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Life

Outdoor Education

Published: Wednesday, February 23, 2011

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BY JON MAURER
Rome Observer

BOONVILLE — Winter continues to linger on for central New York. The novelty of the snow has dissipated and people glue themselves to weather forecasts wondering when and where the next storm is going to hit.

One place that is enjoying every inch of the snow is Potato Hill Farm Outdoor Education Center. Located in Boonville at 11903 Potato Hill Road, Potato Hill Farm is an educational haven for children. Entirely funded by an anonymous donor, the farm beautifully blends education with aerobic fitness for children in kindergarten to 12th grade. It is a popular destination for field trips and encourages schools to take the opportunity to show their children a different educational experience.



Staff Photo by JON MAURER — Donovan Middle School eighth graders after snowshoeing at the new Black River campus in Forestport.

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"It is a way to get children outside, even during these cold winter months," said Potato Hill Farm's manager of program development, Elaine Hage.

"Not only are they exercising and experiencing the outdoors, but they are also learning more about their environment."

Conceived in May of 2008 and situated across 168 acres, Potato Hill Farm has several things to offer. During the winter season, there is cross country skiing and snowshoeing taking place on the grounds. During the spring and summer, hiking, mountain bike riding and nature explorations are conducted. All supplies needed for these activities are provided by Potato Hill Farm.

"There is really no excuse for schools not to get children up here," Hage said.

"They are getting a great education, free of charge. We provide gloves, hats, boots, snowshoes, bicycles, skis anything they need we have." Even the busing to the farm is free.

Animals also reside on the Potato Hill Farm main campus. One may see wild turkeys, deer, rabbits and foxes while on a cross country ski excursion or mountain bike trail ride, but other animals taken care of on the grounds are more unique.

The farm contains a variety of animals including alpacas, donkeys, Welsh mountain sheep and goats. Pack horses take visitors on carriage or sleigh rides, depending on the season. The Scottish highland cattle, acquired two years ago, are the "wooly mammoths" of the farm, as they lumber around the pastures with their thick fur and long horns. Guinea hens are also kept on the grounds. Very unique in appearance, these birds actually serve as watchdogs, alerting those around if danger is nearby

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"There are close to 200 animals on the farm at any given time," Terry Ritz, the farm's animal caretaker, explains. "We are always looking to add more." Continued...

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