

Camelback Mountain provides sweeping views



Downtown Phoenix is in the distance as seen from along the Camelback Mountain trail. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

PHOENIX – Mileage is not always the determining factor in how sore one will be after a hike. Terrain has a lot to do with achy muscles, too.

Nine days ago I found out how true that statement is.

Camelback Mountain is considered by some to be the toughest hike in the city limits of Phoenix. (It's on the border of Scottsdale.) There are two routes to the 2,704-foot summit – Echo Canyon and Cholla. Penny and I did the latter trail, which is longer. Echo is steeper.

We gained 1,300 feet in elevation over the course of 1.6 miles.

The layered sandstone was harder on my legs than Tahoe's dirt and decomposed granite trails. It was even more pronounced

coming down. I wish I had shock absorbers built into my shoes.

That night I could not climb or descend the stairs at the condo without pain and looking like there was something out of whack.

This is definitely not a trail for everyone, especially because of the scrambling that is involved. A backpack with water is recommended over carrying a bottle because many times both hands are needed to get up or down a pitch. There's nothing technical about the climb, but it does require being in shape.

We just shook our heads at the people jogging up and down the trail.

But what got us to really turn our heads was when we saw members of the Scottsdale Adventure Club hauling up multiple Christmas trees to erect at the top. Last year the one 10-foot tree was a bit cumbersome, so this year they did a few smaller trees – all just to be festive.

The name of the mountain comes from its looking like a camel because of the two formations that are split by a saddle. From the top it's a 360-degree view of the valley.

Fortunately, the area had been getting rain before I arrived, and was still overcast the morning of our hike. Even in the 70s it was a warm hike. You are completely exposed all the time – no big pines for shade.

While there are a few cacti growing, there did not seem to be much life on this massive rock. Luckily we didn't see one of the more common critters – rattlesnakes.

Starting out we see the sprawling Phoenician resort below us. Civilization is everywhere below us and in the distance.

There was a time when Camelback was going to be an Indian reservation. Then development kept encroaching on the

mountain. Finally, Preservation of Camelback Mountain Foundation led by Barry Goldwater was able to get the federal government involved in the 1960s to preserve the summit.

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