

Pinnacle Peak – more than a walk in the desert

By Kathryn Reed

SCOTTSDALE – It's a bit of a freeway as people zip past us. They are running. Sweat drips. And the sun hasn't been up long on this last Monday in April.

Hiking in the desert this time of year means getting an early start. Temps are in the triple digits and there are no towering pine trees to provide shade. And even though some of the trail is in the shade, it's still hot.

My friend Penny lives near Phoenix and makes the decision about our start time. I whine. I don't do mornings well on a good day and I really don't relish a 6:15 start while on vacation.

It didn't take long before I was thanking her. I was hot before 7am. And to think I used to live in Vegas and loved, loved, loved the heat. Not so much anymore. I'm kind of wimpy. (It's so hot in Scottsdale now that on May 19 the park will open at 5am.)



Penny and Sue lead the way
hiking Pinnacle Peak.
Photos/Kathryn Reed

But the hike was worth it – even with all the people – even with feeling the heat so early in the day.

The 150-acre Pinnacle Peak Park is run by the city of Scottsdale. While the starting point is at 2,570 feet, the low point is actually 2,366 feet. The highest point is 2,889 feet. But with all the up and down of the trail, the elevation gain is about 1,300 feet.

Day hikers never actually reach the summit. Rock climbers with the appropriate gear may access it.

The Sierra Club rates this a moderate hike. If it weren't for all the stair stepping, it would probably get a lower rating.

It is 3.5 miles out and back.

The trail winds around, providing an expansive view that goes for miles and miles. At the base of the peak are massive houses. Close by are lush golf courses. Farther out are the McDowell Mountains, Four Peaks and Granite Mountain.

One of the great things about the hike is all the signage on the plants. In some ways it's like being at a botanical garden.

While much of it is cactus; they are all so different. And the blooms are as stunning as the wildflowers found on a Sierra hike – just in a different way.

With all the people on the trail, the critters were hiding. But animals that have been seen along this trek include desert tortoises, rattlesnakes, gila monsters, coyotes, grey foxes, mule deer, javelina, bobcats and mountain lions. It is considered a wildlife sanctuary.

We were fortunate to have seen a javelina earlier on the Troon North Golf Course. Pinnacle Peak is a constant fixture when walking the course. The flowers and variety of cacti and other plants on the golf course are reasons to play a round – or

just rent a condo and walk it with a glass of wine after the golfers have all left for the day.

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