

Tis' the Season for Stewardship!

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



Checking out the wildflowers

On March 2, 2016, nine students from City High School got their hands dirty and put their knowledge into action on the Arizona Trail in Oracle State Park. Working side by side was Charles Schnarr, their administrator, Treven Hooker, an outdoor educator and former City High graduate, and our guide for the day – Mary Croft, Passage 13 Co-Steward.

Our day began as we met up with Mary on Wildlife Drive to connect with the trailhead. Along the way, it was evident from the students' shared stories that their last outing in the Coyote

Mountain Wilderness had made a considerable impact on their views of nature, trail stewardship and the importance of conservation. Students were interested in Mary's firsthand experience as she explained what it means to be a steward of the AZT, and she was able to acknowledge her community in SaddleBrooke for maintaining this portion of the trail so beautifully.

Tool and tool safety is always the first lesson in proper brushing protocol and trail maintenance, so after an extensive overview, with tools in hand and helmets on, we made our way through the rolling grasslands. Our path was decorated with the colorful arrival of spring wildflowers.

Once we had covered enough trail to see where work was needed, we divided our group into smaller crews and dug in. Students were encouraged to think critically by playing a role in deciding what would benefit trail users most. They assessed water flow and learned how to best mitigate erosion. This led to two hours of hard work in the sun and indulging in a lunch under the shade of a mesquite tree.



Bluedicks flowers sprout up along the trail

For some students this was a first-time experience on a Seeds of Stewardship outing, and wielding McLeods and pick-mattocks often rank high as a favorite activity. Flora and Fauna are always a highlight to a hard day's work as well. Treven and Payton took turns identifying hawks that flew overhead, while Alfredo demonstrated how to dig up and eat the edible plants in the area. Identifying "bluedicks" or desert hyacinth, *Dichelostemma capitatum*, his fellow students were very impressed about his knowledge of ethnobotany.



Skylar carefully improves the AZT

After lunch we tackled the most eroded portion of trail. Some of the group worked clearing drainages while others reworked the tread and removed rocks. Smoothly and effectively, they worked hard to be sure there was no unfinished business, leaving us just enough time to hike out and head back to town.

At the end of the day, students received AZT bandanas as a thank you for their stewardship, but we're confident that the feeling of contributing to the trail and their community will be a reward that will last much longer.



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