

Overnight Trip Camp Handbook 2024



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Camp Hours:

9 AM drop-off
4 PM pick-up M. - Th. (except during overnight)
3:30 PM pick-up Friday

Camp Location:

VINS Nature Center
149 Natures Way
Quechee, VT 05059

Overnight Location:

Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve
2100 Pepper Road
Washington, VT 05675

Dear VINS Nature Camp Families,

Thank you for choosing VINS Nature Camp. Preparations are well underway for another summer of adventure and discovery.

This handbook is designed to help you plan for camp. It contains information about our policies, drop-off and pick-up, a packing list, and much more.

At VINS Nature Camp, our mission is to help young people develop the life skills necessary to be a positive force for their community and the natural world. To be successful in our mission, we need the help of both campers and parents/guardians. The most significant way you can help is by becoming familiar with our rules and policies and by talking with your child about our camp values and behavior code before their first day of camp.

As you prepare for camp, please do not hesitate to contact us with any questions. We look forward to sharing the wonders of the natural world with your child.

Warm regards,

Sarah Strew
Director Nature Camp
sstrew@vinsweb.org

Courtney Leo
Nature Camp Coordinator
cleo@vinsweb.org

Contact Information

Address: Vermont Institute of Natural Science
149 Natures Way
PO Box 1281
Quechee, VT 05059

Office: 802-359-5000 EXT: 245
Cell: 802-359-2091
Email: camps@vinsweb.org
Website: www.vinsweb.org/nature-camp
Tax ID#: 03-0231665

Who We Are

Organization

Vermont Institute of Natural Science (VINS) has been a leader in environmental education and wildlife conservation since 1972. VINS' mission is to motivate individuals to care for the natural environment through education, research, and avian wildlife rehabilitation.

We offer locally-relevant and compelling environmental education programs and services designed for a wide audience. Our programs combine environmental science concepts with hands-on exploration to build empathy for nature and empower individuals to care for local natural ecosystems.

VINS Nature Camp Mission & Philosophy

VINS Nature Camp helps young people develop the life skills and connections necessary to be a positive force for their community and the environment. By exploring the diversity of nature's living creatures and habitats, VINS Nature Camp nurtures each child's curiosity and helps them to build respectful and caring relationships with themselves, others, and the natural world.

At VINS Nature Camp, we have core values that inform all that we do from how we approach teaching and exploring the natural world, to how we interact with others. Those core values are:

- We recognize that curiosity and a love of learning are crucial to lifelong engagement.
- We believe that every individual has a capacity for scientific thinking and ecological awareness.
- We recognize the power of the individual to make a positive impact on the world.
- We believe in treating human and non-human nature with the utmost respect.

By recognizing these core values, VINS Nature Camp creates an environment that is inclusive, nurturing, and exploratory. Campers develop friendships, learn new skills, and grow more comfortable in a natural setting. Our goal is that when they leave VINS Nature Camp, they will have a better understanding of themselves and their relationships with the human and natural world.

General Camp Information

Camp Locations

VINS Nature Camp runs camps at locations in both Vermont and New Hampshire.

Your camper will be participating in camp(s) held at the VINS Nature Center in Quechee, VT. The VINS Nature Center serves as the center of VINS' organizational operations. Our 47-acre campus features nature trails, exhibit spaces including the Forest Canopy Walk, observation platform, outdoor classroom, and 17 state-of-the-art raptor enclosures. The campus' trails and paths wind visitors through a floodplain forest, along the Ottauquechee River, and through an upland meadow.

Your camper will be participating in camp(s) held at the Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve in Washington, VT - In 2013, Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve, an "off the grid," self-sustaining, seasonal property was bequeathed to VINS by good friends. This historic property consists of 327 acres of managed forest, walking trails, and conserved land. The site is graced with several striking structures including a charming, 19th-century farmhouse and a large, weathered, historic barn. It also

supports several streams, wetlands, and a pond. VINS has built rustic amenities on the property including composting toilets, an outdoor shower, and two tent platforms.

Age Groups

Camps are designed for specific age groupings starting with preschool through grade 8. VINS uses the following designations to identify camps and campers by age groupings:

- *Peeps* are children age 4 & 5 or entering kindergarten
- *Fledglings* are children entering grades 1-3
- *Falcons* are children entering grades 4-6
- *Eagles* are children entering grades 6-8

Camper Supervision

Camps will be staffed to comply with or in some cases exceed American Camp Association staff/camper guidelines as follows:

- *Peeps*: 1 instructor to 6 campers
- *Fledglings*: 1 instructor to 6 campers
- *Falcons*: 1 instructor to 7 campers
- *Eagles* day camps: 1 instructor to 7 campers
- *Falcons & Eagles* overnight camps: 1 instructor to 6 campers

Campers will be under the direct supervision of a camp instructor at all times.

