Riding Through the Fall
by Sabrina Carlson

On October 28th, 2017, twelve students from the Flagstaff Junior Academy Mountain Bike Club set out on our annual 18 mile fall ride on the Arizona Trail from the 418 road to Aspen Corner and back again.

The riders gathered to prepare at the school as we made sure everyone’s bikes were in good working order and all riders had the clothing, food and water they needed.

Parked and unloaded at the 418 road, we headed out uphill for our six mile climb to Aspen corner. Before setting out we talked through the idea that we would be climbing for a good long while. Pacing is one of the most difficult things to teach young riders. They will have more fun, ride more smoothly and ultimately travel faster if they choose a speed that they can just do all day rather than sprinting and recovering over and over again.

It was a perfect, warm and welcoming fall day. Winter had not yet descended on the peaks making it a tremendous day for exploring. The riders headed uphill and settled into their places in the pack.

On we charged to our lunch spot at the Bismark Lake intersection. In the shadow of the mountain on a grassy prairie we refueled with our lunches and prepared for the last bit of climbing to the top.

We wound our way through aspen groves, stands of Douglas Fir and limber pines, and above the breathtaking view of Hart Prairie and the Nature Conservancy.

Once we reached our turn around point, the more experienced riders opted to take the more technical descent down the Arizona Trail to Snowbowl Road with Mr. Ross while the newer riders followed Ms. Deanna and I back down through the aspen and fern groves to the 418. Once we loaded up the bikes and riders on our side of the ride we picked up the rest of the crew on our way back to town.
This ride is a legendary touchstone for the students in Mr. Ross’ group all year. To be able to come, you have to have demonstrated an ability to deal with long climbs and moderate technical riding. It is the motivation to come to practice and put in the work. When the adventure is over, new riders have a new sense of confidence in themselves and their riding. I can hardly wait to do it again next year.

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