



A First Time For 4th Graders in the Huachuca Mountains

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz

On March 18, 2016, 60 4th grade students from Huachuca Mountain Elementary School in Sierra Vista had the opportunity to visit the Huachuca Mountains within Coronado National Memorial. This memorial, whose southern boundary is the US/Mexico border, is right in their backyard and is only a 20-minute drive from their school. Despite this close proximity, many of these students had never been to this beautiful National Park Service unit within the desert grasslands and chaparral.



Rangers Kim and Ann welcoming the group

As part of the *Every Kid in A Park* initiative that is focused on connecting 4th graders to the outdoors, these students were outside to learn about the Coronado National Forest and the Arizona Trail.

We began the morning in the picnic area, where everyone was welcomed in a big circle. Rangers Ann and Kim gave an introduction and spoke about their jobs as park rangers, and about the importance of keeping the park trash free. The students were then divided into four groups – the Coatis, the Red-tailed Hawks, the Black Bears and the Mountain Lions. Each group had the opportunity to cycle through four different activities through the course of the day.

With Park Rangers Ann and Kim, the students had the opportunity to see and touch a variety of furs and skeletons from some of the mammals that live in the park. They also played a game similar to hide and seek that taught them about camouflage. Arizona Trail Association staff engaged students with the local flora and practiced leadership through a game of “find your plant” where one student leads a blindfolded partner to a plant, and then encourages their partner to find their way back to the same plant without the blindfold. They also had the opportunity to hike up Joe’s Canyon Trail. This uphill climb ascends high enough to look out over the San Pedro River Valley with an expansive view across the grasslands and the mountain ranges of Sonora, Mexico. For some of these Sierra Vista natives this landscape is familiar, but for many, this hike was their first experience in the outdoors. One little boy shared how he wished he could hike more but that his mom is often too tired.



Find your tree activity



Students working on a Leave No Trace skit

At the end of the day, students learned about Leave No Trace ethics through a series of creative skits they practiced and performed for their peers. Each group got a short scene to enact demonstrating different principles. This had the students leaving the park bursting with enthusiasm. One thank you letter says it all: "Thank you for that fun trip. I wish to go a hundred times more. I even wish we could have school there."



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