Leader-In-Training

VINS Nature Camps' Leader-in-Training Program involves teens in our camp community by offering them the opportunity to volunteer in our fun, recreational setting while giving them experience working with groups of children in the outdoors. This specialized volunteer program is offered to individuals who are ages 14 through 17 and who will be entering or returning to high school in the fall.

Your camper's group may have up to two L-I-Ts assigned to them for the week. L-I-T volunteers are closely supervised by VINS Nature Camp staff and are designated responsibilities as appropriate which may include leading group games, assisting specific campers, or helping to lead lessons/activities for the week.

Required Forms

VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form

The [VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form](#) must be completed and returned at least **two weeks before** your child's first day of camp. This important information helps us prepare to welcome your child to camp and must be on file with VINS Nature Camp before any child is allowed to participate in a VINS camp.

Your child's Instructors will review these completed forms before the start of each camp week to become familiar with any allergies or special health-related needs of campers.

This form can be completed electronically in our online registration portal and your child's information will be saved and copied from season to season and year to year. Alternatively, if you prefer, you may still fill out a hard copy of our form and email or mail it to VINS Nature Camp. A link to this form is included in your registration confirmation or can be downloaded from the Camp

Forms page on our website at <https://vinsweb.org/nature-camp/forms/>. If you submit a hard copy of our Health and Emergency Care Form, you will need to fill out a new copy each calendar year.

If you indicate a special need or health concern for their child on the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form, the Director Nature Camp may contact you directly to discuss your child's particular needs and accommodations VINS can make to best serve your child.

Drop-off & Pick-up

Camper drop-off and pick-up is located at the east end of the VINS Nature Center parking lot.

Important: As you enter and exit our camp locations **there is a set speed limit of 10 mph** to ensure the safety of campers, visitors, and wildlife.

Drop-off Time: 9:00 AM except when your camper is on the overnight trip)

Pick-up Time: 4:00 PM Monday – Thursday, 3:30 PM Friday except when your camper is on the overnight trip)

You must provide VINS with a list of all adults who are authorized to pick up your child **INCLUDING** yourself. **Each person must show an ID at the point of pickup.** The authorized pick-up list is included in the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form.

If you are running late to drop off or pick up your camper email camps@vinsweb.org, call VINS' main line: at (802) 359-5000 or text or call the VINS Nature Camp Cell Phone: (802) 359-2091 to notify VINS.

Visits

For the safety and privacy of all our campers, visits from parents/guardians or other family members or friends during the camp day are not permitted. There is designated time for parents/guardians to get to know and communicate with their camper's instructors each morning and afternoon during drop-off and pick-up. Visits to VINS' Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve during the overnight trip are not permitted.

Late Arrivals/Early Departures

If your camper will be arriving late or leaving early, please notify VINS Nature Camp at least one day prior so staff can plan accordingly. Contact the Director Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email camps@vinsweb.org. All late drop-offs or early pick-ups must check in with staff at the VINS Welcome Center/Nature Store. **Adults may not go directly to any location on the VINS Nature Center campus to retrieve their camper.**

Due to the nature of this program, VINS is unable to accommodate late arrivals or early departures during the overnight portion of this camp. If you have any questions please contact Director Nature Camp at (802)359-5000 x245.

A Day at Camp

Daily Schedule for Camps

9:00 AM	Drop-off When campers arrive at camp they will be checked in by a VINS Nature Camp staff member, then directed to their respective camp meeting spaces. Parents/guardians may walk their camper to their meeting space. Instructors will have some ongoing activity to occupy campers until the whole group has arrived.
9:15 AM	Official Week Kick-Off and Welcome (Mondays) Group Games (other days of the week) Each Monday campers gather at our Campfire Ring to welcome everyone to camp then briefly review behavior code and expectations. Other days of the week, camps usually gather on the playing field for all-camp games.
9:45 AM	Guided Exploration on Daily Theme – Built-in snack time During this 2+-hour activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. All camps plan to take about a 20-minute snack break during this activity block.
12:00 PM	Lunch and Free Play Lunch generally happens at each camp's meeting space however, Instructors may decide to take the group on a picnic lunch on the trail or somewhere else at the camp location. Following lunch, campers will have designated time for supervised free play.
1:00 PM	Continued Exploration of the Daily Theme During this 2.5-hour activity block, Instructors lead more lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities vary according to age of the campers and camp topic. On Fridays at 2:30 PM, the whole camp gathers for a closing campfire. Campers share a favorite memory from the week and roast a s'more.
3:30 PM	Wrap Up Activity Reflection is an important part of the day. It is a good opportunity for campers to review what they learned and share their experiences.
4:00 PM (3:30 PM Friday)	Pick-up/Free Play Parents/guardians are encouraged to check in with their child's Instructors for a review of the day. Campers must be signed out before leaving camp at the end of the day. To sign out their camper(s), adults picking up a child must present a photo ID to staff and initial their camper out for the day on the camp roster.

