

## Arizona Trail Seeds of Stewardship Program

*A Hot Day Along the Gila River*

by Deborah Oslík



On April 26, we set out on our second outing with students from Miami Junior High to Passage 16 of the Arizona Trail. To my delight, of the 12 students who showed up, just about all of them had participated on our first outing one month prior. It became instantly clear that the friendships formed on the first outing were still going strong and that they were excited to be together in the wild desert near their home.



We drove out to one of the newest trailheads on the Arizona Trail, which is just outside of Kearny, both historically and currently a mining town. Our trip started with a bang when we stepped out of our vehicles and saw a Gila monster crossing the parking lot. An exciting moment for many students, especially for those whose first time it was seeing the only venomous lizard in the United States! After some icebreakers and name games, we hit the trail.

Even though this passage is over 250 miles from the US/Mexico border, this section of trail is at the lowest elevation along the Arizona Trail. That means that when temperatures are high in Southern Arizona, this section of trail can be particularly hot for hiking. Luckily, after 2.5 miles of hiking, we met up with the Gila River, where we cooled off with some shade and a jump in the river.



Of course, not everyone was so brave, but most

students were feeling adventurous and jumped in with all their clothes on! We enjoyed lunch under large tamarisk trees along the bank, and made our trudge back to the van in nice wet clothes, which helped keep us cool for much of our return hike. In all, we hiked about 5 miles round-trip. Because of the heat and sparse shade on this section of trail, our hike was largely focused on the actual hiking and exploring of the river. It makes for an exciting and memorable day for students when you get to go swimming in a flowing river in the middle of the Sonoran Desert!





This outing was made possible by generous grants from Recreational Equipment, Inc. (REI) and Freeport McMoRan Copper & Gold Foundation.

