



Hiking on the Edge

by Treven Hooker

On December 18, 2017, 11 students from Edge High School embarked on their first adventure of the semester with the Seeds of Stewardship program. This group was a part of a hiking club, making them capable and experienced outdoor adventurers. When co-leader Molly Travis and I arrived, we briefed the group on our expedition. Our mission was to venture to the David Yetman Trail in Tucson Mountain Park, and analyze the lush Sonoran Desert ecosystem. The group was thrilled, and eager to get going. Without unnecessary delay, we began our journey.



When we arrived, the cold December morning was replaced by cool air and intense sun. Layers were stripped the moment we exited the van, and water began to flow into our stomachs. We started off by discussing the way we learn outdoors versus indoors, and the expectations required for this kind of exploration. This was easily communicated, and once all heads nodded in agreement we began the march forward. We were greeted with green and lush foliage. Hackberry trees still clung firm to green leaves, and saguaros drew vertical towers of green through the brown rock hills behind them. We paused to discuss

the adaptive qualities of a saguaro, like their ability to swell and contract based on water conditions, and the qualities that let them store water for extended periods of time.

This first inquiry prodded further questions about desert plant adaptations, and we discussed the teddy bear cholla's cloning ability, and the multiple uses their spines provide. The analyzation of these many aspects began to open student's eyes, they were seeing just how unique and detailed the Sonoran Desert ecosystem is. Our trail dipped in and out of an arroyo, prodding one student to ask, "Did this used to be a river millions of years ago?"

I explained that this is a mighty river once a year, for 45 minutes or less. Arroyos are dried creeks or rivers, that upon rain, quickly collect and flow water for miles. Once the rain ceases, the river does too, and soon the arroyo is back to being dry. This seemed to fascinate the student, who found it hard to imagine flowing water here.





The trail delivered us to the Bowen Homestead, an old stone structure built almost 100 years ago. We paused to discuss what the Tucson valley used to look like, and what the quality of life was for those who lived in such natural spaces. We were all very hungry, but some were not satisfied with the location. A group of youth had their eyes set on a near by mountain. So quickly they hiked up very steep terrain, covered in cactus and loose rock, to summit this tall mountain where they could see in all directions. With satisfaction and an acceptable level of energy spent, the students high up pulled out their food and began refueling for the hike back. Those of us below enjoyed the silence, some students even hiking out alone to enjoy some solitude. This is a beautiful example of youth response to the outdoors, and their interest in the exploration of mental, physical, and social aspects.

Once lunch was finished, we loaded our backpacks and began our hike back. On our way, we talked more about water in the desert, and how plants here have adapted to collect that water. Some youth

were interested in the facts being shared, others were focused on the exploration of the area, and some youth were committed to the independence outside. Regardless of the focus, every person interacted intimately with the desert on this day. A massive success for the first expedition of the semester.

This Seeds of Stewardship outing made possible with support from