Schedule for Overnight Trips

7:00 AM	Wake Up
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7:30 AM	Breakfast & Games Half the group helps to get breakfast ready.
9:00 AM	Guided Exploration on Daily Theme During this 3-hour activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day. Activities may include hiking on the trails.
12:00 PM	Lunch Lunch will happen at the Main House area.
1:00 PM	Exploration of the Daily Theme During this 4-hour activity block, Instructors lead lessons and activities related to the theme for the day.
5:00 PM	Free Time & Dinner Prep Campers will have designated time for supervised free time while half the group helps to get dinner ready.
6:00 PM	Dinner
7:00 PM	Evening Activity Evening activities may build on the theme for the day or may be a fun game or activity to promote team building or group rapport. Activities can include skits, improv. games, hide-and-seek, or games that are best played in the dark.
8:30 PM	Ready for Bed
9:00 PM	Quiet Time in Tents
9:30 PM	Lights Out

Swimming

All swimming that takes place at the pond at the Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve will be done under the supervision of certified Lifeguards and adhere to all safety guidelines presented during the certification course.

Bathrooms and Showers

The Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve has restroom facilities for boys and girls with sinks and composting toilets. Campers will not be showering on this overnight trip, however, there is a shower in the event it is necessary.

Overnight

There will be one tent for the boys and one for the girls attending camp.

Except for going to the bathroom or on some planned nighttime activity, campers may not be out of their tents after Quiet Time at 9:00 PM.

Packing List

Your child should come to camp in casual, comfortable clothes, ready to hike, run, and likely get wet and dirty. Your camper should be dressed for the weather and be prepared to spend most of the day outdoors.

What to Pack/Wear¹

- Day pack to carry belongings
- Lunch
- One or two snacks
- Water bottle (water is available for refills)
- Complete change of clothes
- Sturdy walking shoes (ex. sneakers or closed-toed sandals)
- Insect repellent and sunscreen
- Baseball cap or sun hat
- Sweatshirt or lightweight jacket
- Raincoat
- Rain boots/shoes, if desired
- Empty plastic bag for bringing home wet clothes
- Medications (complete list of medications sent to camp must be provided in the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Form)
- Bathing suit and towel²
- Water shoes, if desired (ex. aqua socks, water sandals, or old sneakers)

What to Pack for Overnight Trip

Campers should come with all the items listed above as well as:

- Overnight bag to carry belongings
- Comfortable camp shoes (ex. Close-toed sandals, sneakers, or slippers with rubber sole)
- A flashlight and/or headlamp
- A sleeping bag
- A pillow
- Sleepwear/pajamas
- A mess kit: 1 bowl, 1 plate, 1 mug, 1 fork, 1 spoon, and a bag or container to hold them
- Warm layer for top and bottom (ex. jacket, heavy fleece or sweatshirt & sweat pants or fleece pants)
- Long underwear for top and bottom or similar type of warm layers
- Face towel
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, and other personal care items as needed (i.e. deodorant, contact lenses, feminine products, etc.)

Optional Items

These items may come in handy but are not required. Please feel free to pack them if desired.

- Pocketknife (Camper's knives must be turned in to camp staff upon check-in. Campers will be allowed to use knives during designated times and/or activities as determined by camp staff.)
- Field guides, binoculars, compass, or magnifying lens
- A folding/camping chair
- Camp lantern
- Cards or other games for free time
- Book for free time

What NOT to Pack/Wear

- Video games, iPods, cell phones, or any other electronic toys or devices. This is a device-free environment. (Cellular phone service is limited at this location; camp staff will have working cell phones in the event of an emergency.)

¹ VINS has a small supply of camping equipment such as sleeping bags, headlamps, and long underwear to lend camp participants. Equipment and clothing loans will be made on a first come first serve basis. Please contact Director Nature Camp at 802.359.5000 x 245 to learn more or to reserve your items.

² This camp location does not have a swimming facility, however there are options for water play on hot days.

