

## Youth & Families Enjoy a Day on the Arizona Trail

by Matthew J. Nelson



On February 22, the Arizona Trail Association partnered with El Grupo Youth Cycling Club to host a memorable day of mountain biking along the Arizona Trail (AZT) near the community of Vail, southeast of Tucson. El Grupo is a local nonprofit organization that works to empower youth through cycling. Most of their time is spent on the road, so this outing was a special opportunity to share the joys of mountain biking with young people and help teach them about the importance of long-distance trails like the AZT that encourage shared-use for all non-motorized trail users.

A group of 11 young teens and 7 adult leaders gathered at Colossal Cave Mountain Park and discussed the trail options. Some rode north for an easier experience while others tackled “the big hill” the south. Along the way they encountered other families and community members who had heard about the ride and wanted to participate. One family had their 3-year-old and 5-year-old on bikes and everyone exchanged high fives as they rode by.



Everyone rode at their own pace, and waited for the rest of the group at key intersections along the way. One of those spots was a recently installed steel AZT gate near Old Sonoita Road. When asked what the purpose of the gate might be, youth were able to figure out three of the four features. They were also delighted to hear that the gate was designed by a local mountain biker.



Most everyone rode all the way to Sahuarita Road (10 miles from Colossal Cave), then reversed their route back along the mostly downhill, winding trail. The sounds of laughter and casual conversation could be heard among the prickly pear and ocotillo. It was a refreshing change from the city streets where these young people often ride.



Back at Colossal Cave Mountain Park everyone enjoyed lunch under serpentine mesquite trees. Now that they've experienced one segment of the Arizona Trail, El Grupo is looking forward to exploring more in the future. Future outings are planned in northern and central Arizona, where other teams from the Arizona High School Mountain Bike League will also be invited to participate, and a trail work day to encourage young riders to give back to the trails they ride.



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