In cooperation with the Arizona State Office of the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), the Arizona Trail Association (ATA) is proud to announce the release of the Arizona Trail Junior Explorer Handbook. This educational publication is intended for youth ages 12-16, but kids and adults of all ages will find much to learn and enjoy within its 20 colorful pages. It will inspire readers to get out on the trail to experience the natural wonders between Mexico and Utah, and learn more about the biodiversity that makes Arizona unique.

The Handbook is a virtual adventure from border to border, and each section highlights different geographical areas, including the Arizona-Sonora Borderlands, Sky Islands, Gila River, Mogollon Rim, San Francisco Peaks, Grand Canyon and Arizona Strip. These sections are richly illustrated with the unique plants and animals that are found nearby, and activities that support Arizona science standards at the 6th – 8th grade levels. Just a few of the activities participants are encouraged to do include creating your own watershed (teaching the importance of water awareness and conservation); making a biotic community chart (demonstrating the variety of life at elevations throughout the state); tracking felines such as mountain lions, bobcats, ocelots and jaguars (encouraging awareness of subtle signs along the trail); cream-filled cookie plate tectonics (explaining how the earth’s forces shape the land); drawing a sound map (encouraging seldom-used senses to experience the environment); and many more.

The Handbook also includes Junior Explorer Questions that encourage critical thinking about natural processes, environmental issues, and how to affect positive change. These questions can be answered online and all participants receive a Junior Explorer patch for completing activities and answering questions. Patches are sent through the mail at no cost to participants, along with a full-color map of the AZT.

The first printing of Junior Explorer Handbooks is estimated at 32,000, thanks to support from the BLM and supplemental funding from the US Forest Service and National Park Service. Handbooks are made available to youth free of charge and will be distributed at numerous outlets statewide, including BLM field offices, US Forest Service offices, National Park visitor centers, select Arizona State Park locations, Western National Parks Association gift shop, Arizona Trail Association office, The Summit Hut and special events throughout the year. They will also be mailed to individuals, schools and youth groups upon request. A digital version of the handbook can be viewed online and printed from home, too.

To learn more, visit www.aztrail.org/juniorexplorer/
Dear Friend of the Arizona Trail,

Autumn is my favorite season in Arizona. From the golden grasslands of the south to the changing colors of the central mountain ranges, to the snow-capped peaks up north, this might be the best time of year on the Arizona National Scenic Trail. Hopefully you are able to find many opportunities to get out and enjoy the 800+ miles between Mexico and Utah.

When you’re on the AZT over the next few months, you’ll probably notice the impacts from this summer’s storms. Some sections of trail were completely obliterated by the monsoon season that was immediately followed by an unusual hurricane season. Repairing the damage will require considerable resources, so I am inviting you to help.

Please report overgrowth, downed trees and unpleasant trail conditions to the Trail Director and Regional Stewards through www.aztrail.org; join us for upcoming trail work events, which are advertised on our Events Calendar online; and donate to our Trail Operations Fund by mailing a check or making a donation online. Working together we can assess the areas of greatest need, get boots and gloves on the ground, and pay for professional trail crews to repair the stretches that are beyond the ability of volunteers. Your investment of time and dollars benefits thousands of outdoor enthusiasts (and wildlife) every year.

We have put more energy into making the Arizona Trail News a truly comprehensive resource. Inside these 12 pages you’ll find lots of interesting people, places, events and news. And since we can’t fit 800+ miles of information into one dozen pages every season, please stay tuned to Arizona Trail happenings through our website and Facebook. The more you know the more you’ll realize what an incredible resource the AZT is, and how hard the ATA is working to protect it.

Never forget that you are an important part of the Arizona Trail. Volunteers, stewards, members, donors, business partners, legacy partners and our small but dedicated staff all work together to maintain, promote, protect and sustain the Arizona Trail as a unique encounter with the land. The trail would not exist without you.

