

It Takes a Team to Build a Trail!

by Rebecca Patterson-Markowitz



On April 26, 2016, 15 students from EDGE Charter High School had their first trail building adventure on the Sarasota Trail in Tucson Mountain Park. The group had the opportunity to learn from trail designer Jerry Boettcher, and would help carve out a new trail for hikers, runners, mountain bikers and equestrians. Neil Stitzer from Southwest Trail Solutions served as a co-leader, as well as EDGE teacher Emily Gindlesparger.

Since the students were unfamiliar with trail building, they began their day at the tool trailer with a demonstration on tool safety, best trail practices, and a conversation about the importance of hydration and keeping an eye out for potentially risky reptiles. Hiking out on a new segment of trail we cut across to a freshly marked section that has been waiting for trail workers to carve out its upcoming path. The stillness and quiet of an early morning always reaps special moments, and it was just our luck to spot a herd of deer feeding a short distance up the mountain.



Getting tools ready for some hard work



The McLeod crew working to create the new tread

There was a lot to be done so students divided into groups and with the help of McLeods, rakes, pick mattocks and loppers, they began clearing heaps of prickly pear and cholla, dragging away rocks and stumps and brushing up and down a whole new segment of trail that was quickly clearing a way for others to travel.

The students worked hard all morning, having fun and joking about how trail work can help get your anger out. Through the pounding and heavy lifting, everyone collaborated. Even students that might not normally work together found that in trail work it's better to work as a team.

A lot can be learned as a team. In fact it was Justin who made an interesting discovery while we were building trail into the side of a hill. As he was digging he uncovered a walnut sized, pale, translucent green insect.

Emily was the first to identify it as a cicada in its nymph stage. These desert dwellers were well known to the students for their loud buzzing in the summer, but none of them had ever seen a nymph, since it can stay underground up to 17 years before emerging. In this age of Google and smart phones, another student, Mario, pulled out his phone to research what the nymphs do to survive underground. As it turns out, they feed off of xylem from tree roots while underground. Justin returned the nymph back underground, and we hoped that the temporary exposure to the light of day hadn't caused it too much stress.

As we finished up, we backtracked our steps so that we could explore our new segment of trail before heading out. Since the trail had yet to be named, students were hoping that Edge High School might be considered. Jovially, Jerry thanked them for the thought and encouraged them to come back, even years from now, because what they helped build would still be there.

Everyone left feeling they had accomplished a great deal that day and for their enduring efforts, we stopped at Eegees for a nice cool treat before they were dropped back off at school.



Ringo and Justin on the back slope



Young stewards in action!

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