



Primitive Skills in the Santa Catalina Mountains

by Treven Hooker

On October 29, 14 students from Basis North embarked on an adventure to explore the Santa Catalina Mountains. Our mission was to hike along the General Hitchcock Trail. The students had already experienced Sonoran upland and grassland biomes, but this adventure would expose them to a lush pine forest mixed with oaks and vibrant red manzanita bushes.

From the van, students sprang up the trail with co-leader Angel Breault, gaining elevation quickly. Some students stayed behind with me to observe environmental shifts that changed with slope and elevation. Insects that preferred dense and chaotic terrain found open areas advantageous, and raptors that used tall pines to spot prey from a distance were seen soaring above.

On our way up the trail, students and staff marveled at the massive valley we had hiked up. The space between ridges brought warm and comforting sunlight to the cool and still air that resided below. Manzanita bushes reflected a bright red with their ripe berries dangling like red Christmas ornaments. Once kids learned that *manzanita* was Spanish for apple and that the berries were edible, they found them to be the perfect snack throughout the trip.



After a few hours, we found ourselves at a perfect resting spot for lunch and unstructured play. Once we were done eating, students formed two groups. One group explored a route that led to a small hilltop, and possibly an even better view. The other group was more interested in journaling, socializing, and exploring in a less energetic way. I followed the adventurous group to slow their pace and to point out the unique things they might see along the way, like mountain lion scat, deer and javelina tracks, but most of all to keep them safe. At the top of the hill, a small rocky outcrop poked above the tree line. Using strong teamwork, three students used technical skills to get to the top of the spire. Some students were confident and sat atop of the rock, others were wise and in check with their own capability, satisfied with remaining on the lower ledges.

As we returned, we found the second group relaxing in the refreshing natural pine air. Students had adventured around the local area and found all kinds of big, beautiful reptiles. Ricardo is a true naturalist, and found himself using key skills to inspect, analyze, and record key attributes of these reptiles. After relaxing we prompted the students to begin our decent down. Our trip, however, was far from over.

As we hiked up I noted a perfect outcrop free from debris and far from any dry foliage. This was a perfect location to practice traditional fire skills. When we arrived I quickly set out and collected different fire materials while the students waited patiently. The objective was to start a small and sustained fire using only a single match. I described to the students the terms and functionality of tinder, kindling, sticks, and logs, as well as the process of application using dexterity, focus, and

intention. I described different fuel types, and the dangers and safety considerations before building a fire. I then demonstrated the process of building a sustainable fire using a single match. I explained the chemistry behind the creation of fire, and how to use that knowledge to increase



success. After answering questions and making sure my process was clear, the students separated into three groups and began the process of their own. They set out to collect different fuel types. When they returned, they cleared an appropriate space and began their mission.

The students did an amazing job. They all practiced safe and precise skills, and were patient and deliberate. Nearly each group was

able to ignite a fire using one match. Each group was glowing brighter than their fire in pride as they stoked and fed their small fires. Then the surprise came. Harold, a 6th grader, asked earlier in the week if we could have marshmallows. I indulged and brought a bag of fluffy, white mellovs, of which we quickly began roasting and boasting about our newfound accomplishment. The students had so much fun building fires they asked for more primitive skills work. I congratulated them on their great job and promised more fire technology and science would come.

We reluctantly began our hike down and loaded back up into the van. As usual, it did not take long before most of the students were sound asleep. Their clothes, hair and skin all smelled of the woods, dirt, and campfire. It was another successful adventure for the Seeds of Stewardship program.



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