Enjoy this beautiful season on the AZT,

Matthew J. Nelson
Executive Director

P.S. Please share this newsletter with others and invite them to participate in the Arizona Trail experience!

The Arizona National Scenic Trail

Our Vision...
...a continuous, non-motorized trail traversing 800+ miles from Mexico to Utah, linking deserts, mountains, forests, canyons, communities and people.

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To Print or Not to Print?
Want to receive the Arizona Trail News by email instead?
Send us an email at ata@aztrail.org and we’ll email directions on how to read the full-color version of the newsletter online. The “paperless” option saves the ATA printing and postage expenses so we can direct more resources toward the trail.
In September, Arizona’s Governor declared a state of emergency when Hurricane Norbert slammed into Arizona. Nearly three inches of rain fell near Phoenix in a single storm, flooding highways and leaving tens of thousands of people without electricity. It was just one of many storms that affected areas throughout the state between July and September.

In the dry Southwest, rain is always a welcome element. But when long periods of drought are followed by intense storms, impacts to trails can be devastating. Despite its sustainable design and frequent maintenance by dedicated trail stewards, the Arizona National Scenic Trail suffered from this summer’s brutal weather.

As if rain falling like a fire hose wasn’t bad enough, erosion along the AZT was made significantly worse from the many wildfires that burned on or near the Arizona Trail earlier this year (and over the past few years). The result is degraded trail conditions and vegetation choking the trail corridor. Even areas that were trimmed by volunteers in the springtime have grown back with a vengeance. It’s going to be a long, arduous season of trail maintenance.

That’s where you come in. We know you care about the Arizona Trail, but do you care enough to volunteer a few days per year or donate a few dollars to help our Trail Operations Fund? Your support has never been more important than right now.

The vast majority of the AZT was constructed by volunteers, and is maintained by those who delight in keeping the trail corridor safe for hikers, mountain bikers and equestrians. Some of these are volunteer trail stewards who care for specific segments of trail (typically 3-12 miles in length) while others are folks who attend trail work events held throughout the year. Many individuals reach out to Regional Stewards and offer to help with a particular part of the trail that is important to them.

If you, your family, hiking club, business, or any collection of motivated individuals would like to help repair the damage from this summer’s devastation, we’d like to hear about it. And if you don’t have time or ability to help, but care about the Arizona Trail as the amazing resource it is, then please consider making a donation today. With your help, we can not only restore but improve the Arizona National Scenic Trail for all.

For projects beyond the reach of volunteers or that require specialized skills and/or heavy machinery, the ATA employs professional trail crews to do the hard work. Sometimes these are youth crews who learn valuable skills while working with hand tools in remote regions of the trail, and other times they are mechanized crews. Both are a necessary part of trail maintenance. And both cost a lot of money. Each year, the ATA dedicates a large portion of its Trail Operations budget to trail crews. Your help is needed in helping to fund this effort, as much of our 2014 budget has already been exhausted.

Donations can be made online through PayPal or by sending a check to the ATA. If you would like to specifically dedicate your donation to trail operations, just note that on your check or in the comments section of the PayPal transaction. We will put 100% of your donation into the ATA’s website: www.aztrail.org/at_stewards.html. You can also check the ATA’s Events Calendar online (www.aztrail.org/calendar.html) to see what organized events are already scheduled. Often times, trail work events are a result of trail users reaching out and offering to help, so reporting on current trail conditions is extremely important. GPS coordinates, photographs and a description is greatly appreciated and assists our volunteer corps in addressing priority needs along the trail.

The AZ Trail to Go App for your smartphone is another valuable tool to use, as it was specifically designed to allow trail users to report on trail conditions and problem areas. You can download it for free here: AzTrailToGo.azurewebsites.net.

Building the Arizona Trail took an enormous amount of time and effort, but the hard work is far from over. Now that we have a completed trail from Mexico to Utah, let’s keep the momentum going to maintain and sustain the Arizona Trail for present and future generations.

