



## A Hike Through Time

by Treven Hooker

On April 8, 2017, six students and their teacher Kevin Mathews from Basis North Tucson gathered in the front of the school ready for a warm April adventure. Our mission was to venture into Ironwood Forest National

Monument to explore and experience ancient native cultures through the artifacts they left behind. Students were prompted to use critical thinking to deduce why people lived in this area, and why they created the artwork and utilitarian objects they did.

Our drive through Tucson Mountain Park was a wonderful route with steep mountainsides covered in saguaro cactus and other Sonoran Desert vegetation. Our drive led us to creosote and mesquite forests, separated by soft-sanded dirt and warm breezes. Almost immediately the ecology transformed into lush Sonoran Desert. We unloaded from the van, and began to discuss ethics and our responsibility as visitors while exploring this terrain.

Almost instantly we noticed numerous potsherds scattered across the landscape. We spent almost an hour slowly and carefully walking with hawk eyes searching the ground. The wonderful paintings and designs on the potsherds sparked conversation about how indigenous cultures produced such pigments and paint. Altogether, the creation of the pottery was a large topic of interest, considering no modern tools were used in any aspect of the process. In many ways, students were actively discovering history. Our slow, focused wondering led us to the western hills. Here, a secret location of petroglyphs and strange tonal rocks stands alone. We discussed the petroglyph-covered rocks, stacked like bricks on Cocoraque Butte. How were they made? Who made them? Why? When? These questions sparked dozens of answers, all of which were very valid and probable.



We ascended the butte, carefully moving as we examined petroglyphs along the way. I asked the students to use their imagination, and their interpretive skills to decipher what stories the artist may have been trying to tell. Some stories included battles with extra-terrestrials, or the first introduction of Spanish explorers, while others saw snakes and other desert residents.

Lunch was devoured at the top. The sun was intense, but the views may have been of even greater intensity. Beyond the endless desert valleys were the humble Tucson Mountains, shadowed by the great Santa Catalinas. The Rincon Mountains peeked out from the distant east, the Santa Ritas to the south; the Quinlan and Baboquivari Mountains to the west. With food occupying our mouths, our ears were free to listen. Aside from the occasional dove, the surroundings were eerily quiet. I



explained that the desert at noon is when most desert residents are asleep, or resting until the intense heat of the day subsides.

With the hot sun in mind, we all decided to follow the local tradition and escape the desert heat. We explored the low valley for about a half-hour before finally heading out. Our walk back was spent concluding our theories and ideas about the native cultures that thrived in this area. We also assessed and examined the desert ecology, and just how fruitful this area was when year-round water flowed in abundance.

Once in the car, A/C was turned on high. A new respect for modern technology was felt by the cooling air and it did not take long before each student was asleep, exhausted after a full day in the desert sun. We may have only walked a few miles through Ironwood Forest National Monument, but thousands of years were traversed by students today which is an adventure they may never forget.



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