- Personal items or toys that could get lost or that are not camp-appropriate, including items that could be considered a weapon (Exceptions will be made for pocket knives)
- Flip flops or open-toed sandals
- Nice clothing that should not get wet or soiled
- Perfume, scented lotions, shampoos, or soaps (We do have an outdoor shower facility onsite and VINS will provide bio-degradable soap and shampoo)
- Food of any kind (exceptions can be made for special dietary needs)
- Prescription or over-the-counter medications not listed in the VINS Nature Camp Overnight Health and Emergency Form

Be sure to label all of your child's belongings. At the end of the camp season, all unclaimed lost and found items will be donated to the L.I.S.T.E.N. Center in Lebanon, NH.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellent

Parents/guardians are responsible for sending any topical skin applications, such as sunscreen or insect repellent with their camper for the week. Sunscreen and insect repellent are strongly recommended. With permission from parents/guardians, VINS camp staff may assist children with the application of sunscreen or insect repellent. Permission for assistance applying sunscreen or insect repellent is given on the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form.

Phone Use

Campers should not have phones, electronics, or other valuables. If they do come with any of these items VINS Nature Camp will provide safe, secure storage for them and return them at the end of the camp week.

Camp Instructors will keep phones with them at all times but will only use them in the event of an emergency.

Transportation Policies

VINS will be responsible for transporting campers to and from the Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve camp location unless you make other drop-off and pick-up arrangements with the Director Nature Camp.

All operators and passengers must wear seatbelts and/or other child restraint devices when riding in a VINS or VINS-rented vehicle. Parents/guardians must provide booster seats or other child restraints (if needed) when children are to be transported by camp staff.

VINS will have copies of driver's licenses on file of any staff member driving VINS Nature Camp participants. Campers will never be transported in a staff member's personal vehicle.

Photo Release

Parents/guardians will be asked to sign a photo release permitting VINS to use photo images of campers in newsletters, on our website, and in brochures and other promotional materials. If a parent/guardian has refused the photo release, VINS staff will not take photographs of that camper or if they do, must delete or crop out the image of the child.

Health Care Policies

Medication

If your camper will be taking any prescribed or over-the-counter medications while at VINS Nature Camp you must notify camp staff by completing the medications section in the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form.

You must provide any medication your child regularly takes and give that medication directly to your child's Camp Instructors. You should expect to spend a few minutes at drop-off on Thursday morning reviewing medication schedules with camp staff. At that time, VINS Nature Camp staff will inventory the medication that each camper is bringing on the overnight trip. Upon return from the overnight trip, any remaining pills will be counted and recorded again before being returned to parents/guardians.

Your child's Camp Instructors will remind and/or assist your child in taking his or her medicine according to your instructions. Each time a camper takes their medication, while on the overnight trips, it will be recorded on that camper's Medication Record sheet. Your child's Medication Record will be made available to you at the end of the overnight trip for review if desired.

All medication brought by campers will be kept in a locked safe during the overnight trip.

Epi-Pens, inhalers, and any other lifesaving medications or medical devices will be carried in the first aid kit of your child's Camp Instructor at all times.

Illness and Minor Injury

Please do not send your child to camp if they are ill.

If your child is injured or becomes sick or upset during the camp day VINS Nature Camp staff will provide any necessary care, including First Aid. If the injury or illness limits the child's ability to participate in camp activities, a camp staff member will contact you to pick up your child.

You will be notified by VINS Nature Camp staff at the end of the camp day of any minor First Aid administered to your child that does not limit their ability to participate in camp activities.

Emergencies

All VINS camp staff leading our overnight camps are certified in Wilderness First Aid and CPR and are trained to respond to emergencies. In the event of a health emergency, you will be contacted immediately. If VINS Nature Camp staff are unable to reach you, your emergency contact will be notified.

If necessary, your child will be transported by ambulance to the nearest appropriate medical facility. A camp staff member will remain with your child, including during transport, until you or your designated emergency contact arrives.

If an emergency or last-minute change may influence pick-up times or locations, parents/guardians will be contacted by the Director Nature Camp via email broadcast as well as by phone.

Food

You should plan to pack a lunch as well as one or two snacks each day for your camper. Additionally, please send your camper with a refillable water bottle each day. Hydration is important and for your camper's convenience, we have a filtered water filling station available.

Staff will supervise campers during lunch and snack times to encourage them to eat a good portion of their lunch and ensure that campers are not sharing their food with others. Campers should be informed not to share food for health and safety purposes.

Instructors will be aware of any food allergies in their group and take steps to ensure that campers avoid contact with their allergen. **PLEASE NOTE: VINS is NOT a peanut/tree nut-free site.** VINS cannot control the contents of lunches that our public visitors and other campers bring to our campsite and nature center. Children with severe nut or other food allergies will be provided a separate table to eat at and camp staff will check the lunches of other campers sitting with them to ensure their allergen is not present.