A long summer of intense storms has negatively impacted many passages of the Arizona Trail. Segments that boasted sinuous singletrack earlier this year are now badly eroded and in desperate need of help.

In the dry Southwest, rain is always a welcome element. But when long periods of drought are followed by intense storms, impacts to trails can be devastating. Despite its sustainable design and frequent maintenance by dedicated trail stewards, the Arizona National Scenic Trail suffered from this summer’s brutal weather.

A mountain biker pushes his way through the thick vegetation along the AZT corridor near Antelope Peak. This normally rideable passage is now choked with catclaw acacia, mesquite and prickly pear.

To volunteer, get in touch with a regional steward and/or local trail stewards near you through the ATA’s website: www.aztrail.org/at_stewards.html. You can also check the ATA’s Events Calendar online (www.aztrail.org/calendar.html) to see what organized events are already scheduled. Often times, trail work events are a result of trail users reaching out and offering to help, so reporting on current trail conditions is extremely important. GPS coordinates, photographs and a description is greatly appreciated and assists our volunteer corps in addressing priority needs along the trail.
The friendly town of Superior is the Gateway Community to a stretch of the Arizona Trail that will delight hikers, mountain bikers, and equestrians alike! Whether you’re looking to spend a couple hours or a couple days on the trail, the Picketpost Trailhead (six miles west of Superior on Highway 60) is a great place to start. For the premiere experience, take the time to travel both the Alamo Canyon and Gila River Canyons passages south from the trailhead, about 38 miles in length. The trail swoops through incredible stands of saguaros, colorful canyons, and contours along the Gila River on its way to Kelvin-Riverside.

The monolith of Picketpost Mountain towers over the trail and can be seen for miles. The summit can be reached by a steep two-mile scramble from the Arizona Trail, where a mailbox full of summit logs and a wrought-iron bench await. Plan on spending time on top to soak up the incredible views.

Superior was the first Gateway Community to build a connector trail from the Arizona Trail into town. The Legends of Superior Trail (LOST) travels six miles through the ruins of historic Pinal City and through Queen Creek on its way to the Arizona Trail. The area is rich in mining history and an interpretive brochure takes you through the different points of interest on the LOST.

After an outing on the trail, stop for tasty treats at Felicia’s Ice Cream downtown or choose from a number of delicious restaurants such as Jade Grill, Porter’s Cafe or Los Hermanos. The town celebrates the natural beauty and history of Superior each February with the Legends of Superior Eco-Tourism Festival, and next year’s event will be held on February 21. The town is eagerly awaiting the renovation of the historic Magma Hotel, originally opened in 1912 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

There’s no shortage of places to explore near Superior, from the cliffs of the Apache Leap to colorful wildflower blooms on Peachville Mountain. Rock climbers can explore many routes in Queen Creek and canyoneers can rappel the plunge pools within Devil’s Canyon. For a more relaxed outing, don’t miss the Boyce Thompson Arboretum, where you can learn about the fantastic plants of the world’s deserts.

Superior is a prime destination most of the year, especially during the cooler seasons of autumn and winter.

For more information about the town and its services, check out the Gateway Community page at: www.aztrail.org/gateway/superior.html or refer to page 322 of Your Complete Guide to the Arizona National Scenic Trail.
LF Ranch: An Oasis in the Wilderness

by Sirena Dufault

Your trip through the wild and rugged Mazatzal Wilderness on the Arizona Trail isn’t complete without a stop at the LF Ranch. The ranch was homesteaded in 1909 by the Fuller family. When the Mazatzal Wilderness was designated in 1964, the ranch and its 37,000 acres that straddle the East Verde River were “grandfathered” in. In 1976 it was bought by the Pratt family, who own and operate the ranch to this day. They manage 160 head of cattle on the Bull Springs Allotment.

There’s no easy way to get to the ranch – the closest access is a four-mile hike or horseback ride from the locked wilderness boundary gate off of Doll Baby Road outside the town of Payson. From the north, you’ll have to hike in 11 miles on the Saddle Ridge Trail. From the south, it’s 36 tough miles on the Arizona Trail from the Mount Peeley Trailhead.

