



March 28, 2016

Birth of the SaddleBrooke Hiking Club

By Bill Leichtenheimer, Club Founder

I learned to hike in the Boy Scouts as a youngster in Ohio. My Explorer troop specialized in hiking and I have been an avid hiker ever since.

My wife, Barbara and I moved to SaddleBrooke after retiring. We arrived here on July 1, 1998. I immediately made enquiries as to whether or not there was a hiking club in SaddleBrooke. There was no established club but a resident, Eileen Wells, led hikes for a participation fee. I started hiking with Eileen that Fall and hiked with her group through the following Spring. Eileen charged so much for each three-month period. She led three hikes of varying levels each week.

In June, 1999, Eileen's group held a picnic at the picnic grounds on Kitt Peak. It was Eileen's 75th birthday and we surprised her with a cake. She announced that she was retiring from leading hikes.

I discussed the idea of starting a hiking club with some of my hiking friends from Eileen's group. They agreed that there might be enough interest to get a club started. I owe Eileen a great debt of gratitude for everything she taught me about the hiking trails in our area and about the plants and animals of Arizona. She was a veritable encyclopedia of knowledge. She was very supportive of my idea of starting a club.

At the same time, I was working part time as a hiking guide at Miraval. I learned all of the trails in the 50 Year Trail area and many others and would use this information to good advantage after the new club was formed.

With the decision made to attempt to start a club, I started doing some planning as to how to proceed. My first step was to contact the president of the Sun City Hiking Club. He very graciously invited me to attend their next board meeting followed by their hiking guides meeting. My wife and I attended. They received us most graciously and were very supportive and helpful. They provided me with copies of their constitution and bylaws and a copy of their hiking database.

With that information, I sat down and developed a vision for the future SaddleBrooke Hiking Club. My basic philosophical premise was that it must be a club that would offer hikes for all levels of hikers. Once I had sketched out a draft of an outline for how the proposed club would be organized, I invited some of my hiking friends to attend a meeting at my home. This meeting was held on August 6, 1999 which coincidentally was the birthday of Dave Caldwell, one of my hiking friends and a neighbor. Dave and his wife Beverly attended this meeting and we had a birthday cake for Dave. At this meeting, I reviewed what I had done so far and what my vision for a hiking club was.

After much discussion, our group decided to proceed with the process and we set a date in September in the main ballroom at SaddleBrooke Country Club HOA#1 for all SaddleBrooke residents who might be interested in starting a hiking club.

Those in attendance at the meeting at my home were: William and Barbara Leightenheimer, Ed and Eileen Wells, Jim and Helen Strickler, Dave and Beverly Caldwell, Bob and Linda Appel, Jerry and Mary McElhiney, Arnold and Judi Coopersmith, George Ayuso, Jerry Musser, and Sharon Simpson.

My wife is an artist and she made up posters announcing the September meeting and we placed them in key locations around SaddleBrooke. My hope was that we might get forty to fifty people to show up. I went ahead and made plans and came up with a constitution, bylaws and a slate of officers.

When the meeting date arrived, I was very pleasantly surprised when about one hundred SaddleBrooke residents showed up. Their enthusiasm and support were overwhelming. They voted to form the club and they voted approval of the constitution and bylaws. They elected the following slate of officers:

President	William Leightenheimer
Vice-President	Norm Kyle
Secretary	Judi Coopersmith
Treasurer	Kay White
Chief Hiking Guide	Jim Strickler

Dues were established at \$10 per person per year for the first year as we were starting with no funds. We subsequently lowered the dues to \$5 per person per year. We published the first newsletter with the Oct/Nov/Dec 1999 issue. Beginning in January 2000, we established the newsletter to be published on a bimonthly basis. My wife Barbara, with the help of Beverly Caldwell, designed the club patch and also the design for a club tee shirt. We held our first club picnic on December 4, 1999 at Catalina State Park. It was a rousing success with approximately 150 members in attendance.

Our first hiking newsletter announced forty-one hikes. Our first hiking guides were: William and Barbara Leightenheimer, Dave and Beverly Caldwell, George Ayuso, Jim Strickler, Norm Kyle, Gary Gouvea, Jan and Dean Wilson, George Brunder, and Bob Rogers. The first club hike was led by Barbara Leightenheimer to Catalina State Park on the Canyon Loop Trail.

I write this with a great feeling of pride and satisfaction. This club has turned out to be a huge success thanks to all of the wonderful people who have so unselfishly volunteered their time to serve as club officers, guides, committee chairpersons and in many other capacities. Many, many thanks to all of you and to all members who get out there and hike. Without all of you, our club would not be possible. God Bless you all and happy trails.

Bill Leightenheimer
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