

Arizona Trail Seeds of Stewardship Program

Experiencing (and Making) History in our Own Backyard
by Kristen Widmark



It's a beautiful spring day in Northern Arizona and 10 students from Ponderosa High School are engaged in an activity called a Wonder Walk on section 32a of the Arizona Trail. Half of the students are responsible for leading their partner silently to interesting things in the forest. Later, one student reports being shown live termites while another talks about the sound of the wind his partner encouraged him to hear.



On March 26 the students from Ponderosa High School started the hike from Elden Pueblo, an important archeological site left behind by Northern Sinagua people over 800 years ago. The students were encouraged to wonder about the eruption of Sunset Crater volcano that enriched the soil for farming as well as the macaw heads and California coastal shells that were found on the site.

The group then moved through a section of the AZT that runs through a tunnel under I-89. Along the way the group encountered trash that is littering the forest near the highway. The group discussed littering from cars and illegal dumping. Bruce Belman, the trail steward, told the group about the homeless camps that leave behind piles of trash. The students lament that they don't have bags to collect trash that's strewn about. Fortunately, I brought along trash bags and promised the students we would do some clean-up on our way back through this area later in the day.

The next stop found the group circled around Mark Loseth from American Conservation Experience. Mark talked about trail building and taught students to use a tool called a clinometer. The students took turns peering through the measurement device and determining the slope of the trail. Matt Frinter from Coconino Rural Environment Corps told the students about his work and about the benefits of joining AmeriCorps.

The group then hiked to Picture Canyon, where Bruce pointed out a great number of petroglyphs on the rocks as well as the remains of a pit house. The students also took time to marvel over Flagstaff's only waterfall.

The last challenge of the day was to collect trash. The students eagerly filled up five large bags to be sent to the dump, leaving the Arizona Trail a little cleaner than it was before they arrived.



At the end of the hike, students reported a variety of highlights, from looking at the ancient rock art and seeing the waterfall to learning a bit about wildlife and silent observation. One student reported that the rewarding feeling of removing litter from the forest was his highlight.

This was the second Seeds of Stewardship outing with teenage students from Ponderosa High School, and we are looking forward to many more this season. This outing was made possible by generous grants from Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) and Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation. Special thanks to ACE and CREC for their leadership and expertise on this experiential education outing.

