

Overnight Camp Handbook 2025



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Camp Hours:

9:00 AM Monday - 3:30 PM
Friday

Drop-off/Pick-up Location:

VINS Nature Center
149 Natures Way
Quechee, VT 05059

Camp 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 of Nature Camp
ssrew@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
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Email: camps@vinsweb.org
Website: www.vinsweb.org/nature-camp
Tax ID#: 03-0231665

Who We Are

Organization

The 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 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. Our goal is that campers develop friendships, learn new skills, and grow more comfortable in a natural setting.

At VINS Nature Camp, our core values 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 upholding these core values, VINS Nature Camp strives to create an environment where every camper, volunteer and staff member feels valued for who they are and what they bring to our community. VINS is committed to ensuring that our camp program is free of harassment or discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin, disability, genetic information, or any other category recognized by law. We are committed to respecting the rights and dignity of all by providing training for our staff who in turn model this culture of inclusion with campers.

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 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 groups starting with preschool through grade 8. VINS uses the following designations to identify camps and campers by age group:

- *Peeps* are children age 4 & 5 and entering Pre-K or 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 staff to camper ratios recommended by the American Camp Association

- *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 (L-I-T) 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.

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 Monday

Pick-up Time: 3:30 PM Friday

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.**

If you are running late to drop off or pick up your camper email camps@vinsweb.org, call VINS' main line: (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 to the Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve during the camp week are not permitted.

Late Arrivals/Early Departures

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

A Day at Camp

Daily Schedule for Overnight Camps

7:00 AM	Wake Up	
7:30 AM	Breakfast & Chores	
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 & Free Time	
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.	
4:30 PM	Wrap-Up Activity/Group Debrief Reflection is an important part of the day. It is a good opportunity for campers to review what they learned or the activities they did that day.	
5:00 PM	Free Time & Dinner Prep Campers will have designated time for supervised free time while half the meal prep chore group gets 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 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.

Chore Groups

Campers will be assigned to a chore group for the week. Each morning there will be a designated time for group chores. Daily group chores include meal prep/clean-up, bathroom clean-up, and main house clean-up. Each chore group will rotate their chore assignments daily.

Campers are expected to keep their tent area tidy throughout the week.

Bathrooms and Showers

The Old Pepper Place Nature Reserve has one outdoor shower for camper use. Showers will be kept to a minimum. VINS will provide biodegradable soap for campers to use in the outdoor shower.

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.

What to Bring to Camp

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

Be sure to label all your child's belongings so that lost items can be returned to you.

What to Pack/Wear¹

- Day pack
- Overnight bag to carry belongings
- Water bottle
- Complete change of clothes for 5 days
- Sturdy walking shoes (ex. sneakers or hiking boots)
- Comfortable camp shoes (ex. close-toed sandals, sneakers, or slippers with rubber soles)
- Insect repellent and sunscreen
- Baseball cap or sun hat
- Medications (complete list of medications must be provided in the [VINS Nature Camp Overnight Health and Emergency Form](#))
- A flashlight and/or headlamp
- A sleeping bag
- A pillow
- Sleepwear/pajamas
- Towel
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, and other personal care items as needed (i.e. deodorant, contact lenses, feminine products, etc.)
- 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
- Rain jacket (rain boots and rain pants a plus if you have them)
- A mess kit: 1 bowl, 1 plate, 1 mug, 1 fork, 1 spoon, and a bag or container to hold them
- Journal or small notebook
- Swimsuit, if desired (swimming in a small pond may be an optional activity during the week)

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 the Director of Nature Camp at 802.359.5000 x 245 to learn more or to reserve your items.

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

- Cell phones, tablets, or other smart devices including any wearable tech.
- Items/toys of high monetary or sentimental value
- Items/toys that are not camp-appropriate, including items that could be considered a weapon (Exceptions made for pocket knives)
- Flip flops or open-toed sandals
- Nice clothing/jewelry 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 Health and Emergency Form

Laundry

In the event of nighttime accidents or menstrual leaks, VINS Nature Camp will take appropriate measures to get camper clean linens including asking parents to drop clean sleeping bags or sheets off at VINS Nature Center, laundering camper's linens, or lending one of our camp sleeping bags. VINS Nature Camp will ensure the camper will have clean bedding for the night.

