Appreciating Our National Treasures
by Sabrina Carlson

On September 12th, 2017, fourty-two students from the Flagstaff Junior Academy Middle School visited Walnut Canyon National Monument to learn all about the ancient and modern treasures it holds.

We began our exploration with a ranger led discussion about Walnut Creek and the important resources this water source provided for ancient people. We were reminded of the correct way to visit ancient archeological sites and how to ensure we would Leave No Trace in this important resource.

After our Ranger talk we split up into groups to explore the Island Trail and view both the ruins and the considerable difference between the north and south facing aspects of the canyon. On the north facing side are high alpine firs and pines, and on the south face yucca and cactus. The students main goal for the day was to identify what resources existed for ancient people here, and how the Ancestral Puebloans adapted their lives and homes to make the best use of the surrounding environment. As we made our way around the trail we studied the interpretive signs, noticed the plant diversity, and considered the skill and speed with which people must have moved up and down the canyon wall to gather resources and visit friends and neighbors.

After exploring the island trail and enjoying lunch al fresco, we explored the rim trail, demonstration garden, pit house, and visitor center. With our pre planned scavenger hunt sheets we looked for information on tool making, cliff dwelling construction, and the incredible daily labor that was required to have food, water, and clothing in ancient times.

Once our explorations were complete students had a chance to debrief with each other and their teachers to share what they had learned. They found many examples of natural resources in the plant and animal diversity in Walnut Canyon, plus the advantages of having both warmer and cooler sides of the canyon to live in at different times of the year. This was an obvious choice for an abundant, comfortable puebloan life.
A perfect day, with perfect weather visiting a national treasure. What could be better?

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