

From The Field:

StoryWalk® ~ Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

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What? Tear apart a book and post it along a path? Why would you want to do that—seems too simple and not very interesting.

These are sometimes the first responses to a StoryWalk® discussion. However, the simplicity of StoryWalks® is what makes them so compelling and wonderful. In our screen-addicted, over-scheduled society, families don't take all the time they should to read or go for a walk. StoryWalks® combine both these much needed activities in a low-cost and loved experience.

The StoryWalk® Project was created by Anne Ferguson of Montpelier, VT and developed in collaboration with the Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition and the Kellogg Hubbard Library.

Now their work has spread and many communities and organizations are sponsoring StoryWalks®.

This article outlines our experience at Squam Lakes Natural Science Center (SLNSC) with StoryWalks® and will hopefully serve as a planning guide for many more!

SLNSC has hosted a StoryWalk® for three years. The genesis of the project was when SLNSC joined forces with the Holderness town library and the town recreation department. The project advances the mission of all three

organizations by including nature stories and information, reading, and activity. Additional benefits include community strengthening, connecting the three organizations more deeply, and having the townspeople see the cooperation of the three institutions.

We chose to arrange our walk on an open field of SLNSC property, while some others choose to post the story on tree trunks in a

unteeer who created a birch arbor with the word StoryWalk® across the top to serve as a clear entrance. Additionally, a local, independent bookstore donated the copies of the books.

You need a minimum of two copies of the book so that you can dismantle the book, laminate the pages, and be able to display the pages in appropriate, chronological order. Depending on the location of your walk it may be subject to vandalism or wear and tear. We have not had to replace any pages but you may want to consider having replacements laminated and ready. We have also made certain that there is always a sign showing current sponsors and the names of the collaborating partners.

During the first year, we chose to prepare a book for the month of July and then a second book for the month of August. We have since chosen to do one book for the month of July.

There is a wonderful amount of StoryWalk® information on www.vtbikeped.org.

The Holderness collaborative is proud to have added our own touches to the original StoryWalk® concept. One such example is that we have the SLNSC summer interns read the books and develop short actions that are engaging and match the storyline. We then print these small actions on a bright colored circle, laminate them and add



photo courtesy of Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

Donated, hand-made entry sign with opening day StoryWalk® events in background.

forested area. We allow the grass to grow tall but mow an irregular, meandering path to walk the story. Challenges with this are the hot summer sun and the fading book pages that result. We have found that about a month is as long as the books can remain before they are simply too faded.

For the initial start-up we secured funding through a local bank to pay for the materials and labor. We chose to make sign posts (18 plywood rectangles on 4x4 posts stained by a volunteer). We were also able to find a local vol-

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them to the story. For example, we ask the reader to walk like a bear for the Blueberries for Sal StoryWalk®. These items have become known here as the “pink dots” and really add an additional dimension to the walk.

We open each summer StoryWalk® with a two hour open-house style event. The attendance at this event has been on the rise over the past three years and is currently around 60 people. We arrange the opening event so that the Holderness recreation department day campers are able to attend. The event includes a craft (completely planned and implemented by volunteers), the walk itself, and a snack associated with the story. For example, when we did Blueberries for Sal we served blueberries and the craft was to make a little blueberry bucket.

We also try to connect the story to a sense of place by featuring New England focused books or local authors. Thus in summer 2012 we added a book signing to the opening event which was very well received. In addition, we always make sure the StoryWalk® book is carried in our gift shop. We also mounted a mailbox near the entrance with a sign indicating we would like feedback. We keep a simple guestbook allowing people to respond to their

experience.

The public just adores the StoryWalk®. A particularly high use time is from 4PM to 6PM just before families go to dinner in town. Additionally, it is often grandparents bringing their grandchildren for a summer evening walk.

StoryWalks® are simple yet accomplish so much by encouraging reading, nature curiosity, activity, family engagement, and community building. Perhaps you will consider a StoryWalk®

for your center’s next adventure! 🌱



photo courtesy of Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

Example of SLNSC sign posts made by staff and the laminated book pages. Note the “pink dots” with extra activities.

Amy Yeakel, is the Education Program Director at the Squam Lakes Natural Science Center (SLNSC), Holderness NH. She has served in this position for over 12 years. Amy has served as President of both the New Hampshire Environmental Educators and New England Environmental Education Alliance. She is associated with the North American Association for Environmental Education, Association of Nature Center Administrators, and is assisting in the leadership effort for NH’s environmental literacy plan. She is currently working regionally on a diversity project through NAAEE and the eeCapacity project. Amy has also taken a lead role in the formation of Blue Heron School, a nature-based preschool at SLNSC.



photo courtesy of Squam Lakes Natural Science Center

View of SLNSC StoryWalk trail through the field with families enjoying the story.

Quotes from the SLNSC StoryWalk® comment box:

“My favorite part was watching (ok, and jumping along) as the boys (4&7) were fireworks. It was also very cool to be read to.”

“We’re summer visitors at Squam Lake—our children are grown—and the grandchildren haven’t arrived yet—but we enjoyed it thoroughly—even without the company of children (we’re 53 and 60!) Thanks for the lovely StoryWalk!”

“Every year I come here, I ask to go on the StoryWalk. So much fun!”

“I feel like a little kid but it was very fun. I did it three times.”

“beautiful walk... beautiful day... GREAT STORY!!! THANK YOU!! We loved the little activities, movement, and reading... the best!!”