



Sharing Discoveries in Coronado National Memorial

by Treven Hooker

On May 19, 2017, 50 4th grade students from Coronado Elementary School met at the Coronado National Memorial. This was the last expedition of the semester for this school, causing every student to boil with excitement. The large class was split into three groups (Golden Eagles, Jaguars and Big Horn Sheep) to accomplish a massive day of exploration.

The Big Horn Sheep ventured into the arroyo that carves along the bottom of the mountain, journaling and drawing plants and animals they found. The Golden Eagles hiked up to Coronado Cave to help remove trash, and explore the deep, dark labyrinth. This report is about the Jaguars, the group of 15 students who climbed Coronado Peak to observe its ecological properties, and explored arroyos in search of animal tracks. Our mission was to use our five senses to understand this wonderful landscape.

Our adventure began by discussing just what the five senses were. Students raised their hands eager to share their knowledge, explaining what they use them for, and how they work. I asked the students to close their eyes, and focus on their breath. After everyone checked in, we tried to focus and only observe one sense at a time. Once everyone felt connected, we circled a large soaptree yucca and began to examine. One sense at a time, students observed, felt, smelled, listened and even tasted the yucca. After examination, students used their critical thinking skills to explain what their senses were telling them. Why it is shaped a certain way, why it has that color, what its relatives might be. This captured the students attention and spurred their imagination.



Once we felt we understood our senses and how to use them, we loaded up into the vehicles. Students were thrilled to drive the short dirt road up to Montezuma Pass. We unloaded the van and circled up at the trailhead. We discussed safety, and the possibilities of seeing snakes on the trail. Students listened well and understood what to do if a snake was spotted. We also discussed leadership and how to move in a group when on an expedition. They listened attentively, waiting like a rubber band to be released into the beautiful wilds. We hiked along the yellow grasslands, past oak trees, agave, yucca, and many other wonderful plants. The students split in two groups, some were feeling the thrill of burning muscles and lungs as they raced up and the down trail. Others were hypnotized by the beautiful plants and animals, stopping constantly to inspect and inquire.

At the top, I instructed students to find something that was interesting to them and stimulated their senses. After about five minutes each student returned with a hidden treasure. One at a time, students were instructed to come in front of the group and present their findings. They would interpret how their five senses understood their object. If a student did not want to disturb an

object, they brought the group out to observe it. We talked about how to be an effective listener, how to be a respectful audience, and how to ask good questions.



Students presented on wonderful finds like cicadas, yucca seeds, flowers, lady bugs, rocks, leaves, and exoskeletons. Each presentation was five minutes or more, and was very thorough. Metaphors were encouraged, as I reminded students that imagination is key to being a naturalist. Once they were done fully reporting on their five senses, the audience asked great questions to help the presenter think deeper, and to better understand the presenter's object. Every student was very thrilled to present and observe,

and some students who initially refused became eager to share.

Once everyone was finished we hiked back to the van, and drove to a low arroyo. There, we met Bryon Lichtenhan from Sky Island Alliance. Bryon brought with him an array of skulls and fur to show the youth. One replica skull was that of a jaguar – a rare cat that has been documented in the mountains of southern Arizona! After the animal introduction, Bryon then gave a demonstration on how to track animals. The students were focused and excited. Soon they were turned loose to see what kind of tracks they might find. Students reported signs of deer, javelina, coyote and bobcat in the sand.



Students were tired, but fulfilled from the day. The entire class circled up and a big thank you was exchanged. Together we celebrated before sending them off back to school, where this adventure will become just another wonderful story about their incredible experience in Coronado National Memorial.

This Seeds of Stewardship outing made possible by an Active Trails grant from



**Active Trails grants are funded through the generous support of the
Coca-Cola Company and the Coca-Cola Foundation**