Earlier this year during my thru-hike (the AZT Trek), I arrived at the LF Ranch after four days of solitude. As I neared the ranch house I heard the peculiar calls of peacocks, an alien sound in the middle of the desert. After going through a gate that says “Hikers Welcome” I was greeted by Maryann Pratt, matriarch of the ranch, and an assortment of friendly dogs, cats, peacocks and chickens. A signpost at the ranch has the mileages to Mexico and Utah as well as signs pointing the directions to other notable landmarks on the ranch.

In addition to being a working cattle ranch, there is a small bunkhouse with showers to house weary hikers or horseback riders who arrange to stay over on their journey. It’s not fancy, but even the most spartan accommodations feel like such a luxury in the middle of the wilderness. Picket lines are available for horseback riders and their steeds.

Meals are also available, but only by prior arrangement, and the ranch also accepts resupply packages. Many weary travelers have shown up to the ranch house hoping to get a ride out to the wilderness gate or into town, but unless you’ve made prior arrangements, don’t get your hopes up. The closest store in Payson is an hour and a half drive away on a bone-jarring road. The day-to-day chores of running the LF are endless and the folks on the ranch are almost always busy.

Once at the ranch, there are many places to explore nearby. There are swimming holes in the East Verde River and Rock Creek, and a nice afternoon can be had walking along the banks of the East Verde River – one of Arizona’s most precious waterways.

Undoubtedly one of the most interesting things about the LF is Maryann herself. Get her talking and you’ll realize the strength and tenacity it takes to run a ranch in such a remote location. The ranch is powered by solar panels scattered around the property and the occasional generator. Constant vigilance is required to chase away predators that might want to eat the LF Ranch Smorgasbord. Just rounding up cattle and moving them from one area to another is an extreme event, given the rugged nature of the landscape. Yet Maryann still finds the time to care for the Arizona Trail in her own backyard: she is a trail steward for Passage 25a (Whiterock Mesa, from East Verde River to Rock Creek Ridge).

So if you’re going to be “in the neighborhood,” hiking the Red Hills and Whiterock Mesa passages, follow the barking dogs and peacock calls to the LF Ranch. You’ll be glad you did.

For more information, visit www.lfranch.com.

Sirena Dufault works as the Gateway Community Liaison for the Arizona Trail Association. She also works with Arizona Trail Business Partners, coordinates the ATA’s Social Media efforts, and organizes numerous Arizona Trail events throughout the year.

Ocelot on the Arizona Trail

Over the past five months, an ocelot (Leopardus pardalis) has been photographed in the Santa Rita Mountains southeast of Tucson near Passages 4 and 5 of the Arizona National Scenic Trail. Considered one of the rarest cats in the United States, ocelots have rarely been documented in the Southwest over the past 50 years. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the ocelot was photographed by a federally financed project whose remote cameras have also repeatedly taken pictures of an adult male jaguar in the same area.

This is only the fifth ocelot documented in Arizona in five years. The Arizona Game and Fish Department reported two ocelots in the Huachuca Mountains; the Sky Island Alliance conservation group photographed one in the Whetstone Mountains; and another was discovered after being killed by a car near Globe.

Rare cats on the Arizona Trail are further proof that the AZT is an important wildlife corridor in addition to a recreation trail. Since jaguars once roamed as far north as the Grand Canyon, they may someday return to their historic range thanks to the 800-mile trail from Mexico to Utah.
Segments of the Arizona National Scenic Trail within Tonto National Forest have long held the reputation as being the most formidable in the entire state. Dense vegetation, steep hillsides, rocky terrain and badly eroded tread are just a few of the defining features that have discouraged many from visiting this seldom-traversed region. Although the natural setting is absolutely gorgeous, the journey has always been a serious endeavor. Thanks to a grant from 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC), nine of the AZT’s passages could soon be transformed.

