



Record Breaking Trail Work Day by Sabrina Carlson

On November 7, 2016, a record breaking 217 students from Mount Elden Middle School (MEMS) met up on the Rocky Ridge Trail where it descends to Elden Lookout Road to dig drains, move rocks, and build rolling grade reversals.

Working with a group this large can only go two ways. It could become a chaotic mess, or it could go pretty well. Thankfully, because of the fantastic organization of teachers and the many volunteer hands, it was smooth, safe and extremely productive.

Before lunch, half the group divided to gear up with gloves, hard hats and safety glasses in order to safely dig in the dirt and fix up the trail. I was amazed at how much got done in such a short period of time! To keep up, I was running back and forth on the trail ensuring everyone had water, sunscreen, and anything else they might need. With every passing there was new drain and smoother pieces of beautiful trail. I could hardly believe how much could get done by a group of teenagers, most of whom had never worked on a trail before!



Determination with a smile!



Discussing the location of a parking area for their trail.

While the first group of student trail workers dug in the dirt, the other half of the class participated in some outdoor lessons with co-leader Richard May. Leading a micro trails lesson, he discussed many of the important details that need to be considered when planning a new trail. Once they discussed preparation details like user groups, accessibility, land ownership access, permits, cost and funding, and sustainability, they designed their own “micro” trails using yarn to mark their alignments.

Other MEMS teachers led a nature poetry reading about the importance of springs and other small surface water sources in dry climates. Along with a mindfulness and observation lesson, they also were engaged in the history of the Magna Carta and how its legacy led to important environmental legislation like the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts.



Trail Steward Rob Mason coaching a young trail builder.

After a lunch of PB&J, snacks and cookies, all lovingly made by the MEMS 8th graders, the groups then swapped places so they could all have the chance to experience trail work and the lessons of the day.

Some of these students may never fully embrace a love of the outdoors, but some of them most certainly will. The upside of the experience is that each and every one of them left with the understanding that building trail and keeping them maintained is hard work that doesn't happen by magic. Each of them felt the empowerment of knowing that they made a difference, and that their volunteerism matters.

Enormous thanks to Arizona Conservation Corps, US Forest Service, AZT Trail stewards Rob Mason and Justin Inglis, and volunteers Isaac Neff and Greta Matje for dedicating their day to helping shape the next generation of trail stewards! We couldn't be more grateful!



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