



A Hike Through Time

by Treven Hooker

On September 7, 2017, 16 students from Bisbee High School ventured to the Chiricahua Mountains for a Sky Island adventure. This was the first expedition of the semester, and the students were eager to

explore the remote mountain range not far from their home. The goal of this expedition was to explore, experience, and learn about Sky Islands, the Chiricahua Mountains, and the vast and diverse biotic community.

It took over an hour to drive from Bisbee to the trailhead, and by the time we arrived students were restless to put boots to soil. We began by hiking the Echo Canyon Trail. Students were taken back by the alien landscape as thousands of “hoodoos” stretched high into the sky. I asked the group how these spires were formed? Erosion was the obvious answer, but that was not good enough for me. I prompted them to continue guessing, and finally students came to the conclusion that extreme weather like monsoon storms, scorching heat, and freezing winters cracked, chipped, and pushed these rocks into stand-alone spires. The students’ jaws dropped when they were told the spires were formed as a result of ancient volcanic ash from a single deposit of mass proportion.



The trail carved down into Echo Canyon, and we were privileged to have shade, water and cool breezes. Here, we discussed biomes, ecosystems, and aquatic desert environments. After our discussion, we devoured our well-deserved lunch under the shade of pine trees. Students ate, laughed, and discussed post high school careers and the value of outdoor education. One group hiked up to two massive spires that stood on top of a butte. From there they described unbelievable views of the surrounding mountains.

After lunch, we continued our hike through the Chiricahua Mountains and discussed the avian species in the area, and how to identify different raptors from a distance. A group of vultures soared high into the sky in a spiral formation. This prompted questions about why they fly as they do, how to identify them based on their flying motions, wing patterns and colors.



Later on, we spotted two red-tailed hawks soaring overhead. The students pointed out key features about their color, patterns, shape and flight. When comparing the red-tailed hawk to the turkey vulture, students got a clear idea of the unique qualities of each bird.

The trail was a steady incline, and the sun was strong and bright. This prompted us to take many breaks in the shade and guzzle water. Here we were able to truly appreciate the adaptations of the desert, and the animals that live out in the landscape permanently. I described the cooling effect prickly pear fruit has on the body, and healing properties prickly pear mucus when applied topically. It seemed students were fully interested, but the heat and the hike had taken its toll.

It was not long before we made our way back to the vehicles. We snapped one wonderful group photo at the top while overlooking thousands of hoodoos, then piled in for A/C and shade. With the engines roaring and the students fast asleep in the vehicle, we cruised the long winding roads back to Bisbee. This expedition was full of wonder, imagination, learning and adventure. This what education looks like.

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