



Nature Walking in Gardner Canyon

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz

On March 19, 2016, seven boys from the Patagonia Youth Enrichment Center hit the Arizona Trail at

Gardner Canyon. Steve Coleman, and Caleb Weaver from Borderlands Restoration, came out with the group for the day. Two new boys joined the group today, along with the other students already involved with Seeds of Stewardship program since last summer.

Driving along a busy Forest Service road, it appeared that many families were already out camping for the weekend, and we were excited to find a good segment of the Arizona Trail near some seasonally flowing water.



Anthony, Alex and Eric get ready for the activity

As we began our hike, we quickly came upon a spectacular view of Patagonia and mountain ranges in the distance. Jose, an 8th grader, successfully identified this ridgeline as the Huachuca Mountains. Caleb Weaver, who has seemingly infinite knowledge of native plants, spent time helping the students identify bergamot, bluedicks, lotus, silk-tassle and a whole array of other flowers, cacti, grasses and trees. After some time on the trail, we took a short water break at the end of the Bear Springs mining tunnel, where students curiously approached the entrance, wondering about the people who mined their long ago.

As we continued on, the students began pointing out and practicing naming the species they had just learned to identify from Caleb. As we sat to eat lunch, sharing food together in the shade of a rock face, the students also noticed that there were some spectacular bright green and turquoise lichen hoodoos. Caleb relayed an anecdote to help them remember the composition of lichen. "Annie algae and Freddy fungus took a 'lichen' to each other, and now their relationship is on the rocks!"



Exploring Bear Springs

After our break, we started hiking again and noticed how the trail had changed a little bit as we came to a gentle slope where patches of soft bunchgrasses were interspersed between the trees. The sunlight was casting a beautiful afternoon shadow, so we took the opportunity in this perfect spot for our five senses activity. The students were instructed to each find their own personal spot, then we spent three minutes listening and sensing our surroundings. Students were asked to reflect on their experience. Alex was surprised at how peaceful everything felt, and that he had to hold himself back from making any noise that might disrupt everyone. Anthony noticed how soft the grass was and how it could be a

perfect place to lie down for a nap. Eric could hear the wind in the trees. Steve Coleman was surprised since this was the first time he had ever been around these students where they had been quiet for a whole three minutes!

After the reflection activity, we headed back toward the van so we could spend some time investigating the stream before heading home. In the creek students saw water boatmen, and the beautiful caddisfly larvae that amass little stone and mica protective tubes, as well as dragonfly nymphs. At the end of the day, they enjoyed some wading and splashing before getting back in the van and driving back into town.



“¡Agua!”



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