



El Grupo Youth Cycling Team Takes on Touring by Sabrina Carlson

El Grupo Youth Cycling is an institution known throughout Tucson to provide young people the opportunity to build their confidence, speed and racing skills on bikes. Their coaches are highly dedicated to the kids feeling successful and the teens themselves are fast, fit, and LOVE riding bikes.

So when the Seeds of Stewardship was given the opportunity to introduce the team to bike touring, we were thrilled to help! Confidence on a bike for a day ride or race is a different set of skills than the trip planning, navigation, safety, and sanitation considerations of a tour.

Excited to share what we had learned during our Peaks to Park trip the month before, I met with the team on Tuesday evening to brief them on what to expect. We talked about the additional gear they needed to carry for a tour, our plans for lunch and water stops, trail etiquette and Leave No Trace principles. I shared our experience with “The Mud Day” from the ride in June and emphasized that any chance of rain would require a change of plans.



El Grupo on the AZT near Flagstaff

The next morning was cool and clear and promised excellent weather. The kids and their coaches launched from Snowbowl Road and headed for Aspen Corner. They would ride about 23 miles to meet up with myself and the other driver for a water resupply and lunch at Cedar Ranch.

Each rider had an enthusiastic story to tell about the vistas, flora and fauna they saw on their beautiful descent through the aspens and ferns and down into the piñon and juniper.

After refueling with food and water, the youth and their mentors rode off for another 25 miles across the open range toward Lockwood Tank. While our original plans included camping for the night at Lockwood, timing and the threat of rain that evening caused us to rethink our plan and head closer to the town of Tusayan to camp for the night instead.

The next morning, with clouds beginning to form, the crew voted to take their Grand Canyon hike day rather than risk the mud and rain. With cloud cover, the weather for hiking down the South Kaibab portion of the Arizona Trail couldn't have been better! We descended past Cedar Ridge before returning to the trailhead, about 6.5 miles round trip. On our way we saw condors up close and personal and watched a mule team ride by. After our hike the crew voted to view the film in the

visitor center at Mather Point. We all enjoyed hearing about the geologic and human history of the canyon.



Sam enjoys sweet singletrack near the Babbitt Ranch

The following day, we discussed a variety of ride options. The weather had held so far, but was looking like it could be rain or shine. The team voted to ride from camp in Tusayan back to Grandview Tower where Daniela, the Executive Director of El Grupo, and I would meet them for support. If the weather held, they could turn around and ride back all the way into the park.

Before the first riders arrived at the tower, the sprinkles had begun. We still held out hope that it would just be a passing cloud burst, and everyone could finish their ride back the other way. But sadly, by the time the final riders made it to the lunch stop the rain was there to stay. The last riders had begun to encounter the beginnings of the peanut butter mud we had discussed and now understood why rain means the ride is over. Everyone was happy to be camping inside the park that night with warm showers nearby.

The next day, we said goodbye to the Canyon in a grey drizzle feeling excited we had packed in so much adventure before the monsoon cycle descended again.



A successful adventure from Flagstaff to Grand Canyon!

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