



Tracking Adventure

by Treven Hooker

On April 26, 2017, 50 4th grade students from Coronado Elementary School adventured to Coronado National Memorial. This report is one of three, as this large class was split into three groups to accomplish a

massive day of exploration. This report is about the group of 15 students named the Big Horn Sheep, who climbed tall sky island peaks to observe its ecological properties, and winded through low arroyos in search of animal tracks. Our mission was to use our five senses to understand this wonderful landscape.

We began by observing all five senses in action. Touching plants, rocks and bugs. Observing all colors and movement. Listening to the sound of wind rattling the leaves of nearby trees. Tasting the salt that accumulates on skin after a few hours in the warm sun. I reminded them that our senses are how we understand the world around us. The more senses we are using, the more we will learn.

We drove up the steep, windy road that leads to Montezuma Pass, a wide saddle between Miller Peak and Coronado Peak. There we had a safety talk and Leave No Trace briefing. I set clear boundaries about where we can hike, what we are able to leave behind, and what to do in case of a snake encounter. Students confirmed they understood, and we set off down the Arizona Trail.



It was impossible to make consistent progress up the trail, for every ten yards or so each student found something that captivated one of their senses. Blooming flowers, wild and bewildering rocks, and fragrant juniper berries were only a few of the natural wonders that grabbed their attention.

Once at the top, I asked students to disperse and find something to analyze using all of their senses near Coronado Peak. After enough time had passed for each student to learn and study their object, they returned as a group. I asked them to present their object, using descriptive language, analogies, and objective observations. The students led an unfacilitated presentation describing their objects, how they felt, sounded, tasted, and what it reminded them of. When they were done, students asked a multitude of questions that prompted the students to continue observing. In the end, each student independently volunteered to present.

Once we were done presenting, we devoured lunch on the peak with incredible views of the San Rafael Valley below. Students observed silence on the mountain, only hearing birds carve through the wind.



After lunch, we packed up and began our descent. After the presentations, students were even more keen on observing the things around them. At the bottom of the trail, we reassembled for a lesson wildlife tracking from Mirna Manteca, the Mexico Conservation Biologist for Sky Island Alliance. She came with us for our adventure and shared a wealth of knowledge.

Mirna volunteered to show her exemplary skills in wildlife tracking down in an arroyo. Mirna pointed out evidence of bobcat, fox, javelina, deer, and many species of birds. Then she showed us how certain animals walked and ran, explaining how to read a track, and which animals leave certain patterns in their prints. The dry arroyo that seemed lifeless suddenly came to life with the tracks of all of the animals that recently passed by.

After the tracking activity, we began our walk back to the bus. Students ran, played, tracked and discovered every step of the way. Once at the visitor center, we were reunited with the other two groups, who roared back with excitement and laughter. All the students circled up, and random students shared their experience. Each was a story of adventure, discovery, and playful learning in Coronado National Memorial. The outing was a complete success, and each student and staff member expressed their excitement for our next adventure together.

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