

IMPORTANT NEWS FOR AZT THRU-HIKERS & RIDERS

March 18, 2020

If you are currently thru-hiking or thru-riding the Arizona National Scenic Trail (AZT) then you're probably in one of the safest places imaginable. The AZT provides ideal locations to practice social distancing to help fight the spread of COVID-19. However, recent events locally and nationally mean that your long-distance adventure is about to get a lot more challenging. Please read this thoroughly, and if you know anyone currently thru-hiking or riding the trail, please help share this information with them immediately.

GATEWAY COMMUNITIES

Recent orders from city, county and state government have led to the closure of bars, restaurants and many businesses throughout Arizona. If you are planning to resupply within Arizona Trail gateway communities for essential supplies, you may find CLOSED signs on stores and empty shelves within the places that remain open. And forget about ever being able to find toilet paper for sale or available at public toilets. As of today, post offices are still open so if you mailed packages to yourself in advance you may still be able to collect those. However, the small towns with great food and friendly characters that normally define an AZT experience are not the same places they were just a few weeks ago.

WATER CACHES

If you cached water in advance of your thru-hike at a designated location, don't count on it being there when you arrive. Some Trail Angels have recently reported water caches being raided by non-hikers (likely due to a shortage of bottled water within stores across the state). The good news is that natural water sources along the AZT are flowing as healthy as ever, so plan to treat water from springs, seeps, tanks and creeks along the way. Not treating your water puts you at extreme risk of waterborne illness, including salmonella and E Coli. Because of the current strain on our medical system due to the COVID-19 outbreak, please do everything possible to minimize any risks to your health.

MEDICAL SERVICES

As COVID-19 continues to spread, our current medical system is being tested. This is especially true within rural Arizona where long-distance trail users are likely to need help if they get into trouble. You are encouraged to do everything possible to minimize risks to your personal health and the need for medical services. By visiting medical facilities and engaging with health care professionals you may increase your risk of coming into contact with the coronavirus. If there has ever been a time to NOT get injured or sick, it's now.

SHUTTLES

To minimize risk to themselves and the general public, many shuttles have decided to discontinue services until further notice. If you were counting on a shuttle to help get you from a trailhead to town, or to/from the southern or northern terminus, you should explore other options.

HITCHHIKING

Normally, hitchhiking is very easy within Arizona and especially near AZT trailheads. Not anymore. With social distancing and the 6-foot minimum rule to minimize spread of coronavirus being widely implemented, you're not likely to get picked up unless it's in the back of a pickup truck. Please re-read previously stated cautionary advice about minimizing your risk and reliance on a strained medical system before you climb into the back of a truck.

CONSIDER POSTPONING YOUR TRIP

As painful as it may be to consider this option, the Arizona Trail Association encourages you to postpone or cancel your long-distance adventure along the AZT. If you have not yet started your trip, stay home or consider hiking shorter segments along the trail where you can be fully self-sufficient without relying on others to help you with transportation, food and other services.

If you have already started and can be fully self-sufficient for 800 miles and/or rely on assistance from a single friend or family member, consider all of your options very carefully. Bailing out and returning at another time may be the best choice. The AZT will be here for you to explore in the future.

HYSTERIA OR REALITY?

As humans, our first, most natural response to any tragedy is denial. This is why a lot of people are refusing to take COVID-19 seriously. So let's move past denial and work toward acceptance. The natural steps between denial and acceptance are anger, bargaining and depression. Walking or riding along a trail is an ideal place to process these kinds of emotions, and please allow yourself the time you need to work through each one of these. But soon – really soon – it will be important to accept personal responsibility for helping to stop the spread of this disease. You can do this by minimizing contact with others.

If, a few months from now, we look back and agree we overreacted and COVID-19 is not as bad as we predicted, then we'll know we did something right by taking extreme precautions. It beats the alternative of underestimating a global pandemic.

The Arizona Trail Association does not make these statements and recommendations lightly. We work tirelessly to protect and maintain the trail for you to use, and know that the AZT provides a pathway for transformative experiences. We know that trails and outdoor spaces are going to play a vital role in America's recovery, which is why we are asking for your kindness, patience and support today.

Sincerely,



Matthew J. Nelson
Executive Director, Arizona Trail Association

Stay informed about coronavirus and learn about steps you can take to minimize your risk by visiting the Center for Disease Control's website: [cdc.gov](https://www.cdc.gov)