Paul “Pablo” Burghard of the Tonto National Forest, Globe Ranger District, submitted an ambitious proposal earlier this year. The vision was numerous youth crews working on the Arizona Trail, spending weeks at a time addressing critical needs along the most neglected segments within Tonto National Forest. In addition to maintaining and improving the Arizona Trail, an important element of any 21CSC project is employing youth and helping them connect to America’s great outdoors. Pablo’s grant was approved for $200,000, with 100 percent of grant funds going to Arizona Conservation Corps (AZCC), whose employees are carrying out the work between September and December of 2014.

AZCC is the combination of two youth corps programs that have done an enormous amount of work on the Arizona Trail over the past decade: Coconino Rural Environment Corps (CREC) and Southwest Conservation Corps (SCC). AZCC is focused on connecting youth, young adults and recent era military veterans with conservation service work projects on public lands. Like other conservation corps, AZCC continues the rich legacy of the Civilian Conservation Corps of the 1930s and ’40s.

For anyone that isn’t already familiar with the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), it’s worth knowing that during the time of the CCC, nearly 3 million young Americans planted 3 billion trees to help reforest America, constructed more than 800 parks nationwide, upgraded most state and county parks, updated forest fire fighting methods, and built a network of service buildings and public roadways in remote areas.
Many of the trails and facilities we use today are a result of the hard work of the CCC. It was a bold initiative that helped employ young men during the Great Depression while implementing a natural resource conservation program within every state and territory.

Now, 80 years later, a new version of the CCC is gaining momentum through 21CSC. The goals of the program are to build America’s future by developing natural and cultural resources stewards; put youth and veterans to work by providing training and employment opportunities; and preserve, protect and promote America’s greatest gifts through increased public access and use to public lands. (You can learn more by visiting www.21csc.org).

From now through the end of the year, a total of 16 youth corps hitches will be out on Passages 17 - 26 of the Arizona Trail. Each hitch is a crew of 8 people working for 80 hours. Many crews are in the field simultaneously, working and camping for a week in whatever conditions Arizona’s autumn and winter seasons offer. For the participants, it will be the experience of a lifetime. And for Arizona Trail enthusiasts, it means some much-needed attention to the trail’s remote passages that will help sustain the Arizona Trail into the future.

Although none of the 2ICSC grant funds directly benefit the Arizona Trail Association, nor can any of the funds be used for management of the crews, the ATA and Tonto National Forest have been working diligently to ensure the project will be a success. Relying on knowledge and experience, trail steward assessments and trail user reports, priority areas were identified on a map. Then, trained volunteers were sent into the field to flag, photograph, and prepare detailed reports on current trail conditions. Superstar volunteers Donnie and Barbie Borinski and their dog, Mate, hiked the entire length of the project area over many weeks. The information they gathered helped the ATA’s Trail Director and Pablo Burghard develop a comprehensive work plan.

Given the number of youth crews in the field, the massive scope of the project area, and the importance of this once-in-a-lifetime grant opportunity, the ATA realized it was wise to hire a project manager. Among a cadre of talented applicants, the contract was awarded to Matthew Roberts of American Conservation Experience. Matthew is responsible for meeting the crews upon arrival in the field, helping them understand the importance of the project and how it affects the entire Arizona National Scenic Trail, giving them some skills-specific training, checking on them after a few days and critiquing their work, debriefing the experience after the end of the hitch, and reporting to the ATA and Tonto National Forest. Since each youth crew will work for a total of four hitches, the goal is to educate and inspire them so that their skills and confidence improves with each day on the trail.

Here is a recent report from one of Matthew’s field visits on the Highline Passage near Bray Creek:

The crew did a good job of routing the trail out of several deep gullies and creating new tread on the sloped side of these erosion scars. This way the old trail acts as a drain and provides a side slope for the new tread. Rubble rock check dams were created within the gullies to begin the healing process by trapping silt and encouraging plant growth. Most of these reroutes were in the first mile or so east of Bray Creek.

