Students embark on moonlight hike

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One by one, hikers made their way up the path with only moonlight guiding them to the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park wind caves Friday evening.

The group of more than 30 was mostly made up of Imperial Valley College and San Diego State University-Imperial Valley campus geology students.

“The moonlight was awesome. You could see everything. I didn’t really expect that,” IVC student Edgar Ramirez said. “It’s probably something everybody should do, at least once in their life. You’re out there, you don’t know what you’re going to expect, you’re exploring. It’s an adventure. I like that.”

It was the first time for Ramirez to hike, and he now plans to go on more.

IVC student Jose Serrano also went Friday and plans to return during the next full moon.

“It was very impressive. I liked it a lot. I talked to some friends and told them we have to go,” he said. “It’s a new experience, something new to do in the Valley.”

These types of responses from students are exactly why IVC/SDSU-IV geology instructor Kevin Marty has been taking them on the trek for years.

He offers it as an extra credit assignment to students each semester.

“I think it’s really cool when students that have never hiked go out and find out they like it,” he said. “It’s just kind of one of the hidden things in the Valley that is cool to go visit.”

The hike is about five miles roundtrip and challenging at times with trekkers hopping across some areas, huffing up inclines or accidentally hitting sharp cactus plants lining the trail.

At some of the rougher areas, some joked that they thought the hike deserved more extra credit points than promised.
The group met around 7:30 p.m. near the Imperial Valley Mall before traveling by caravan west on Interstate 8 and north onto S2 past Ocotillo before turning off on a dirt road.

Then, those whose vehicles couldn’t traverse the rugged landscape jumped into others’ sport-utility vehicles or in the back of pickups for the short drive to the beginning of the trail.

Marty said the group has been as large as 50 at times, but he tries to keep it to a more manageable 30.

The area is part of what used to be an ancient beach from when the Gulf of California extended up into the Valley and now contains a lot of marine deposition.

Marty said fossils found in the Imperial Formation date back 7 million years.

The wind caves are ancient beach deposits that have been uplifted through faulting, exposed now with the sandstone caves formed through a process of wind and water erosion.

Some students brought small flashlights to inspect findings along the way, but while it was cloudy, the majority of the group only used the light provided by the full moon.

“It’s amazing with clear skies and in the moonlight,” Marty said. “It’s a different experience. I think it’s really cool. Out in the desert, it’s really exposed, and you can see everywhere.”

It took a couple of hours for the entire group to reach the wind caves, where people then spread out, climbing all over the geological structures on their own mini-adventures.

While some caves could only fit one person, others were as large as a small room.

The group members returned to their vehicles, tired but triumphant, about 1 a.m. before getting back on the highway to return home.

“I thought I was not going to make it, but it was a very enjoyable experience overall,” Ramirez said. “I’d go back anytime as long as it’s not hot. I’d definitely do it again.”

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