

Gila River Chapter FCF Trek 2016

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The Gila River Chapter is part of the Arizona District Royal Rangers ministry. Being located in Arizona presents challenges unique to few other chapters in the U.S. Oppressive heat, cacti, rattlesnakes, scorpions, lack of water sources and seasonal monsoon rains make scheduling a time and location for an FCF trek a real task.

A location was selected based on its central location to Phoenix and water. The high desert surrounding the ghost town of Nothing, AZ, and nearby Bagdad, AZ, appears desolate, but hides a little known spotty tributary known as Little Burro Creek. Located along this hidden waterway are abandoned gold mines and oasis ponds that see little, if any, human visits during the year. After two misfires in 2015 and early 2016, a date of November 19-20, 2016 was scheduled, and the planning began in earnest.



The FCF Trek links on the National FCF website are THE source of information for planning an FCF Trek. Clicking on the link (<http://www.nationalfcf.com/FCFFrontierTrek/tabid/2347/Default.aspx>) at the bottom of the homepage provides several resources: some Period Trekking Web Links, Suggested Reading, a Preparations guide and an excellent Gear List. These resources were shared with the chapter on our FaceBook page and District Royal Rangers website.

When the dates finally arrived, four hardy souls made the drive to the trailhead. Included were myself, Dave “Oso Grande” Blount and Todd and Cayden Mills – our father and son team. While we strived to keep everything as period as possible, there were a few modern items we felt had to be included. First, shoes. Arizona has some of the most inhospitable terrain this side of the Israeli wilderness. Modern shoes were worn on the trail and period shoes brought along.



Next was a water filter. Water is a huge commodity in the desert, and our location consisted of a series of potentially stagnant ponds – so a modern water filter was used to cut down on boiling and cooling water. Finally, phone cameras were used to capture the trip memories. The trekkers used the most period gear they had, and made notes to improve those items they don’t have for future treks.

The drive in to Nothing, AZ and through the unmarked desert proved challenging. Topo maps and Google Earth maps both proved less than accurate once we actually drove around in the area. After a few miscues, we finally arrived at what we thought was the trailhead to the path to Bonanza Wash – an abandoned gold mine. The path is actually a large wash – a dry river bed that can turn to a raging river with one of Arizona’s famous rainstorms. Maps appeared to show a hiking distance of about 4 miles.

Once we loaded up and hit the trail, both the weather and the scenery proved picture perfect. High desert vistas with the signature saguaro cactus and several other species of pricklies mixed with fantastic rock formations and changing view around every river bend. The trek ended up being shorter than we thought – the bottom of the wash was filled with huge boulders that required picking our steps carefully until reaching the Little Burro. We were in a different wash than we thought!



No problem – this wash had a lot of water. There was a pond about one mile long with lush reeds along the edge and sheer mountain walls protecting our site, along with a sandy wash to set up camp. We all agreed this was a perfect location for a comfy camp. We set about making a fire



ring with the countless boulders and collecting armloads of dry firewood for the evening. A fire was started using flint and steel – just four strikes and she was lit. As we cooked our supper and shared our blessings around the fire, a billion stars shone overhead. Arizona is famous for its clear night skies! Slowly we dropped off to sleep on a semi-comfortable sand bar, covered by a few blankets. Night temperatures only get down to the 50’s in Arizona. The only alarm we had was a few mule deer bucks that walked through camp in the middle of the night and alerted on our presence – raising a ruckus.

Morning sun peeked over the steep mountains and the fire was relit to cook up some breakfast. Mmmm, hard tack and dried fruit in boiling water – what a treat! The gear was carefully packed and off on the trail we were once again.



Some gathering clouds were a cause for alarm as rain was in the forecast for the following day. Being caught in a wash in a rainstorm can be deadly. But the slow trip up the wash proved to be both beautiful and uneventful. Except for the cows we scared up while hiking out.





We closed out the trek by visiting the nearest town and sharing a tasty lunch and talking about what we will do THE NEXT TIME! Some lesson we learned: pack baskets are a better choice than a bedroll around your shoulder and using a haversack to carry gear works well. Cut down on the food and unneeded gear, and have a bigger canteen. And just like Psalm 19:1 says: “The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands.”

To view a short YouTube video show of the trip, visit the following link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KkL8mgbJe1g>



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