

Chuck A What?

Reptiles rule trail to Wind Cave

I joked the day before going on this hike what a great video it would make if I got bit by a rattlesnake.

Now that *Take 5* is doing "News at Noon" and providing readers with video on most of our stories, the need for great clips is a new part of this journalist's thinking.

But sacrificing for the sake of great video, well, let's just say there are a lot of things I'd do, but getting bit by a rattlesnake isn't one of them.

Still, this time of year I wondered if I'd have a choice as I set out on the 3.2-mile (round trip) Wind Cave Trail in Usery Mountain Regional Park.

Now if you're wondering if I make it back alive from this hike you'll just have to keep reading.

(Top left) A chuckwalla soaks up the sun just off the Wind Cave Trail in Usery Mountain Regional Park.

(Above) Ocotillos are in full bloom at Usery Mountain.

(Left) The Fountain spouting is visible from the Wind Cave Trail.

(Right) A rattlesnake makes its way through the brush and on to the trail.



Into the Outdoors

These could be the final ramblings transcribed from the tape, or I could be comfortably sitting on my couch typing away on my laptop.

I know the suspense is, dare I say, killing you.

Chuck a what?

I know a lot of things about the desert. Sometimes I amaze myself at the seemingly useless knowledge I possess.

But what it really boils down to is if you say something with enough confidence and big words, people will believe anything.

It just so happened, though, that when a lady asked me what kind of lizard I was taking photos of, I just so happened to know what kind it was.

It's a Chuckwalla, I said.

"A chuck a what," was her reply.

The thick black lizard sat on the rock, unafraid of the crowd that was starting to gather.

I pointed the lizard out to more people, some so focused on hiking the trail they're unaware of the details of the desert beyond the path.

But I've got my snake eyes focused and I'm ready to spot all wildlife.

I've taken enough photos of the Chuckwalla (it never smiled incidentally) and now a group of elementary school



A chuckwalla keeps an eye out on hikers.

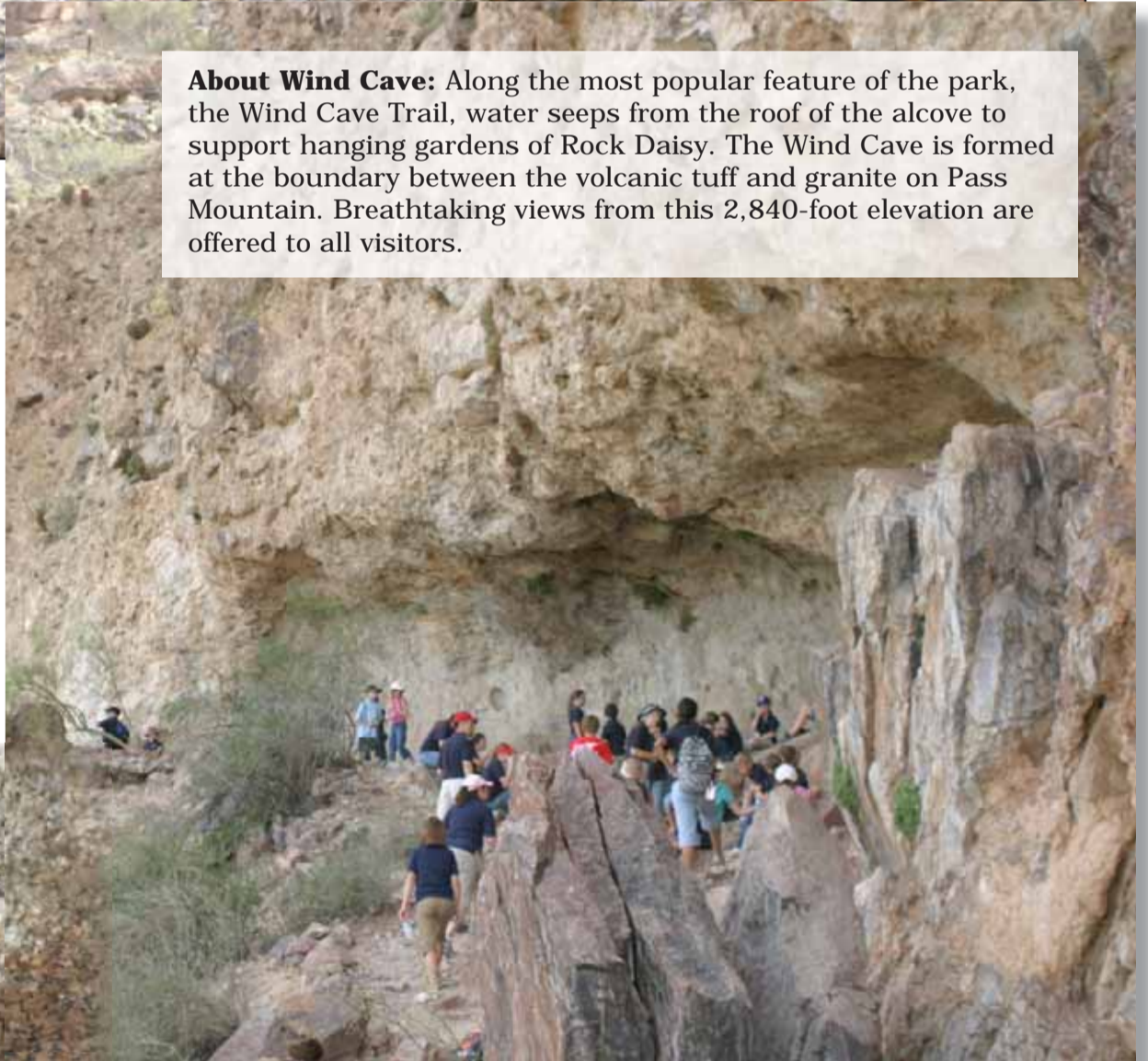
kids have started up the trail. I hustle to stay ahead of them as I ascend several hundred feet up Pass Mountain.

About a half mile out the trail really begins to climb with switchbacks up the steep terrain.

The trail cuts around large boulders and up the mountain face. At about a half mile from Wind Cave it levels out at an elevation of 2,800 feet. The trail winds along the

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About Wind Cave: Along the most popular feature of the park, the Wind Cave Trail, water seeps from the roof of the alcove to support hanging gardens of Rock Daisy. The Wind Cave is formed at the boundary between the volcanic tuff and granite on Pass Mountain. Breathtaking views from this 2,840-foot elevation are offered to all visitors.



(Above) A group of school children take a rest at Wind Cave in Usery Mountain Regional Park in Mesa.

