

Trail Day in Skunk Canyon

by Sabrina Carlson

On April 17th, five members of the Flagstaff Junior Academy Mountain Biking Club, two teachers, three trail stewards, and four representatives from American Conservation Experience (ACE) set out to repair approximately 1 mile along passage 33a of the Arizona Trail in Flagstaff. We spent most of our time and energy giggering new drains and building up a badly eroded section of trail.



Matt Roberts of ACE and I met the students at school at 12:30 p.m. for a brief lunch meeting to give an introduction to trail work safety and a brief explanation of stream dynamics, erosion science, and the kind of work we would be doing. Once the students bellies were full, we all loaded up the van to meet our amazing trail stewards and the volunteers from the ACE crew out at the forest access point. All the way to the forest, the kids entertained us with their unique brand of middle school humor and energetic stories. The excitement was palpable the moment the seat belts went "click."



After bumping our way along old dirt roads to get as close to the worksite as possible we piled out of the van, donned our PPEs (Personal Protective Equipment) and carried tools out to the work site.

While the ACE crew flagged the drains we were to dig, we reviewed the stream dynamics lessons from the classroom and the kids got to examine eroded trail in real life. They made predictions about which way the water might flow in a rain storm and how to divert the water off the trail. After another safety talk around tools use, we

split up into groups and started digging!

I was incredibly impressed with how thoughtful and careful the kids were with using the tools. They could be heard reminding each other to put PPE back on after breaks and to keep the pointy ends of the tools down.

We all worked diligently for 2.5 hours and made a great deal of progress in repairing the trail. When energy began to wane, three of the students became involved in studying the local fauna and having deep conversations about the usefulness of earth worms and the biomechanics that make a grasshopper's legs jump so far.

When asked what he had learned, one student first said "Nothing really, but it sure was fun!" His teacher pressed him to describe what he'd learned about erosion and how to divert water off of a trail. He immediately spun into a description in great detail talking about drains, path of least resistance, downcutting and diversion. After a while he stopped, looked surprised and said, "I guess I learned kind of a lot!"



Sneaky learning...the very best kind.



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