



Livingstone Range  
SCHOOL DIVISION

# LAND-BASED CAMP 2022



Report June 2022

# LRSD/Actua Land-Based Camp 2022 Report

From May 2 to May 6, 2022 a group of 20 students ranging from Grade 7 to 11 participated in Livingstone Range School Division's inaugural Land Camp, which this year was held in Castle Wilderness Provincial Park. Four years of planning, significant support from Actua, as well as partnerships with local Elders and community groups, made it possible to offer this transformational experience to our students.

During the Actua/LRSD Land Camp, the beauty of the park was undeniable as the snow had just melted and spring was returning to the valley. Immersed in this stunning backdrop, students experienced a variety of outdoor activities and took part in traditional ceremonies and learning.



We were fortunate to have several elders and knowledge keepers share their stories and cultural history with the group while on the land.

Joe Eagle Tail Feathers, an Elder-in-Residence at Livingstone Range School Division and community leader, lead the camp along with his mother Nora First Rider and sister Joyce Mountain Horse. Joe is an interpreter and a translator, and has been a ceremonial leader in the Blackfoot community since 1995. Joe is an expert on traditional medicines and has focused his life's work around the promotion of spirituality, healing, wellness, and community engagement.

*Joe Eagle Tail Feathers*



Jaron Weasel Bear, the Programs Coordinator for Piikani Traditional Knowledge Services also lead activities and shared teachings during the camp. Jaron is a singer, drummer, storyteller, and a level three instructor from the traditional games for the Traditional Games Society. Jaron is known throughout the community for coordinating powwows, leading tipi raising, and sharing teachings about Blackfoot culture.



*Jaron Weasel Bear (Right)*

Under the guidance of these two community/cultural leaders, the students learned about and took part in smudging ceremonies, spirit plates, tobacco offering, traditional stories, tipi raising, traditional games, and built miniature replicas of birch bark canoes. One of the main themes of the camps centered around the return of flora to the land during the spring. Joe Eagle Tail Feathers taught the students about local plants that Blackfoot People have been using as traditional medicine for thousands of years. Students were given the opportunity to handle many of these medicines, learn about how local plants were prepared into medicines and even taste many of the medicines they had learned about. Each night, the students had the opportunity to reflect upon their learning.

Livingstone Range School Division Place-Based Supervisors Joel Gamache and Jason Clifton worked under the guidance of local elders and knowledge keepers to plan and carry out a meaningful and engaging itinerary for students.



During the first day, students were welcomed to the camp by Joe, his mother, and his sister who led the group in an opening blessing, and smudged around a fire. During this fireside ceremony a small bird came and landed on one of the student’s heads. The bird stayed with us for some time, flying around the circle of people and returning to the boy's head one more time before flying away. A few days after this event, the boy received a traditional Blackfoot name, Bird Plumb, which was conferred upon him by Joe.



A traditional meal of elk stew, fry bread, and berry soup was served for lunch and Joe taught the students about spirit plates and led the group in this traditional ceremony. That afternoon, Joe began his teachings of traditional medicines. Joe brought many samples of medicines and plants, passing each sample around for all of the kids to see and many of the medicines were sampled by the group.

In the late afternoon, the students were introduced to several different forest games. After supper, the group played games and then bonded around the fire.

On the second day, the students hiked a short distance to the bank of the Castle River where they were led in a tipi raising by Jaron Weasel Bear.

The students followed Jaron's instructions closely while the tipi was raised. The group then sat inside the tipi, ate lunch, while listening to traditional stories and teachings associated with the land and Blackfoot traditions associated with tipis.



Later that afternoon and into the evening the students learned about and participated in traditional games. The students had a great time and were very tired that evening.





On the third day of the camp, Steph Elder and Walker English from the Destination Exploration joined us to lead the students in STEM activities for the morning. Destination Exploration (DE) is the youth STEM outreach program at the University of Lethbridge and a local network member of Actua that aims to provide all youth with experiences that create self-awareness of their abilities and the enjoyment they find in STEM as a base for life-long learning. Steph is the Program Coordinator who has been with DE since 2019 and has a degree in

Civil Engineering and Management. Walker is a summer instructor working towards a degree in Kinesiology and is back for his second summer.

To start off the day, students had an introduction to the micro:bit — a small microprocessor with multiple sensors and components and is a perfect way to code for the first time. The students used fundamentals of math and directional coordinates to block code and build a digital compass.



As the morning progressed, the group moved outside for a biology activity. Students learned about DNA structures and the unique attributes that help differentiate characteristics of organisms. They then performed the steps to extract DNA from a strawberry and discovered the similarities to that of humans.



In the afternoon, Place-Based Supervisors Jason Clifton and Joel Gamache led the students on a challenge hike to summit the Carbondale Lookout. Jaron Weasel Bear initiated the hike with a prayer and accompanied the group leading a tobacco offering from a viewpoint midway through the hike.





During the evening, the students continued to work on their birch bark canoes, and bonded over snacks and games.



Following breakfast on the fourth day of the camp, students traveled to Beauvais Lake where they spent the day exploring the land and canoeing. Among the wildlife that joined us at the lake that day were a variety of ducks, Canadian geese, sandhill cranes, osprey and several eagles.





That evening, the group completed their birch bark canoes and Joel Gamache led the group in a smudging ceremony in a Cree tradition delivered from his Métis perspective. There was a perceivable stillness to the mood of the students that night as they completed their final journal entry. Tired from the various outdoor activities, the students were very reflective as they contemplated the learning that had taken place during the camp.



On the final day of camp, the students woke up to a special breakfast. Camp was cleaned up, bags packed and conversations carried about the happenings that occurred over the past days. The students each received a special decorative paddle provided by Actua. The students took time to write messages and sign each paddle which would serve as a piece of memorabilia which would go home with each student.

Several special guests including Joe Eagle Tail Feathers, Joyce Mountain Horse, LRSD Associate Superintendent Chad Kuzyk, Board Trustee Greg Long, Valery Archibald, Walker English, and Steph Elder from the University of Lethbridge joined the camp for the closing ceremony. A final smudge, blessing and story preceded the closing remarks. Again, a sense of solemnness was tangible among the group as the closing ceremony proceeded. Following the ceremony, and after all the guests had left, Joel and Jason said goodbye to the students who were loaded on the bus for departure. The students left the camp to travel home changed by the experiences of the past week. The students returned home different than they had left. Immersed in the week-long camp, the students created memories and learning that will last a lifetime.



In the years to come the Place-based Supervisors will work closely with our elders to build upon the land camp and expand the experience for our students. We would like to send out appreciation and thanks to all of the individuals and organizations that contributed to making our first land camp so impactful and meaningful. Thank you to all of the members of Actua who made this event possible. The value of this experience cannot be measured.