



Exploration, Observation & Creating Connections

by Treven Hooker

On March 7, 2017, 13 students from Bisbee High School and their teacher Nicole Baker arrived at Coronado National Memorial for their first Seeds of Stewardship outing. Our mission was to explore the crest of the Huachuca Mountains.

I introduced myself and the Arizona Trail. Students were surprised to learn about the 800-mile that bisects our state. When I told them they were going to be hiking on that trail they became very excited. I asked if any students had been to the Memorial before, and only a few raised their hands. We drove up the steep and windy road to Montezuma Pass, and after a safety briefing, we began our hike.

The day was beautiful and clear, revealing the full colors of this grassland desert. Agave dotted the mountainsides with deep green and blue tones, and their massive stalks punctuated the landscape. Some were purple, others were brown and dead, and those in bloom showed wild and wonderful orange flowers. Oak and pine trees provided much needed shade, but also allowed for unhurried relaxation. This opportunity allowed us to look far out into the distance without sunlight striking our faces. We observed seven turkey vultures riding the thermal pockets high into the sky. We discussed how to properly identify them from almost any distance based on their flight and colors. Students were interested in their adaptations, and why they behave the way they do. Students made excellent observations and guesses.



After two hours of hiking and studying, we settled down for lunch on top of a saddle. This location provided incredible views and offered a wealth of opportunities for observation and discussion. We talked about the neighboring mountain ranges and the different ecosystems that exist between and within them. The view of the international border brought up the topic of migration, and we discussed the North American jaguar, an animal who is using these mountain ranges to migrate

between Mexico and Arizona. Students were fascinated by the idea of a big spotted cat living in the mountains near their homes.



After lunch we began our descent back down the trail. As is often the case, students noticed more on the way down than up. Lizards, snakes and red-tailed hawks were spotted, keeping everyone

motivated to see what they might find around the next corner. We talked about how important these places are for plants, animals and people, and how trails provide healthy escapes from urban environments.

Back at the trailhead, I talked about how native and modern cultures use yucca for primitive fire making. Using supplies I brought from home, we practiced strap drill and bow drill techniques. I explained the chemistry and ingenious technology of both. Through a lot of trial and error, students successfully “busted” an ember, a thrilling and exciting achievement. This experience wrapped the day up perfectly, for the students explored the mountain ridges, studied its landscapes, and practiced primitive skills like native cultures did thousands of years ago.

The students loaded back up into the van, and promptly fell asleep as we drove back to school. The first expedition of the semester was over, and two to come would expand their knowledge and connection to this special place.



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