



## Search for the Emory Oak

by Treven Hooker

On April 11 2017, thirteen students and their teacher Nicolette Baker met with the Seeds of Stewardship crew Treven Hooker and Molly Travis for another wonderful adventure. Coronado National Memorial still had lots of terrain to explore, and we were determined to trek every mile we could. This hike was focused on investigating the Emory oak, and documenting and recording notes about this species. We would hike Joe's Canyon for this mission.

When we arrived, the sun was already strong, giving us a sample of the summer heat soon to come. Wild grasslands and waxy oak leaves reflected the light in neon colors. Steep mountains looked soft and forgiving with oak and pinon canopies climbing to the top.

We gathered at the visitor center and began debriefing our mission. Using the iNaturalist app, we were going to photograph, note, and document the Emory oak, a species specifically chosen by the students. Once everyone was confident with the app and our plan, we loaded our packs onto our backs, and made our way up Joe's Canyon Trail. The sun radiation upon our heads and shoulders. The air carried warm fragrance of flowers and juniper, sweetening our ascent up the trail.

Students were adamant about identifying the Emory oak. What could have been a short hike was lengthened by short stops every 20 – 30 yards. Because of our attention to detail, and our analytical vision of the surrounding landscapes, plants and animals of all kinds were discovered. Rainbow cactus stole the show, as many students had never seen such a colorful cactus before. After some time, we ascended above the preferred habitat of the oaks, and made their discovery rare. Wide vistas of southern Arizona grasslands and deserts captured our attention.



Soon, students spread out along the trail to devour their lunch. Some climbed into inviting trees to eat their meals like jaguars, while others sought shade beneath. Everyone remained transfixed upon the compounding miles that seemed to overwhelm the eyes, requiring one to close their lids and take a deep breath before coming back to the startling reality of nature's beauty.

We discussed the sky island effect, and watched from our perch how biomes changed as elevation gained. Observation showed a wild land in Mexico underdeveloped and still relatively unexplored. The US side showed a labyrinth of roads, towns, and human construction. Animal



migration, and how physical barriers like the border wall impact ecosystems became a lengthy topic. I encouraged students to keep protection, conservation and propagation of all things natural in mind for each action they make.

We began to hike back to the vehicles, seeking to identify anything they might have missed. We focused on proper ways to identify a plant species, cautioning students to only seek individuality based on leaves. It is bark and flowers that are the most telling, and thus close attention to premature plants must be taken and not overlooked. Students began using the iNaturalist app to identify any species they did not know. Because of this attention, we made our way down the trail before we even knew we were moving. Our days had been filled with successful hiking, naturalist practice, and wonderful exploration of our natural world.

Students unloaded from the van back at school. Tired, sun baked, and fulfilled, each student walked away with a smile. A successful day was had, and everyone was looking forward to another outing next month.



This Seeds of Stewardship outing made possible by an Active Trails grant from



Active Trails grants are funded through the generous support of the Coca-Cola Company and the Coca-Cola Foundation