Overnight Meals

Campers are encouraged to eat the food that is provided by VINS Nature Camp on the overnight trip. If your child has specific dietary restrictions or food allergies, please be sure to indicate that in the [VINS Nature Camp Dietary Information Form](#).

The menu will be designed to accommodate common dietary restrictions including vegetarian or vegan diets. If you need to pack specialty items such as food substitutes please keep these alternative food items to a minimum and be sure to pack that food separately from your child's overnight belongings. Food is not allowed in the tents with campers.

If you have questions regarding the menu or sending food with your camper please contact the Director Nature Camp at camps@vinsweb.org or call (802) 359-5000 x245.

Behavior Policies

VINS Nature Camp is committed to providing each camp participant, whether a camper, Leader-In-Training, or staff member, with a safe, nurturing camp experience that accommodates individual needs and learning styles.

VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code

To maintain the safety and quality of our camp program, we expect that everyone understands and adheres to our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code. Please review the VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code with your child before their first day of camp.

VINS NATURE CAMP BEHAVIOR CODE

VINS Nature Camp's Behavior Code is based on the Five Finger Contract used by many adventure and challenge-by-choice programs. In our behavior code, we embrace five values, represented by each of the five fingers, which direct how we conduct ourselves at VINS Nature Camp.

- The **Pinky Finger** is the smallest and easiest to hurt which is why it represents **Safety** in our behavior code. When we look at our pinky, it reminds us to look out for the emotional and

physical safety of others and ourselves, by following safety rules, using kind language, and keeping our hands to ourselves.

- People traditionally wear wedding bands on their **Ring Finger** to represent their **Commitment** to their partner. VINS Nature Camp expects participants commit themselves to the camp experience by participating in the activities of the day, being willing to try new things, and being open to facing challenges. This allows campers to get the most out of their camp experience.
- At VINS Nature Camp, the **Middle Finger** represents **Respect** for each other, ourselves, and the world around us. Camp participants practice working with others and seeing the capacity for good in everyone. While at camp, participants are also encouraged to think about ways to respect our camp environment.
- The **Pointer Finger** points; people often use it to point at others; at VINS Nature Camp we point this finger at ourselves. This finger reminds everyone about their **Responsibility** as part of a group. Everyone gets to choose how they behave. At VINS Nature Camp, children are taught to make their own choices and to take responsibility for their actions.
- “**Thumbs up**” is a universal gesture of approval. At VINS Nature Camp, the thumb reminds us to keep a positive attitude, encourage others, and **HAVE FUN**. VINS Nature Camp curricula are designed so that campers will have fun while exploring nature and through those experiences build a better understanding of and appreciation for the natural world.



Behavior Management

VINS Nature Camp staff are trained in behavior management techniques and work with campers to resolve issues with their conduct. However, certain behaviors are deemed unacceptable at VINS Nature Camp; including, but not limited to, intentionally harming others, bullying, using abusive language, or disobeying camp rules established at the start of the camp week.

In the event of unacceptable behavior, staff may issue the camper a ‘Strike’. VINS Nature Camp operates on a three-strike policy when dealing with discipline issues:

1st Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified of the behavior and ensuing ‘Strike’ immediately. VINS Nature Camp staff will work with parents/guardians and the child to prevent the behavior in the future and make a plan for the rest of the week.

2nd Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified of the behavior and ensuing ‘Strike’ immediately and camper will be removed from camp activities for the remainder of the day. VINS Nature Camp staff will continue to work with parents/guardians and the child to prevent the behavior in the future and make a plan for the child’s return to the camp group the following day.

3rd Strike – Parent or guardian will be notified to pick up the camper immediately. The child will be removed from camp for the remainder of the week. No refund will be given in the event of an expulsion.

If you have any questions about our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code or our policies regarding discipline or expulsion, please contact Director Nature Camp, at 802-359-5000 x245.

Cancellation Policy

May 1, 2024, is the deadline to cancel your camp registration and receive a full refund (less a \$35 cancellation fee).

If you must cancel your child's camp registration after the deadline, refunds will be issued according to the following schedule:

- Cancellations made **at least one month** before the first day of your camp session will receive a 50% refund.
- Cancellations made **less than one month** before the first day of your camp session are not eligible for a refund.
- VINS will not provide refunds if a child misses one or more days of camp due to dismissal, illness, unexpected family obligations, or any other unforeseen factor.

VINS reserves the right to cancel camp programs due to low enrollment. If a camp is canceled due to low enrollment, VINS will work to place campers in other camps or refund the entire camp fee.