



Hoodoos in the Winter Sun

by Treven Hooker

On November 23, 2016, 13 students from Mansfeld Middle School left school with their backpacks filled and ready for adventure. With Thanksgiving only a day away, every participant knew they needed to work up an appetite.

What better way to do that than with a rugged expedition to Saguaro National Park?

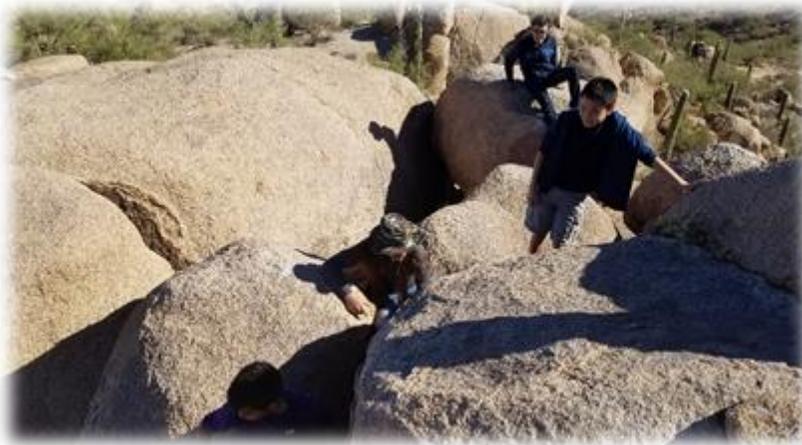
Winter had arrived, allowing us to migrate away from mountain peaks to our lush and wonderful Sonoran Desert. The morning air was cool, but the desert sun was still intense. Students who have grown up in Tucson typically hold an unimpressed judgment of our desert, as pine trees and water are rare and can be a more desired environment for adventure.



The youth vocalized these perspectives and attitudes, but it didn't take long before their thoughts shifted. Students quickly came to realize that the wilderness experience of pristine Sonoran Desert landscape

could inspire and motivate some unique adventures. We set off making a quick pace along the trail, stopping only to talk about tall ancient saguaros, dormant ocotillos, or fragrant creosote. What captured the students' hearts most of all were the beautiful and massive exposed granite boulders that decorated each mountain peak like jewels on a crown.

It took some time before students instinctually remembered how to operate on uneven terrain.



Their balance and confidence was shaky, but they soon found their rhythm of play, and bounded for boulder peaks and the black crevices between rock. When students were uneasy, others showed compassion and encouragement, guiding the skeptics through the motions until uneasy frowns turned into confident smiles. The once apathetic students soon became curious and ambitious.

Hoodoos scattered the landscape and everyone found their imaginations running with explanations and questions. When a student named Diego came up with an answer about their formation, I asked him to do a presentation to the whole group. He asked students how these formations might have come to be. Ideas that were popular were the possibilities of the collapse and stacking of rocks, or ancient human construction. Diego explained that the creation was through a process called erosion and was a product of time and weather. He descriptively explained how water and wind sculpted the boulders, leaving them balanced and stable only through the heaviest focus points.

Students were eager to test their strength against the mighty ball of granite but Diego promptly explained why it is important not to disrupt the continuing process, using both moral and legal conservation arguments.

One student named Angelina exclaimed “Treven, you were right! The desert is fun!” Another student wanted to tell me that he was no longer afraid of heights, because the desert was so beautiful to look at from above. Diego asked if we could live out here forever. Angelina wrote a song about nature and the benefits it holds in contrast to the urban world.

*“I gotta lot of things I gotta take off my mind.
The backcountry is good because it makes me feel alive.
From colorful leaves who are all unique, from towering trees, to the rocks I see.
I hear the wind, it’s telling me to stay.
I hear it when the birds keep chirping away.
I look around and thank God for my five beautiful senses, just to feel, hear, see, smell and taste all of nature’s blessings.
It’s better than the front country cuz all we do is judge, and see negative images that affect us.
So I thank you all for taking your time out of your day to show me natures one of life’s greatest things.”*



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