hawks, blue jays, and cardinals and hear a variety of sparrows and warblers, catbirds, fly catchers, and red-eyed vireos
- Since 248 species of birds have been seen in or from Mud Lake and 52 species have been known to nest there, this area is one of the best birding sites in Ontario

Stop 4 – Bridge

- Take care, no leaning over water
- Try another 2 minute sit spot like you practiced earlier (discuss similarities and differences between the two locations) - you should be able to hear the rapids in the nearby Ottawa River
- On a sunny day from April to early October you'll likely see turtles basking on logs (painted, snapping, and if you're very lucky the endangered Blandings turtle)
- Check out the water for a variety of tadpoles and frogs, and the shoreline for snakes (garter and northern water)
- There are also likely to be water birds including Canada geese (please don't feed them, as they get quite aggressive), ducks (mallard and wood), herons (great blue, green, and black-crowned night)

Stop 5 – Big Rocks Lookout (stay back from edge and beware of poison ivy)

- Check out the beaver lodge and maybe even see one of the resident beavers or a muskrat swimming nearby
- Discuss the importance of the tall white pine trees (along with the beaver, they were Canada's earliest important export for ship masts and later a vital part of the Ottawa Valley's early economy)
- The resident squirrels (eastern grey and red) tend to be very active in this area

Stop 6 - The Tall Pines and Dock

- You will notice a dramatic change in plant life as you approach the stand of eastern white pine trees
- Erratic boulders are also present, these leftovers from the retreating glaciers of the ice age serve as a contrast to the sedimentary rock found throughout Mud Lake
- The woods are a nesting grounds for birds of prey, including merlin, Cooper's hawk, and screech and great-horned owls
- From the viewing platform (dock) you'll get a great view of Mud Lake and the Britannia Water Filtration Plant that provides most of Ottawa with clean drinking water

Tour Completed - Return to Regina Street Public School

Best Practices for Outdoor Learning

Whether this is your first outdoor learning experience or you are a seasoned veteran, we've included some information that should be helpful, not only on this trip, but also on future expeditions. We hope that these practices will help you make outdoor learning an important part of your teaching practice.

1. Prepare

- if possible, prepare a backpack with some basic useful supplies (i.e., first-aid kit, field guide, binoculars, cell phone/radio)
- review the learning expectations for the activity with the students before heading out
- visit the outdoor area you will use before your first visit with the class
- identify potential safety hazards before your first class visit both en route and at the destination
- make sure you are dressed appropriately for the season/weather (i.e., boots, mittens, jacket,

2. Be Safe

- discuss with students the appropriate way to interact with things found in nature using their senses
- have a “do’s and don’ts” discussion with your class relating to safety expectations
 - things to avoid and the reasons (i.e., poison ivy could cause a rash, water can be dangerous, interactions with wildlife can be unpredictable)
 - always stay with your assigned group
- be aware of board regulations concerning weather safety (i.e., extreme heat and cold)
- discuss with students how to react if an injury occurs
- let the office or a teaching partner know every time the class is going outside, and establish a method of communication with the school (i.e., cell phone or radio)

3. Communicate

- before beginning your outdoor teaching activity, discuss your safety measures and learning goals with administration
- make contact with parents prior to the activity to keep them informed and seek support, if needed
- carry a cell-phone or two-way radio to communicate with office staff
- ensure that a method of communication is established and well-understood by the students (i.e., whistle signals, verbal cues, etc.)
- ensure that students understand the importance of the “leave no trace” approach to exploration

- Mud Lake is a very popular with the public and you will likely meet walkers, photographers, or bird watchers, so it is important that students understand what to when encountering people on the trail:
 - yield the path by moving to one side in single file
 - greet others with a smile
 - be as quiet as possible and respect those that are actively engaged in animal observation or photography

4. Gather Support

- Administration
 - be clear when communicating intended learning outcomes, safety considerations and preparedness issues with your principal
 - invite your administrator to participate in your outdoor learning activities
 - regularly share your results and successes with administration
- Teaching colleagues
 - invite other teachers to observe and participate
 - share outdoor teaching resources
 - create mentoring opportunities by working with other classes
- Community volunteers/partners
 - invite parents to participate in learning experiences whenever possible
 - survey class parents to learn if they have any interests or special skills related to the outdoors that they would be willing to share with the class
 - have a means of sharing your experiences with families (e.g., website, newsletter)
 - make a point to make a connection with potential community partners (e.g., local naturalist groups, NCC)

5. Managing your class

- using groups of 6 or fewer to one “mentor” is recommended
- provide clear instructions before beginning all activities
- ensure that all children know and respect your signals to wrap up activities
- suggest a washroom break before leaving
- establish consequences for misbehaviour and follow through
- try to reserve exclusion from future trips only as a last resort unless student safety is a concern
- “leave no trace” - stay on the paths and **walk** no more than two wide (no running - save running games for the park area or school yard)

6. Be a facilitator

- encourage questioning by responding with questions that promote further thinking instead of answers that end thinking (if an answer is necessary to keep a learner motivated, ask a question about the answer to keep them thinking)
- embrace “not knowing” while demonstrating an open enthusiasm for learning more
 - being an “expert” is not necessary and can even be an impediment to when teaching through exploration and inquiry
- explicitly teach how to explore in nature - don’t assume it is a common experience for all students

7. Make it routine

- set a goal before introducing outdoor learning as a routine (e.g., commit to go once per week, once per month) and try to stick to it
- make a habit of going even when the weather is not ideal
- start with small and manageable goals - even smaller than you think you can achieve!
- have a plan for each session, but allow time for spontaneous exploration - you never know what you will encounter
- provide time for sharing upon your return