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Amazing Places: Storm Ranch area offers great trails close to home

By [Nigel Reynolds, Courier Columnist](#)

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This week we'll stay within city limits with a hike to the Storm Ranch area of the Granite Dells. The Dells have been in the news a lot recently — more on that in a minute.

A sales tax initiative, dating to 2000, showed citizens were willing to be taxed three-quarters of 1 percent for streets and one-quarter of 1 percent for purchase of open space. Well, the initiative wasn't well written, so the City Council later found a legal way to spend less than one-quarter of 1 percent on open space over the 15-year period. Some open-space money was left in a dedicated account at the start of 2015 — \$2 million of that money was used in January 2018 to buy 160 acres of the Storm Ranch, immediately east of the Peavine Trail. Under the guidance of Joe Baynes and Chris Hosking, with construction work by the Over-the-Hill Gang, a wonderful trails system was built in this fairly small acreage.

The photo at the top of this story gives you an idea of the amazing rock formations you'll find as you explore these trails. This trail was named Easter Island because the rocks there remind some people of the statues on that Pacific Island. Boulder Creek runs through much of Storm Ranch — the photo on the right is looking up the sandy and rocky floor of a side creek. You can see a small trickle of water at bottom right. The rocks are interspersed with lots of trees and bushes, and many flowers at this time of the year after our consistent monsoon rainfall.

This trail system is one of the Spree Hikes for this autumn. The Highlands Center for Natural History on Walker Road organizes an annual Hiking Spree to encourage people to get some exercise and enjoy nature as well. Each hike has its own 8.5-by-11-inch map that tells you how to drive to the trail head, describes the trail, identifies points of interest and often gives you some history. For your own map, go to "highlandscenter.org/hiking-spree/" and scroll down to the map list. Click on "#12 Storm Ranch" to print the color map. If you don't like these maps, complain to me — I've been creating all of the maps for the previous 10 years. The Spree started just a week ago, so sign up for free. You can hike as many trails as you wish, with family or friends at times convenient for you. The 12 trails are a mixture of Easy, Moderate, Strenuous. This year, 10 of the trails are the favorites from the last 10 years, together with two new trails — Storm Ranch being one of those.

If you've been following local news, you'll know that a development company, Arizona Eco Development (AED), recently submitted a request to the city for 1,000 of their acres to be annexed, where they plan to build houses and a resort. Some of these acres include the Heart of the Dells by the Point of Rocks, where the Peavine and Iron King Trails join. Planning &

Zoning, and then City Council, will review this annexation request over the next 12 months or so, and ask for changes to meet certain ordinances and to protect the existing trails for the benefit of the public. AED's current proposal has various roads crossing the trails, which will completely change their character and safety, not to mention houses being built adjacent to these two popular trails.

If you care for the Dells and these trails, attend the upcoming meetings to show the council how important the Dells are to you, and that the open space required of a large housing development should be assigned in a way that protects our heritage of this Amazing Place.

Nigel Reynolds was born in England and has lived in Arizona for 40 years, and in Prescott for over 20 years. "Exploring is in my blood," he says. To see today's or previous articles with the photos in color, go online to dCourier.com and enter "Amazing Places" in the search-bar at top right — you'll need to be a subscriber.