PumpkintownSC.com

UPSTATE EXPLORER SERIES



Winter Mission Pack

10 outdoor missions for curious kids, ages 3 to 12

This pack belongs to _____

- 10 missions with two levels each
- Animal Tracks Spot-It sheet
- Explorer log
- Winter bingo card
- Where to try it in the Upstate
- Completion certificate

Before you head out

A quick guide for parents, grandparents, teachers and anyone else tagging along.

How the pack works

Each mission has two versions. **Little Explorers** is for ages 3 to 6 and works great with a grown-up helping. **Trailblazers** is for ages 7 to 12 and asks kids to observe, record and compare.

You do not need to finish them in order or in one day. Most missions work in a backyard, a neighborhood park or a state park.

What to bring

- This pack and a clipboard or hard book
- Crayons with the paper peeled off
- A pencil and an outdoor thermometer if you have one
- Warm layers, a hat and gloves
- A thermos of something warm and a snack

Winter safety notes

- **Dress in layers.** Cotton stays cold once it gets wet. Pack a dry pair of socks.
- **Never walk on ice.** Upstate ponds rarely freeze thick enough to hold a person.
- **Watch for ice near water.** Rocks by creeks and waterfalls get slick on cold mornings.
- **Look, do not pick.** Leave nests, plants and rocks where you found them in parks.
- **Wear a bright color.** Some hunting seasons continue into winter on public lands.
- **Daylight is short.** Sunset comes early, so start in the morning or at lunchtime.

Make it stick

Let kids lead. Ask "What do you notice?" before giving answers. When a mission is done, have them check the box and mark it on the Explorer Log. Finish 7 or more missions to earn the certificate at the back.

1 Track Detective

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Find an animal footprint in mud or sand. Draw it in the box.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Find 3 different tracks. Match them to the Spot-It sheet and guess which way the animal went.

2 Bark Rubbing Gallery

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Put this page on a tree trunk and rub with the side of a crayon.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Rub 3 different trees. Is the bark smooth, bumpy, peeling or deeply grooved?

3 Feeder Count

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Watch a bird feeder for 5 minutes. Make a mark for every bird.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Watch for 15 minutes and tally each kind. Every February, families everywhere count birds for the Great Backyard Bird Count.

Northern cardinal (red)	
Carolina chickadee (black cap)	
Tufted titmouse (gray crest)	
Dark-eyed junco (gray and white)	
Other birds	

Draw what you found

4 Evergreen Hunt

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Find 3 plants that are still green in winter.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Find each evergreen below. Count the pine needles in one bundle: 3 for loblolly, 5 for white pine.

- ☐ Pine (needles in bundles) _____
- ☐ American holly (spiky leaf) _____
- ☐ Christmas fern _____
- ☐ Moss _____
- ☐ Eastern red cedar _____

Draw what you found

5 Waterfall Power

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Visit a waterfall from the viewing area. Is it loud or quiet? Draw it.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Winter rain makes falls bigger. Count the tiers, rate the roar from 1 to 5 and sketch it.

Stay behind railings and on marked paths. Never climb on rocks near a waterfall.

6 Nest Spotter

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

With the leaves gone, look up! Find a nest in the bare trees.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Find 3 nests. Is it a bird nest of twigs, or a squirrel nest of leaves? Guess how high each is.

Bird nest (twigs and grass)	
Squirrel nest (ball of leaves)	
Tallest guess (feet)	

Draw what you found

7 Frost Scientist

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

On a cold morning, find frost or ice. Draw its shape.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Compare a sunny spot and a shady spot. Where did the frost last longer? Why?

Temperature (if you have a thermometer)	
Frost in the sun? Melted at what time?	
Frost in the shade? Melted at what time?	

Draw what you found

8 Shadow Tracker

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Stand in the sun. Is your shadow longer or shorter than you?

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Winter sun sits low in the sky. Measure your shadow at noon with string, then compare it to your height.

My height	
My noon shadow	
Longer or shorter? By how much?	

Draw what you found

9 Marker Hunter

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

Find a sign or marker that tells a story about the past. What picture or shape is on it?

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Find a historical marker and copy one fact. What happened here long ago?

1.

2.

3.

4.