On one steep wash crossing the crew built a very high quality dry stone staircase of eight steps. The structure will reduce erosion on this steep downslope into the wash.

The quality of the corridors brushing was good and the trail was very easy to follow.

The Mazatzal Mountains, Highline and many other passages of the AZT will always provide wild and primitive backcountry experiences that challenge all who attempt this rugged terrain. But after the hard work of AZCC’s youth crews this season, everyone visiting the trail within Tonto National Forest in the near future may wonder why the harsh reputation.

Dry stone masonry features are among the many improvements to the AZT happening throughout the Tonto National Forest this year. 
Matthew Roberts Photo
Coordinators have organized and led many successful outings on the Arizona Trail, including a hike along the San Francisco Peaks passage with 6th graders from Mount Elden Middle School, a hike along the Alamo Canyon passage with students from Superior Junior & Senior High School, and a hike along the Santa Catalina Mountains passage with youth from City High School. Each outing provided participants an opportunity to connect with the natural wonders that exist in their own backyards.

The three-tiered program focuses on experience, education and stewardship. After youth experience the Arizona Trail on foot and mountain bike, program coordinators work with teachers to integrate existing curriculum into the outings and use the AZT as an outdoor classroom. After a few educational outings, stewardship activities are organized that allow youth to get their hands dirty doing trail maintenance and invasive species removal. The goal is to engage each participant 5-7 times throughout the school year on day trips and overnight adventures.

“In order for the hard work of Dale Shewalter, Teddy Roosevelt, John Muir and others like them to benefit future generations, we need to work diligently to make sure youth are getting outdoors,” said Matthew Nelson, the ATA’s Executive Director. “The Seeds of Stewardship program works wonders in helping youth connect to their natural environment, and the Arizona Trail is an ideal place to teach concepts like interconnectedness and biodiversity while encouraging healthy habits.”

Seeds of Stewardship outings are made possible from a grant from the Bureau of Land Management, and from contributions of the ATA’s members and donors. To learn how you can support the program, please visit [www.aztrail.org/donate.html](http://www.aztrail.org/donate.html)

A student from Superior High School enjoys a quiet moment atop a boulder during a recent Seeds of Stewardship outing.

Matthew J. Nelson Photo

Subjects like mathematics and science are easily taught while using the Arizona Trail as an outdoor classroom.

Matthew J. Nelson Photo

The Arizona Trail Association’s Seeds of Stewardship program has enjoyed a few busy months with youth from the communities of Flagstaff, Superior, Tucson and Vail. The mission of the program is to provide educational and meaningful outdoor experiences that empower youth to become the next generation of stewards of Arizona’s wild landscapes.
If you’ve volunteered for the Arizona Trail Association (ATA), chances are you’ve seen the welcoming smiles of Mel and Marlene Betani. Since 2010, the Betanis have been regular trail stewards and keepers of the tools for the ATA. Not ones to brag, the Betanis don’t do the work for the glory, but for another reason. “We enjoy being outdoors, and the ATA is an organization of exceptional people doing noble work,” they said. “The very idea of a trail that goes from Mexico to Utah through so many scenic and wild sections of our state is exciting and inspiring. It’s the ATA’s job to constantly improve the trail and its access so that it will last far into the future for those that come after us. We just like doing what we can to help the ATA and the trail thrive.”

The Betanis found out about the ATA from a newspaper advertising a “Close the Gap” project that would complete the Arizona Trail. With their kids now out of the house, the Betanis took the opportunity and have been involved in the ATA ever since.

“Our favorite thing about the ATA is the people we have gotten to know, and the new people we meet each time we attend a work event,” they said. “The volunteers love the outdoors as much as we do and have been everywhere that’s wild. Their stories of the places they’ve been, things they’ve done and people they’ve met are endlessly entertaining.”