Phone Use

Campers should not have phones, smart devices, or other electronics. VINS Nature Camp is a device-free environment. If campers do bring any of these items to camp, we will provide safe, secure storage for them and return them at the end of the camp day or overnight trip.

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

Food

You should plan to pack a lunch as well as one or two snacks each day for your camper. Our campers are outdoors and moving most of the day, we encourage families to pack high energy, high protein foods that will sustain campers for the whole day. If campers eat all the food packed for them and still report being hungry, we may offer them a snack item stocked by VINS.

Hydration is important as campers move about in hot weather. Please send your camper with a water bottle each day. Our camp sites have access to potable water for refilling water bottles.

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 groups 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 Overnight 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 of Nature Camp at camps@vinsweb.org or call (802) 359-5000 x245.

Sunscreen and Insect Repellant

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

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 of 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 of the VINS Nature Camp Health and Emergency Care Form. You must provide any necessary medication for your child and give that medication directly to your child's Camp Instructors.

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

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 the morning of the overnight trip 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 regular medications 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 determine if your child should remain at camp for the week.

Any time first aid is administered to your child, it will be recorded in the first aid log including, any time an existing injury is cared for such as redressing or cleaning. At the end of the week, if you would like to view your camper's first aid log you may do so.

Due to the remote setting of this camp, VINS makes an exception to our over-the-counter medication policy. VINS Nature Camp staff at Old Pepper Place will have access to basic over-the-counter medicine to be used on an as-needed basis for campers to alleviate minor illness or injury. This medicine is kept in a locked safe. VINS must have your permission to dispense these over-the-counter medicines to your camper. Any time over-the-counter medication supplied by VINS is dispensed, it will be recorded in your camper's first aid log.

Emergencies

All VINS camp staff members are certified in First Aid and CPR and are trained to respond to emergencies. In the event of a health emergency or serious injury, 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. Camp participants will never be transported in a VINS staff member's personal vehicle. 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 of Nature Camp via email broadcast as well as by phone.

Support and Accommodations

VINS Nature Camp is committed to providing each camp participant with a safe, nurturing camp experience that accommodates individual needs, abilities, and learning styles.

We work to keep camp programs as accessible as possible given the limitations of our facilities, terrain, the scope of our staff training, and our camper to staff ratios. If you are registering a camper with medical or behavioral support needs, please contact the Director of Nature Camp so that we can discuss a plan to provide your camper with a positive, safe, and empowering camp experience.

If you are registering a camper with a disability, please contact the Director of Nature Camp to discuss accommodations and support that VINS Nature Camp may be able to provide to support your camper in our unique camp environment.

Behavior Policies

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 believes in ensuring a safe, welcoming community in which all our camp participants can thrive. We recognize that everyone can make mistakes and approach behavior management through the lens of fostering growth within our campers. Our staff are trained to help campers take ownership for their mistakes, recognize what they could do differently, and make a plan to prevent that behavior in the future.

At any time, if behavior is unsafe (to self or others) including, but not limited to, causing physical harm, bullying, leaving the group, or using abusive/discriminatory language, a camper will be removed from the activity and required to take some time to refocus, make a plan to move forward, and make amends, if appropriate, before rejoining their group.

VINS Nature Camp recognizes that parents/guardians are our best allies in helping campers work to meet our expectations for behavior at camp. VINS Nature Camp staff will communicate and work closely with parents/guardians to develop plans for managing negative or unsafe behavior at camp.

If negative or unsafe behaviors continue or campers are unwilling to make an effort to meet our expectations, a camper may be dismissed from VINS Nature Camp at the discretion of the Director of Nature Camp. No refund will be given in the event of dismissal from camp.

If you have any questions about our VINS Nature Camp Behavior Code or our policies regarding behavior management, please contact the Director of Nature Camp, at 802-359-5000 x245 or email camps@vinsweb.org.

Cancellation Policy

May 1, 2025, is the deadline to cancel your camp registration and receive a full refund (less a \$65 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.

Questions/Comments/Concerns?

Thank you for taking the time to read through our policies. If you have any questions about this handbook, please contact the Director of Nature Camp at 802-359-5000 x245 or email camps@vinsweb.org.

We look forward to another wonderful summer of VINS Nature Camp!

