

Experiencing the AZT on Two Wheels

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



On February 27, a diverse mix of students from Superior Junior and Senior High School explored the Arizona Trail on mountain bikes. For some it was revisiting a favorite activity, and for others it was a completely new experience. They



Students riding along the AZT near Superior.

ranged in age and grade, the youngest in 8th grade, with a few high school seniors in the mix, many getting ready to enter the world of careers and college in just a few short months.

We began the ride just a few miles west of Superior on the Reavis Canyon Passage. Our mountain bike guide and co-leader Mathew “PNut” Laney had everyone ride in figure 8s, practicing spatial awareness, shifting, braking, and balance. After ten minutes of confidence building we set off along a jeep road that took us beyond the power lines and noises of the highway into the rolling desert.

Students experimented with speed and bike handling, trading places in the group depending on the grade and incline of the slopes. We stopped often to recover and hydrate, usually at the tops of the largest climbs in the shadiest spots we could find to allow the group to regroup and recharge. It was a good opportunity to talk about the mechanics of our bodies in motion, and the youth learned about the build-up of lactic acid, why to prioritize stopping for bathroom breaks to save the body’s energy, and about how hypothermia can happen even in warmer conditions depending on the moisture-wicking ability of their clothing.



Enthusiastic junior and senior high school students and their leaders hit the trail in Reavis Canyon – Passage 18 of the Arizona Trail.

About an hour into the ride one of the high school boys, who is also a hunter, noticed a bobcat slinking along a ridge to the north of us. Another student would spot the same cat later while checking out our strange conglomerate rocks from another ridge.

We stayed along the jeep road until lunch, taking breaks as needed, and reaping the rewards of a challenging ride. The students were incredibly grateful to plop down in the grassy shady areas near a small creek for lunch. Those with excess energy explored the area, scrambling up and over rocks, and finding lizards scurrying around in their wake.



After a few hours in the saddle, students were relieved to find shade and grass in Reavis Trail Canyon.

It was decided that after our lunch we would finally depart from the dusty doubletrack and ride on the Arizona Trail itself, inviting a little more of a challenge, but much more beautiful scenery. We set off on the slender path, lined with Mexican gold poppies, wild hyacinth, jojoba and saguaros. Almost immediately a few students opted for traveling by foot; luckily the passage was not difficult and everyone was able to move at their own pace and not put too much distance between each other.

It was a dirty and tired group that made its way back to the parking lot where just a few hours earlier we had practiced riding in figure 8s. All of the students wanted to finish on the bike, no matter how sore their backsides felt. They had cold drinks waiting for them in a teacher's cooler on the bus, a well-deserved reward for their effort. Many were proud at all they had accomplished between 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m., a respectable 16+ miles of ground covered on two wheels and sometimes two feet.



Lindsay discovers a horned lizard.

As we said goodbye to the group from Superior they collectively reminded us and their teacher Mrs. Brammer about the proposed camping trip that could be the group's end of the semester outing on the AZT. It is clear with this enthusiasm for repeat trips that this group has a

strong appreciation for all that is made possible by the Seeds of Stewardship program.

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