

# Early Explorers

## How can we create a community that unites and takes responsibility for the quality of our local parks?

- Engage students from a young age in local park stewardship by using parks as outdoor classrooms.
- Integrate user-friendly mapping technology to excite children about the natural resources our parks hold.
- Highlight the efforts of community volunteers using story maps.

## Why care about parks?

Parks provide a number of ecosystem services that benefit the well-being of people. Our project focused on 4 aspects of cultural ecosystem services:

- Educational opportunities that raise awareness of environmental science issues
- Outdoor recreation
- Aesthetic appeal
- Forest bathing to improve health and reduce anxiety

In order to appreciate these natural areas they must be maintained, but by who?

## The Plan

Next Generation Science Standards encourage the use of 3D models which explain a phenomena.

- At the elementary level, shift indoor class experience to explore plants and animals within their natural environment by mapping natural features of Blazer’s Trail.
- Highlight the impact of expeditionary learning using story mapping.
- Share story maps as a group and reflect on conservation strategies that would impact their community in positive ways.



Park Name	Location	Intervention Needed
Blazer’s Trail	Avon, CT	“Can we make these woods another classroom?”  (create trail map with elementary students)
Elizabeth Park	Hartford, CT	Time lapse photos showing growth from winter to spring as a result of volunteer efforts.  (show impact of multiple generations volunteering)

## Interactive Trail Mapping & Next Steps

In October, a small group of students, our AP, and I explored Blazer’s Trail during recess. One month later on November 13, the 4th graders learned how to use the Track Kit GPS App to map out the trail and take pictures of this natural classroom. Below are photos of the interactive map that the students made.

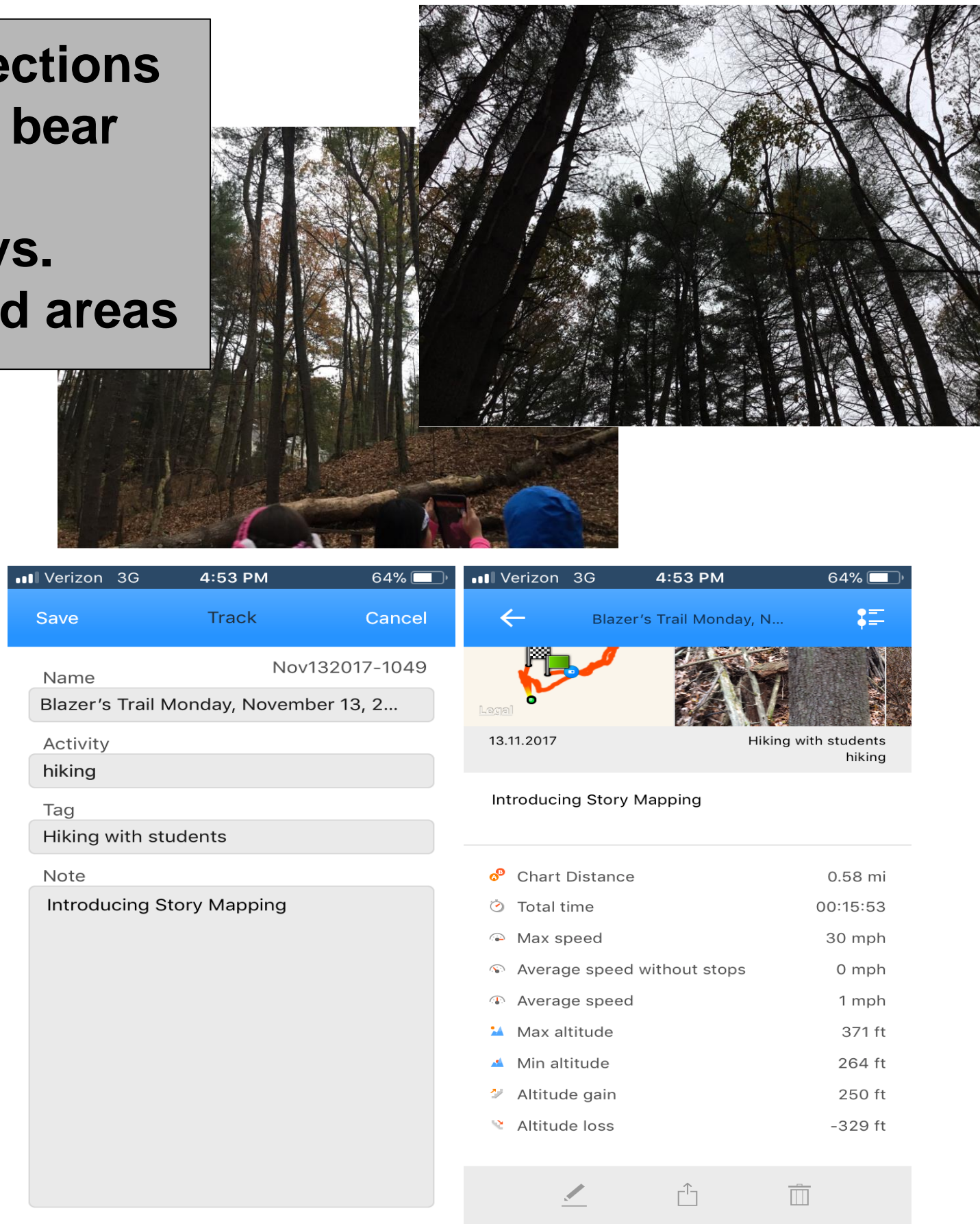
### Take Aways:

One student team titled their interactive map as “Fun!” → effectiveness of using tech & outdoor classroom to engage children in the environment.

Students gained an understanding of authentic tools scientists use to gather data.

Made connections to recorded bear sightings in developed vs. undeveloped areas

**Next Steps:** use data and images to create a story map of Blazer’s Trail  
See story maps at:



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