



Back to the Basis

by Treven Hooker

On May 6, 2017, seven students from Basis North arrived at school ready for an adventure in the Santa Rita Mountains. We drove for one hour south of town, through the charred remains of the recent Sawmill Fire.

Through the blackened landscape, we made it to Gardner Canyon Road and on to the Arizona Trail. Our mission was to help maintain and revitalize a segment of the trail south of the trailhead.

Zach MacDonald, the Assistant Trail Director for the Arizona Trail Association, met us out there, providing the tools, knowledge and skill to direct our energy. We had a safety talk, covered the basics of tool use, wildlife protection, and overall hazards when working on trails in the backcountry. We started together down the trail, stopping only to demonstrate how to properly use the tools we had been given.

The first stop came when we crossed a mesquite tree that had grown lush and full into the trail. I explained to the students that by keeping trails clear and clean we protect the surrounding landscapes from off trail hikers.

Students cleaned and pruned the mesquite tree, then we hiked on to the next obstacle – a sprout of catclaw acacia – and students put their Pulaskis and pick mattocks to work in removing the flesh tearing beast respectfully.

After a large impeding branch required a saw demonstration, students felt they had the experience necessary to begin the real work. We crossed a wonderful stream and hiked a series of switchbacks before finding our project location. The group split into two, with the first taking charge of pulling debris and loose foliage over undesignated trails. Using a MacLeod, they cut and smoothed the designated trail so visitors won't get confused. The other group was tasked with a difficult reroute job, cutting a new trail, removing massive boulders, and leveling banks and washed out drainages. This work took a considerable amount of focus, strength, and humility.





At noon, we took a break from the hot sun and found security under the wide canopy of an



oak. Lunch was removed from our backpacks, and soon shoveled into our bellies. It is surprising how hungry youth become after hard work outdoors. Students found water almost soul quenching, as it replenished the fuel necessary for operation. We talked about the benefits of this work, and what careers await youth with this type of

experience. Once we finished eating, the students eagerly picked up their gear to finish our projects. The crown on our project was a long dam composed of large rock and boulders built by the students to funnel water away from the trail.

Our sights were then set on installing a water bar which we had removed from another segment of the trail. With the help of students, we dug a narrow ditch and removed the largest movable boulder I have ever encountered. With foot stomps and a pick mattock head, we hammered the water-bar securely into the ground.

With our projects complete, we began to hike back. Before we could make it to the vehicle, rumors of water pools down a wet creek excited us too much, forcing us to drop our packs and take off in search of the desert's gold.

It wasn't long before we found green pockets of life underwater. Red rock scrambling and limestone sliding took us to the edge of the water. As we peered in, a Sonoran mud turtle was spotted, and carefully captured for students to observe. After it was briefly observed, it was released back into its cool aquatic desert world.

This was the last outing of the semester for Basis North with the Seeds of Stewardship program, and it was one of great accomplishment and adventure.



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