



## Flexibility with the Weather

by Sabrina Carlson

On October 17th, 16 members of the Rim Country Middle School Adventure Club journeyed to Flagstaff with their teacher Scott Davidson and three parent volunteers for an adventure on the San Francisco Peaks. It was the perfect time of year to view the changing leaves and the approaching autumn weather.

The night before the adventure, however, it had been torrentially raining with intermittent snow and lightning on the mountain. Mr. Davidson and I were in close contact to make the best decision possible for the safety of the students. We came up with a handful of contingency plans depending on the conditions the next morning.

Upon examining the cloud covered mountain top from the bottom of Snowbowl Road, we decided to start our day at the Lava Tube caves instead. It was drizzly and chilly, but the well-prepared students had the right clothing for the day, so we felt good about continuing with our new plan. Before heading into the caves we explained to the students the importance of taking care of any and all bathroom needs before entering the sensitive ecosystem of the lava tube.



*Into the cave and back out again!*



*Checking out the biodiversity!*

The entrance to the cavern is quite steep, and with the added complexity of the recent moisture the brave young adventurers tested their rock scrambling and problem solving skills right away. We were not too far in when the darkness enveloped us and we all pulled out our headlamps to illuminate the way.

After the initial descent underground, the route leveled out to a more straightforward walking path for a while. As we continued our journey, Mr. Davidson pointed out the different rock textures to the students explaining how each unique formation told a different story about the speed and temperature of the magma as it flowed through the forming rock channel.

When we arrived at the back of the lava tube, we all tried turning off our headlamps to experience the complete darkness underground. It was a powerful experience.

After emerging from underground, one of the students asked a question about the “weird” colored growths on some of the nearby pine trees. This sparked a lengthy discussion of forest density and health, and how dwarf mistletoe is not only very damaging and contagious in an overcrowded section of forest, but what a huge forest fire hazard it presents.

After lunch near the bus, we reevaluated the sight of the mountaintop. There seemed to be a brief break in the clouds, so we decided to go take a look while the weather was less threatening.

Starting from Aspen Corner, we began our hike to the Arizona Trail north toward the Aspen Loop. It became immediately obvious how different the forest density and tree diversity was here, compared to the parking lot around the lava tubes. As we followed the connector trail down to the AZT we paused to notice how wide, rubbly and damaged this section of trail is. The students learned the term “fall line trail” and how trails heading straight downhill will channel all the water straight down it. It was a PERFECT day for this conversation as they could literally see a river flowing down the poorly planned, reclaimed fire cutter’s road.

On our 4-mile hike, we had experienced only a brief sprinkle of rain and no lightning or thunder...almost as if the Kachinas themselves had granted us reprieve. The thunder and rain returned just as we arrived back at the vehicles. Everyone was energized by the day’s adventure, and grateful to be back in the warm car.



*A day well spent!*

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