

Must Have: "Your Complete Guide to the Arizona National Scenic Trail"

by Elaine Mariolle

"Your Complete Guide to the Arizona National Scenic Trail" is a spectacular guide written by Matthew J. Nelson, executive director of Arizona Trail Association, and is a must-have for hikers, equestrians and cyclists who wish to explore the more than 800 miles of trail, that stretches from the United States-Mexico border to the Utah state line.

The AZT travels through a diverse geography of desert, forest and canyon terrain - from the Huachuca Mountains of Passage 1 where you can gaze south to Mexico, to Buckskin Mountain on Passage 43, north of the Grand Canyon.

The book opens with three introductory chapters on the AZT and covers: its history, backcountry safety and philosophy, the botany of diversity and the geology of Arizona. The AZT is divided into three regions: south, central and north - with each region divided into "passages" of varying distances from seven to 35 miles.

Each passage includes comprehensive information of the location, distance, day-trip options, shuttle tips, level of difficulty, land managers, recommended months of travel, gateway communities and geology highlights. There is a color plate map for each passage along the route with inspiring photos of places and panoramas along the way.

The "Water Sources Along the AZT" is critical for all travelers, and the extensive resources in the 22 Gateway Communities is most helpful.

The maps are meant to get you to the trailheads and point you in the right direction. The text is the real trail guide. Once you're on the AZT, the route is easy to follow because it is well marked and signed.

In addition to the maps in the book (which are also available to download and print for free at www.aztrail.org) the Arizona Trail Association offers a complete topographic map set as a download or on CD (\$25 or \$15 for members). The maps feature the trail at 1:24,000 scale (7.5 minute) and there are a total of 130 maps covering the entire 800-plus miles.

Garmin also offers the Arizona Trail as a preprogrammed data card for \$50 – you slip the chip in your handheld unit and you're ready to go.

Additionally, ATA members can download GPS tracks of the entire trail for free.

Depending on what "map" people prefer - paper or digital - there are numerous options.

The guide in paperback is \$25.95 (388 pages with color maps and photos), and in Kindle format (\$14.49).

Downloading maps as noted above, or carrying additional USGS maps is recommended, especially in the more isolated areas.

This first-ever AZT guide is well worth the investment. It is everything you'll need to explore this wonderful resource in countless ways.

And here's a suggestion: join the AZ Trail Association. Basic membership is \$35 (with discounts available). AZT is also actively looking for volunteers.

Sirena Dufault Photo

