



Celebrating Stewardship While We Ride by Sabrina Carlson

On May 24, 2016, 14 members of the Flagstaff Junior Academy Mountain Biking Club headed to the Arizona National Scenic Trail along with their coach Neil Ross and a parent volunteer. They made their way to the junction at Forest Road 418 with the goal of riding southbound to Aspen Corner, and then riding back down to the cars.

Many students had worked on maintaining a bit of this trail a few weeks earlier, and were anxious to return with their bikes to feel it out. Having been given special permission from their principal to use a school day for our last ride of the school year, we gathered at the school at 8 a.m. For about 40 minutes there was a flurry of checking bikes, repairing bikes, digging out loaner bikes, oiling chains, double and triple checking snack and water supplies, and loading bikes into the vans. After one final check for snacks, water, helmets and sunscreen we piled in the vans and headed to the trailhead.



Leaning into the turns

After unloading and strapping on packs, we reviewed some last minute safety and courtesy reminders before heading up the trail. As we rode along, we noticed the first tiny fiddleheads poking out of the ground, ready to unfurl their leaves, and fluff out into a carpet of ferns. We ascended through the aspens and up to the ponderosa pines. We popped out onto the open meadow at the junction to Bismarck Lake where we stopped for a rest and some food. It was windy and slightly cooler than anticipated so the full sun felt warming and wonderful to bask in.



Last little hill climb

We continued along the trail to where we could see The Nature Conservancy Hart Prairie Preserve. Riders who are also in Mr. Ross' class remembered visiting this property on a recent field trip, and really enjoyed seeing it from a new perspective.

We finished our climb to the junction at Aspen Corner and rode over the new water bars and drains we had recently constructed. Everyone was glad to see that they were starting to pack down a bit and we were relieved to see them looking so good.

After a nice long break and some more food, we pointed our wheels back downhill toward the vans. While crossing a huge tree that had fallen in the trail I noticed a bright pink flower in the decomposing tree material. Since I was already paused, I tipped the end of the flower up for a better look. It was a Calypso Orchid! This very rare tiny orchid grows only on the north side of the San Francisco Peaks, and even then only for a short window in very specific conditions. It was a marvelous find, and I was so thankful to have been able to see it, and show it to the others around me.



A rare and wonderful find!

After we reloaded the vans we paused for some happy high fives before heading back to school. I don't think I was the only one who felt like it was a Tom Sawyer kind of day. We got a day of fun instead of a day at the desk.



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