



Basis on the Ridge

by Treven Hooker

On September 16, 2017, 22 students from Basis North gathered to embark on their first expedition of the season. Our mission was to explore the Oracle Ridge Passage of the

Arizona Trail on top of the Santa Catalina Mountains. The trail brings hikers to gorgeous vistas, thick stands of oak and pine, and arid grass fields. This expedition was six miles round trip, and provided tough trekking for any hiker.

The trail was thick with growth from a record wet summer, fully engulfing students as we hiked through. Flowers of all colors lined the trail, attracting equally vibrant and diverse pollinators. Not a second was wasted as students began hiking with speed. The Arizona Trail followed a steep ridge, and after we climbed through jungle like foliage, we emerged onto grassy slopes, full of healthy *Agave perryi* and multiple species of yucca, most of which were blooming with massive stalks and an array of flowers.



From clear vistas upon the ridge, we enjoyed distant mountains, desert planes and horizons. Discussing Sky Islands has never more perfect than from right here. From the ridge it was clear to see layered biomes, from pine forests, chaparral/oak, desert grassland, down to the Sonoran Desert. Here the students not only saw the differences, but felt the 60° comfort in relief from the 90° down below. Discussion of climate change and its effects on our local area was felt, observed, and debated.

After three miles, we arrived at Dan's Saddle, our lunch spot and halfway point. Here we discussed how wildfire changes landscapes and the regrowth process. After our initial discussion about climate change, students were quick to see a dangerous relationship between fire and climate change. The current landscape surrounding Oracle Ridge may never look the same after another fire. This gave the students great appreciation for the hike.

After lunch, the group split up into two. Both groups hiked on separate trails to find a shaded vista point. Here the students split up and spent 10 minutes in silence, observing and analyzing spaces near and far. When the time was over almost and I announced we needed to return to the trailhead, every reaction was sheer disappointment. Time was running out though, and we still had six miles uphill to hike. With confidence, students made easy work of the return trip, only stopping to admire views they missed the first time.



The drive down collected the beautiful evening drop of the sun. Light found difficulty traveling into the canyons, laying thick orange and yellow colors over everything. Nearly all the students fell asleep on the drive, resting after a long day of hiking, playing, and learning. It was another successful expedition with Basis North.



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