

New Discoveries at Sycamore Reservoir

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



Taking in the spectacular view at the saddle

On March 30, 2016, 22 students from Edge Charter High School hit the Arizona Trail from the Gordon Hirabayashi Trailhead. It was a beautiful cloudy day, with temperatures in the 60s. Along with this group were seven EDGE seniors joining us for the first time to take advantage of the opportunity for service learning. To get everyone up to speed on how to be responsible trail stewards, we started with a review of Leave No Trace ethics. The returning students surprised everyone by remembering all seven principles. Matthew “PNut” Laney, the co-leader for the day, used

the recap to remind our big group of students to walk single file on the trail, and then we headed out through the manzanita and oak groves toward Sycamore Reservoir.

As we hiked along, many recognizable species of plants were pointed out. For example, alligator juniper with its rough and scaly bark, also manzanita, which many of the bilingual students in the group appreciated since it is the diminutive word for apple “manzana” in Spanish. Logan, a sophomore, immediately asked why there were so many charred trees, and he learned about the Aspen Fire of 2003.

We made our way up to Shreve Saddle where the Push Ridge Wilderness expands out to the west. Everyone caught their breath and took in the spectacular view. Most students stopped to take “selfies.” Iris, a senior, whose hair was colored a light grey-purple, matched perfectly with the mountains in the distance.

After a break, we headed down the trail toward Sycamore Reservoir. The reservoir was built to supply water to the federal prison camp in the 1930s, and has silted up to form a beautiful riparian area attracting many animals and birds. When we arrived, students were given 20 minutes to explore and enjoy the cottonwoods, willows and ash trees. They scrambled up rock faces and down below the damn to get a close look at the pools below.

There were many new hikers with our group, and with great surprise one group of students had actually put time in to researching and preparing for their hike by packing snacks, water, and even a first aid kit. For two senior girls, it took some time to get used to the newness of being in contact with a vibrant insect community. Mustering up the courage to find a bathroom spot was quite an accomplishment for these ladies, despite their shrieks and giggles.

Their teacher, Emily Gindlesparger, spent time talking to them at lunch about Gordon Hirabayashi, for whom the area had been renamed. Hirabayashi (1918-2012) served time in the federal prison camp that had constructed Mt. Lemmon Highway, after the Supreme Court ruled against his resistance to the Japanese-American internment camps during

WWII. Eventually pardoned with other draft resisters by Harry S. Truman, he is known as a peace activist and academic.



Facing fears and finding plants

After adventuring, snacking, and a history lesson we got a closer look at the surrounding flora with the “find your plant” activity. For this group the idea of being blindfolded and lead around this new landscape required more trust than some felt totally comfortable giving. Most however were willing to try, leading each other to and from textured and leafy shrubs, forbs, succulents and trees.

All too soon it was time to hike back to the van, when suddenly we had a surprise encounter with three AZT thru-hikers from Seattle! “YogaBird,” “Wildflower,” and “Turtle” impressed the students with their tales of the last 100 miles they had just hiked. Our EDGE newcomers had the opportunity to share their snacks with the hikers before we wished them luck and said *adios!* On the way

back, the group stayed together and cheered on their peers that had a challenge with the uphill climb to the saddle. It was encouraging to witness that in these few short hours, a sense of camaraderie and friendship had formed for this diverse group of new adventurers.



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