On September 21st, 2017, fifty students from Mount Elden Middle School’s Alpine Leadership Academy program took a 3.5 mile hike through Picture Canyon in Flagstaff to visit the Elden Mountain Passage (Passage 32) of the Arizona Trail.

One of the key components of the Alpine program is service learning and guiding the students to create their own projects that will serve their communities by the end of the year. We launched our hike by honoring the many Flagstaff city residents who took it upon themselves to clean up, restore and revitalize this beautiful riparian area and cultural landmark. It had become an unofficial dump for many years and had been taken over by invasive weeds. We discussed what it means to “leave a legacy.” We will all leave something behind us. Do we want to leave behind something positive that benefits thousands of people, like Dale Shewalter and the citizens that restored Picture Canyon? Or do we want to leave a mess. We get to choose.

Half the group stayed behind to take a tour of the Wildcat Hill wastewater treatment facility and half headed out on the hike. After lunch our groups would rotate to make sure everyone was able to learn and see all the packed day had to offer. The hikers meandered down the trail to the waterfall, which is a rare and wonderful sight in Flagstaff to see flowing water tumbling in churning rapids. From here we searched for the first visible petroglyph of the hike, an antelope high on the canyon wall.

Once we intersected with the Arizona Trail, we practiced walking in silence for a short distance to see what local birds we could see and hear dancing in the canopy above. Once we arrived at the main petroglyph panel, students had an opportunity to explore and consider images of waterbirds, suns, hunters and game animals. They then took a little time to create their own stories using pictures to tell the tale.
After lessons we played some rounds of camouflage to round out our adventure. How lucky we are to be able to have a lovely day of learning and adventure, right in the heart of our city.

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