

A Day in Molino Basin

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz

On November 25, nine 7th graders from Mansfeld Middle School hit the Redington Pass Passage of the Arizona National Scenic Trail inside the Coronado National Forest. Before we even got out of the van students began their observation of the changing landscape as we drove up and into the grasslands and chaparral. They are learning about biomes and were excited to apply their knowledge, and even more excited to get out and onto the trail.



The hike began with an uphill climb from Molino Basin that warmed everyone from the chilly morning wind. Students exclaimed all the way up over different plants, colorful seeds and new vegetation. They noticed that suddenly the saguaros we had been seeing were not around, and so they began to theorize about why they would be seeing this change at a higher elevation. Juan offered that maybe saguaros couldn't grow on rocks, which Eliana countered with cactus are mostly water and it gets too cold. There was a little debate before it was rationalized that Eliana's theory probably hit closer to the mark.

We made a few stops on the way up the hill to hydrate, rest, and to check out the view. Everyone was happy to get over the ridge and begin making their way downhill. The slopes also provided an ideal opportunity to talk about watersheds and to notice erosion and the path the water had cut through the landscape. A student named Ocean spotted what looked like a cottonwood off in the distance and followed the direction of flow back up to where we were standing.



Students from Mansfeld Middle School ready to hit the trail near Molino Basin.

We stopped for lunch and students began ravenously polishing off sandwiches and snacks. For a little hands-on learning, each student was given an oreo cookie to use as a tool in understanding plate tectonics, an exercise that they took home at the end of the day in their Junior Explorer Handbooks.

After the satisfying tasty end of their tectonic plate models we took an opportunity to quiet down and do some sound mapping. It was an opportunity to record observations in their field journals and to hone their listening skills as they sat in silence for two and a half minutes. There were buzzing grasshoppers, a few distant

bird calls and the sound of wind through the grasses. After the exercise they reflected on how it felt to sit in the quiet.

David, who had made himself a spot a little bit away from the rest of the group to lean back and listen immediately said “It was peaceful.” Esteban, trying perhaps to keep up his cool guy image, had said “boring” at first but not a minute later was requesting that we spend more time in silence to discover what else we might hear.



Sitting in silence reveals new discoveries.

On the hike back to the van many of the more gung-ho students chose to stay back and encourage their peers who were conquering the uphill slope at a much slower pace. They offered words of encouragement and hands to help each other up the steeper parts of the trail. Once everyone made it back they were asked to reflect on how hiking was like life. Some of the responses included: “There are ups and downs!”

“It’s hard at first but it’s fun to stick.”

“If it’s green there’s water there.”

“You can’t do it without help!”

This was one of the biggest take aways of the day for everyone.

Camraderie and cooperation blossomed on the trail, and as we made our way back into town a contented quiet filled the van. Students from Mansfeld Middle School are looking forward to future outings on the Arizona Trail.



Students enjoy views of Molino Basin within the Santa Catalina Mountains.