

## Pinhead Institute hosts Bridge Camp

REGAN TUTTLE, Planet Contributor | Posted: Friday, August 14, 2015 5:20 pm

Several hikers and mountain bikers on Telluride's Valley Floor were pleasantly surprised to come upon children working with saws and other tools to create a bridge last week.

Through Pinhead Institute's Bridge Camp, eight to nine kids aged 8 to 11 collaborated to plan, design and build a permanent bridge in Telluride, located on single-track about 10 minutes southeast of the parking lot on Highway 145 at the bottom of Lawson Hill.

Pinhead Institute is a Telluride-based science education center and an affiliate of the Smithsonian.

Pinhead Institute Program Directors Claire Carver and Patrick Sharlow said the new bridge will help preserve the Valley Floor landscape and guard against erosion.

Carver said an experience like Bridge Camp can inspire kids to explore careers in science, technology, engineering and math, and at the same time it can teach kids about contributing to their community.

"Every time a biker comes by and thanks us, it makes an impression on these kids and makes them realize they are helping and making a difference where they live," Carver said.

Last Monday, kids began Bridge Camp by using a computer program to explore structural analysis and cost estimates of bridges, and Tuesday they built balsa wood bridge models and tested them.

Bridge Camp kids rode bikes out to the construction site on the Valley Floor Wednesday and looked at other existing bridges on the single-track to prepare for Thursday and Friday's execution of their design.

In Pinhead's one-week camp, kids learned about erosion, cost effectiveness, water rights, liability



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Kids aged 8 to 11 build a bridge on Telluride's Valley Floor through Pinhead Institute's Bridge Camp. [Photo by Regan Tuttle]

and tool safety. Children had to bring supplies to the construction site via wagon. They also had to get their hands dirty, digging out part of the ditch and cutting lumber. Carver said the kids learned about building in a natural environment and what it means to have a low impact.

“I loved the computer part,” Telluride Intermediate School fifth-grader Raef Buttars said. “And it challenged us to see if we could get a really cheap bridge, and if a truck could get across it, and mountain biking was fun.”

“I liked planning and making the model, and I am excited to walk across the bridge when it’s done,” Sophia McNamara said.

Carver said that Pinhead Institute worked with the Town of Telluride to obtain permission for the project and to determine the location. The town also donated the wood and sent Open Space Ranger Josh Williams, a town employee, to come supervise and support bridge construction. Several parents of kids participating in the camp also contributed.

“This area is highly used and the ditches cause erosion,” Carver said. “The bridge will help bikers and other users and the coolest part is the ownership and citizenship that kids take part in.”

Carver said that Bridge Camp means a lot to the kids, especially because the results last longer than the week they spent together working.

“These kids will come with friends and or parents and say, ‘I built this bridge,’” she said. “It’s a lasting, valuable contribution.”