



An Epic Ride On the South Face of Elden Mountain

by Sabrina Carlson

The Mountain Biking Club at Flagstaff Junior Academy is growing in size and skill thanks to the leadership of their teacher and club leader, Neil Ross. Our 15-mile ride along the south face of Elden Mountain was evidence of just how far many of the riders have come.

Having worked on this section of the AZT just a few weeks earlier, the club was excited to ride the trail they had helped renew.

Ten club members, Mr. Ross and three parent volunteers rode from the trailhead on Elden Springs Road early on October 31 with the goal of riding all the way to Buffalo Park, 15 trail miles away.

The first section was a nice warm up – recently improved, smooth and relatively flat. It gave everyone a chance to find their legs and stay together as a group. But as we approached the Sandy Seep Trail intersection we encountered sections of fall line trail that were badly damaged, rubbly and completely washed out. The young cyclists braved the steep downhills and grunted on the challenging uphill, cheering each other on as they each came through the difficult sections.



Beautiful Views Along the Base of Elden!

As we approached the 10 mile mark we entered into more technical riding. The washed out sections were fewer, but the tight turns, large rocks and nearby ledges became more plentiful. The young riders made great choices to either ride things with tremendous focus, or dismount and walk when they felt something was too challenging. We approached the Fat Man's Loop corridor, a very popular area for weekend hikers and mountain bikers. At one busy intersection, our large group of students came upon several groups of hikers and another group of riders. Having talked extensively about trail courtesy, the students quickly moved off the trail and out of the way of other users. They greeted the other groups with smiles and "good afternoons" and successfully negotiated a sensible order for everyone to proceed. One of the riders in the other group was someone I know, who sought me out later to tell me how impressed he was with the manners and courtesy our group of students displayed.



Tight Turns and Fast Descents



A Smooth Start

As we neared the last few miles of the ride, the trails became increasingly braided and interwoven, and it became clear that we would need to keep the group together to prevent anyone from getting lost. As we climbed the last grueling hill into Buffalo Park the tired but proud riders took guesses on how far we had ridden and congratulated one another for strong effort throughout the day.

The ride was difficult and tiring to be sure, and several options were presented along the way to bail out with one of the parents and go home early. Not even the youngest rider chose to leave, though. Everyone finished the day. Each and every person earned whatever Halloween candy they would eat later that evening!

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