Draw what you found

10 Warm Animal Detectives

☐ Mission complete

Little Explorers 3 to 6

How do animals stay warm? Find one clue.

Trailblazers 7 to 12

Tally signs of winter survival. Birds puff up their feathers to trap warm air.

Puffed-up bird	
Burrow or hole in the ground	
Squirrel leaf nest	
Animal tracks	
Bird at a berry bush	

Draw what you found

Winter Bingo

Cross off each square when you spot it. Get five in a row, then try for a blackout.

Pinecone	Holly leaf	Northern cardinal	Animal track	Frost
Bird nest	Moss	Christmas fern	Woodpecker	Squirrel leaf nest
Bare tree	My breath cloud	Winter Explorer	Long shadow	Acorn cap
Ice in a puddle	Red berry	Feather	Hole in a tree	Lichen
Pine needle bundle	Bird at a feeder	Mountain view	Sweetgum ball	Something white

Little Explorers: a grown-up can read the squares aloud. Trailblazers: try to get a blackout in one outing.

Spot-It: Upstate Animal Tracks

Eight tracks you might find in winter mud or the occasional Upstate snow. Prints are not shown to scale.



White-tailed deer

Two pointed halves like an upside-down heart. Very common on Upstate trails.

☐ Found it



Raccoon

Five long fingers like a tiny human hand. Look in mud near creeks.

☐ Found it



Gray squirrel

Small front prints with four toes. Bigger back prints with five land in front.

☐ Found it



Eastern cottontail

Two long back feet in front, two small round front feet behind. Makes a Y shape.

☐ Found it



Gray fox

Small, neat oval with four toes. Claw marks often do not show.

☐ Found it



Wild turkey

Three long toes pointing forward and one short toe behind. Bigger than your hand.

☐ Found it



Opossum

Toes spread out like a star. The back foot has a thumb that sticks out sideways.

☐ Found it



Dog or coyote

Like a fox print but bigger, often with little claw marks at the tips of the toes.

☐ Found it

Where to try it in the Upstate

Every mission works close to home, but these spots make it easy. Find full family guides with distances, restrooms and parking tips at **pumpkintownsc.com/kids-adventures**.

#	Mission	Try it at
1	**Track Detective**	Conestee Nature Preserve, Greenville; Nalley Brown Nature Park, Easley, a day after rain
2	**Bark Rubbing Gallery**	Hatcher Garden and Woodland Preserve or Milliken Arboretum, Spartanburg
3	**Feeder Count**	Your own backyard, or a nature center feeder at a state park
4	**Evergreen Hunt**	Table Rock Lakeside Trail; Oconee State Park
5	**Waterfall Power**	Falls Park on the Reedy, Greenville; Cedar Falls Park, Fountain Inn; Wildcat Wayside Falls
6	**Nest Spotter**	Doodle Trail, Easley to Pickens; Swamp Rabbit Trail, Greenville
7	**Frost Scientist**	Any grassy park on a cold, clear morning, such as Unity Park or Cleveland Park
8	**Shadow Tracker**	Any sunny, open field at noon
9	**Marker Hunter**	Oconee Station; Campbell's Covered Bridge; Pelham Mill Park
10	**Warm Animal Detectives**	Lake Placid Trail at Paris Mountain State Park; Lake Hartwell State Park

Trail conditions, hours and access can change. Check with the park before you go.

My Explorer Log

Write down where and when you finished each mission.

#	Mission	Where	Date	Done
1	Track Detective			☐
2	Bark Rubbing Gallery			☐
3	Feeder Count			☐
4	Evergreen Hunt			☐
5	Waterfall Power			☐
6	Nest Spotter			☐
7	Frost Scientist			☐
8	Shadow Tracker			☐
9	Marker Hunter			☐
10	Warm Animal Detectives			☐

My favorite winter discovery

What I want to find next winter:

PUMPKINTOWN SC · UPSTATE EXPLORER SERIES

Certified Winter Explorer

This certifies that

_____

completed ____ of 10 Winter Missions in the Upstate of South Carolina by looking closely, listening carefully and exploring outside.

_____ _____

Explorer's guide Date

Next adventure: the Spring Mission Pack at pumpkintownsc.com/kids-adventures

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