In addition to transporting, sharpening and maintaining the ATA’s tools, the Betanis are trail stewards on the Mormon Lake Passage (30e) who have organized major volunteer events including one for a new connector trail near the Lakeview Campground south of Flagstaff.

“Events like these are how the Arizona Trail was constructed in record time, and it’s great to see how the Betanis’ enthusiasm and leadership inspires others,” said Matthew Nelson, Executive Director of the ATA. “They show up at every Arizona Trail event and are easy to recognize by their great big smiles. They love the Arizona Trail and have become an integral part of the ATA community.”

Andrea Michaels works closely with the Betanis as Northern Regional Chief Steward. They first met each other at a “Close the Gap” event. Back then, the Betanis were used to the outdoors, but had no previous trail work experience. No matter, because according to Michaels, they quickly mastered the skills.

“We are so fortunate to have a host of hardworking, dedicated volunteers,” Michaels said. “Mel and Marlene exemplify those special individuals who unflinchingly go more than the extra mile. They drive thousands of miles to work events, expos and socials. They see what needs doing and then set about doing it!”

In addition to their trail duties, Marlene enjoys bringing goodies from her kitchen and garden to the Lakeview Campground hosts, and Mel is an avid Arizona Trail runner.

“Marlene and Mel make the ‘face’ of the ATA warm and welcoming, the reputation of the ATA caring and trustworthy,” Michaels said.

When they’re not on the trail, the Betanis enjoy fishing, camping, hiking and backpacking on the weekends. Even though they still have their “day jobs,” the Betanis find time to contribute to the ATA.

“We’ve found in volunteering that we receive more than we give,” they said. “It can be difficult, dirty and exhausting work, but the feeling of accomplishment we get in return is worth it. One gets a sense of pride when the section of trail that we worked on weathers the monsoons well. The teamwork required to move big rocks or plan an event builds strong bonds of respect and friendship. Bottom line though, it’s just fun.”

If you’re interested in volunteering for the ATA, visit the Volunteer page at www.aztrail.org
Rizzoli Press is proud to announce the release of one of the most beautiful and inspiring books ever published – America’s Great Hiking Trails – celebrating all of America’s National Scenic Trails, including the Appalachian Trail, Pacific Crest Trail, Continental Divide Trail, North Country Trail, Ice Age Trail, Potomac Heritage Trail, Florida Trail, Natchez Trace Trail, Arizona Trail, Pacific Northwest Trail, and New England Trail. Full-color photographs demonstrate the biodiversity and adventure available throughout America’s trails, and once you open the book you won’t be able to put it down.

The book is a hiker’s bucket list embodied in a lavishly illustrated collection of more than 50,000 miles of America’s most iconic trails. Celebrating the 40 most important trails in America, this volume takes the reader through 49 states and eight national parks. Literally tens of millions of tourists and hikers visit these trails each year, some of which wind through the country’s most scenic natural wonders and virtually every major ecosystem in America. Each featured trail has its own section, complete with a map and photo gallery, and the reader explores what makes it one of the most magnificent hiking experiences anywhere in the world. Trail histories accompany detailed hiker-friendly descriptions that highlight the most scenic spots, with suggestions for shorter weekend and day hikes.

The stunning photographs take the reader on a visual adventure conducted by Bart Smith, the first person to hike all 11 National Scenic Trails from end to end. America’s Great Hiking Trails is perfect for anyone interested in outdoor recreation and conservation. Proceeds from the sales of books benefit the Partnership for the National Trails System (PNTS), of which the Arizona Trail Association is a member.

Available at bookstores online and throughout America, this hardcover book weighs nearly five pounds and retails for $50.00. Advance copies are available as thank you gifts to the first 10 individuals making a donation to the Arizona Trail Association of $500 or more before the end of the year. You can donate online or by mailing a check to the ATA.

Anyone who has ever traveled along the Arizona Trail at night between Oracle and Superior knows that it is one of the darkest places in this part of the world. Far from cities and other sources of light, the dark skies are just one of the natural resources that make the Arizona Trail special. The rest of the world may soon learn more about this as the International Dark-Sky Association Board of Directors recently named Oracle State Park an “International Dark Sky Park.”

