



Hidden Terrain

by Molly Travis

On December 16, 2017, 14 students from Basis North Tucson ventured to the east side of the Rincon Mountains. It was my second time leading this group of inquisitive students. Without using established trails, we hiked up an unnamed canyon in search of a hidden, high-country grassland area. The trip was full of surprise lessons.

It finally felt like fall as the temperature dipped to a cool 54 degrees. Although the forecast predicted rain later in the day, we braved the elements and headed outdoors. The eastern side of the Rincon Mountains is remote and rugged. The washboard dirt road we drove on crosses dry washes through cattle country. It is a mix of riparian habitat, high desert grasslands, canyons, and ancient rock formations.

Due to the nature of the terrain, conversations about teamwork, decision-making, and risk management were of utmost importance. As the eager students explored the canyon, they made sure to help out their classmates by passing backpacks up steeper sections or waiting for a friend to catch up. As with



most things in life, it is always a question of risk versus reward. Luckily, this canyon had a wonderful balance of problem-solving navigation while still encouraging the students to push forward.

The canyon also held some hidden secrets. Our spot for lunch was a black-rock cove, smooth from eons of water erosion. Huge boulders littered the base of the dry waterfall and we admired the natural architecture.

After lunch, we trekked onward. Occasionally, the group would stop and gather around something neat, like a multi-colored quartz rock or an interesting piece of scat. The most amazing discovery of this day was finding a tarantula! Some students naturally



gravitated toward this arachnid, while others kept their distance. All students were intrigued by this rare find!

Treven lead a wonderful discussion about the relationship humans have with animals, plants, and the natural environment. Often, we approach spiders and other “creepy-crawlers” with a negative or hostile energy. However, by approaching the spider with a gentle and respectful energy, Treven was able to safely handle the spider.

The group made it further up the canyon than ever before and we took in the 360-degree views from a small butte. One quick look at the clock showed that we had spent almost all day hiking! After a well-deserved break, the students collected their things and begun the trek back to the vans. Just in time: the clouds continued to increase and the winds picked up. Our first storm of the season was arriving. Perhaps next time we visit, we will get to enjoy the pools formed from the rain! Although we did not make it to the grassland pastures, we delighted in the journey of discovery through this hidden terrain.



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