



## Then Came the Snow

by Sabrina Carlson

Late autumn outings in northern Arizona can be sunny and warm or grey and chilly. And often times a seemingly beautiful day can transform into a cold winter storm. On October 21, 2015, 23 students from Mr. Doerfler's class experienced this firsthand.

Our plans were to return to Aspen Corner, as the class across the hall had done the week before. We had decided to gather data on tree type and temperatures at different elevations and compare it to the readings gathered by the other class the previous week. We were also looking for evidence of animal life and studying the biology of the aspen tree.

The day before our outing, the first deep cold snap and convincing snow of the season had settled over the San Francisco Peaks. On the morning of our outing, it was proposed that we could change our plans and head to a lower elevation where there would be less moisture and slightly warmer temperatures. The students campaigned hard to go to the original location though, and since the sun was beginning to peek out of the clouds, Mr. Doerfler and I consented to let them experience the day as planned.

Unsurprisingly, all of our readings for temperature, from the school yard to the base of the Snowbowl Trailhead were considerably lower than the readings taken the week before. Thankfully the sun was out and inching the temperature into a reasonable range.



*Are you sure about this?*



*Chilly but Happy!*

We headed out on to the Aspen Loop, which connects with Passage 34 of the Arizona Trail. The recent snow made locating animal tracks fairly simple. The students found deer, rabbit and dogs. We talked about the ecological niche of the aspen and discussed its importance as a succession species that moves into an area where the conifers have burned away. Not only does this provide important biodiversity, but it helps stabilize the forest floor and prevent erosion.

By the time we made it to our lunch stop, the warming temperatures had melted some of the snow, leading to wet feet. It was decided that we would eat and then

head back to the parking lot for an early ride back to school on the bus. Chilly temperatures are one thing, but moisture can be dangerous in cold weather.

Before beginning our hike back, one observant student found a tiny snail on a leaf. They had all been so hopeful to see a wild animal in its natural habitat. Though a snail wasn't exactly what they had in mind, it was exciting nonetheless.

Sometimes the most important learning opportunities are the unexpected ones. During our debriefing back at school, the number one lesson everyone seemed to take away was the old adage "There's no such thing as bad weather, only bad gear." The students who had worn snow boots compared their experience of warm dry feet, with the students who had worn sneakers and gotten their feet wet. This spurred a lively and supportive conversation about trip planning and being prepared for the conditions when setting out on adventures. The students even began sharing their ideas with each other about the best stores to get good deals on outdoor clothing.



*Wild Animal in its Natural Habitat!*

While we didn't cover all of the academic goals of the day, I think the lessons learned from our damp day on the trail were much more valuable.

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