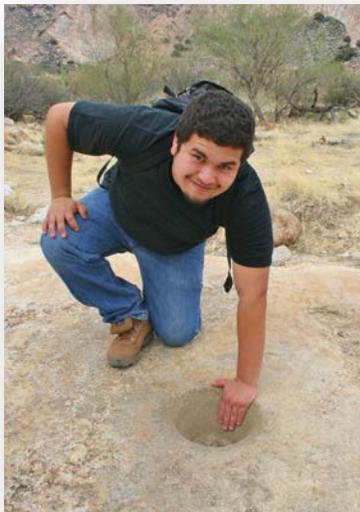


Hiking Back in Time in the Coyote Mountains

by Matthew J. Nelson

On February 19, I led a group of five teenage students from City High School to the Coyote Mountains Wilderness west of Tucson. Along with an administrator (and former outdoor guide) from the school, we hike along the old ranch road on the King Anvil Ranch toward the towering granite domes in the distance. All of the students had participated in previous Seeds of Stewardship outings, and they were eager to explore a new place. The group included two Hispanic/Latinos and three Caucasians (including one foreign exchange student from Germany) from the Title I school located in the heart of downtown Tucson.



The Coyote Mountains are within an archaeological district, so the ground is covered with well-preserved cultural resources. I took the opportunity to teach an introduction to Hohokam archaeology near a petroglyph site with numerous bedrock mortars. Along the hike toward the mountains, I pointed out random pieces of flaked stone, including bits of chert, fine-grain basalt and obsidian.

Seeing the artifacts outside a museum context was an awesome experience for the students, and led to a great discussion about the importance of protecting cultural resources and why it's vital to leave what you find. I explained the state and federal laws that protect these resources, and more importantly, the ethics that surround protecting artifacts for future generations.

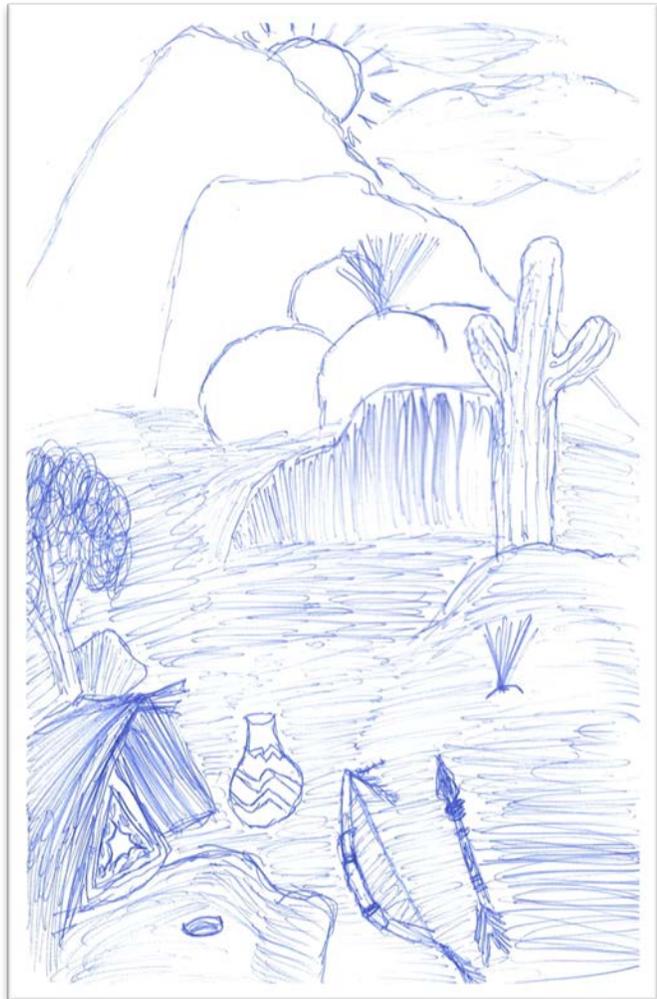
After crossing over a stone dam where a small amount of water could be found, we walked along a primitive path and crossed a barbed wire fence into the Coyote Mountains Wilderness. Once inside the designated wilderness area we followed the main drainage of Mendoza Canyon until we found a large granite slab where we could enjoy lunch together. The topic of conversation during lunch was wilderness. With the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act just around the corner, it was an opportunity to share with these inner city youth the importance of wilderness, why it is there, and what it means for them. The afternoon ended with 10 minutes of silence on the granite slabs of Mendoza Canyon. The silence was broken by snoring from one of the students who nodded off under the sun's warm rays.

We followed a circuitous route back to where we started, which led to the discovery of a brilliantly decorated ceramic rim sherd (red-on-buff) hidden among the rocks, and a mountain lion kill site where at least two mule deer carcasses had been torn apart. The students really felt like they were in a wild place.





On the drive back to Tucson, I asked each to record their experiences from the day through written words, sketches, or poetry. One student's artwork was particularly striking, and detailed the granite domes, canyons and rich cultural history we had just experienced.



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