The organization chooses sites that have exceptional starry skies and natural nocturnal habitat where light pollution is mitigated and natural darkness is valuable as an important educational, cultural, scenic and natural resource. Among 16 parks that have been awarded Dark-Sky status by the association are Big Bend National Park in Texas, Chaco Culture National Historical Park in New Mexico, Galloway Forest Park in Scotland and Eifel National Park in Germany.

Special nighttime events are being planned at the park and will allow the public to take advantage of dark skies there for star parties and other astronomical gatherings. “Oracle State Park is ‘behind’ the mountain from the city of Tucson, so it can provide a look at the night skies without a lot of light pollution — and that’s a really wonderful thing,” said Ellen Bilbrey, spokeswoman for Arizona State Parks. “It’s also exciting because this is the first Arizona State Park to get dark-skies designation.”

“The designation will yield tremendous benefits to the Park, the Oracle community, Pinal County, and the State of Arizona,” said Michael Weasner, Chairman of the Oracle Dark Skies Committee. The Committee is working with area residents, business owners and government offices to reduce or eliminate light pollution in the Oracle area to maintain the dark skies.

A celebratory event at Oracle State Park is being planned and will be announced through the ATA Events Calendar.
The community of people connected to the Arizona Trail is as long and diverse as the trail itself. As we lose members of our community, the ATA memorializes individuals through our In Memoriam webpage: www.aztrail.org/memorial.html.

If you know someone who should be added to this page, please contact us. We encourage personal stories, photographs, and information that may help inspire others.

There is also a way to make donations in remembrance of those who have passed on. Upon receipt of memorial donations, a letter is mailed to a designated family member, with a listing of all donors’ names and addresses (monetary amounts are not included). All donations are 100% tax-deductible. To learn more, click the “donate” button at www.aztrail.org.

Also, please consider a bequest to the Arizona Trail Association in your estate planning. A bequest is a provision in your will or living trust that directs a portion of your estate to a named person or charity, such as the Arizona Trail Association. You may bequeath a specific asset, a dollar amount, a percentage of your estate or the remainder of your estate after all other gifts have been distributed. This is a wonderful way to be part of the enduring Arizona Trail legacy. More information is available from your attorney, and at www.aztrail.org/bequest.html.
Thank You to Our Generous Arizona Trail Supporters!

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Bureau of Land Management
Camp Colley
Cirrus Visual Communication, Inc.
Colorado River Discovery
Diversified Print Solutions, Inc.
El Rancho Robles
Emmitt Barks Cartography
Endurance Rehabilitation, LLC
Epic Rides
Flagstaff Bicycle Revolution
Fleet Feet Sports of Tucson
Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold
Greater Vail Area Chamber of Commerce
Green Valley Hiking Club
Hancock Resources, LLC
High Jinks Ranch
Inn Suites Hotels and Suites
InterWealth Management
It's Greek To Me
Jade Grill Asian BBQ
Jorden, Bischoff & Hiser, PLC
Juan Jaime's Tacos and Tequila
Mountain Bike Association of Arizona
Oracle Land & Homes/A Diamond Ranch
Oracle Ford
Oracle Patio Café
Peace Surplus, Inc.
Pink Jeep Tours
Porter's Café
REI
Reevis Mountain School of Self Reliance
Resolution Copper
Rosemont Copper
Southwest Solutions
Sulphur Springs Valley Electric Cooperative, Inc.
Summit Hut
Sunnyside Medecenter - Dr. & Mrs. Dennis Thrasher
That Brewery
The Wildland Trekking Company
Trans-Canyon Shuttle
Tucson Saddle Club
United States Forest Service
Valley Toyota Dealers
Wanderlust Brewing Company
We Cook Pizza & Pasta
Westwind Solar Electric, Inc.
Woolston & Tarter, P.C.