

OUTDOORS

Desert Beauty

Winter is the ideal time to enjoy any of our hiking trails around the Valley. Need help picking one? We've got a recommendation to start off your 2026.

By Steve Stockmar
Sun Life Magazine

It's easy to love our 300-plus days of sunshine in the Valley, but let's be real – winter is our optimum time to get in those hiking miles.

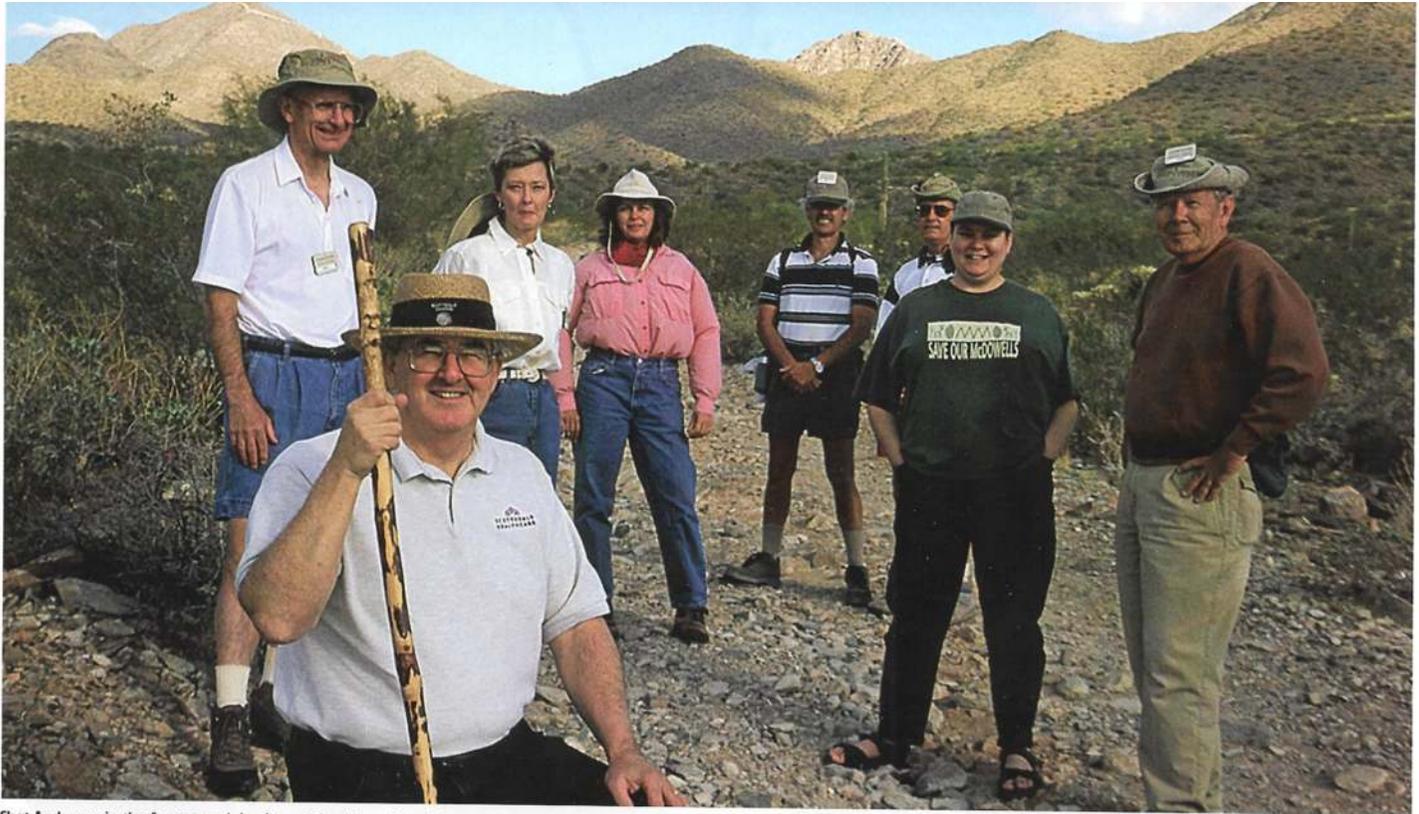
And the possibilities! Maricopa County Parks and Recreation manages about 645 miles of trails itself. In the West Valley alone, Glendale boasts more than 40 miles of trails within the city limits. Peoria residents enjoy access to more than 18 miles of multi-use trails in its trail system.

You get the idea.

Access, skill level, and those endless southwest views are

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Volunteers work to build the Andrews-Kinsey Trail which, by the time it was dedicated in 2014, became the first hiking trail to link the approximately seven miles of preserve trails within Fountain Hills to the more than 300 in the Scottsdale McDowell Mountain Preserve, McDowell Mountain Park, and into Tonto National Forest. (Photo provided by Bill Craig)



Cher Andrews, in the foreground, is pictured in this undated photo. Andrews helped build trails at McDowell Mountain Regional Park, and his leadership was instrumental in the preservation of the McDowell Sonoran Mountains. (Photo provided by city of Scottsdale)

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the primary reasons hikers select which trail to visit on a given day, especially during our moderate winter weather.

Consider also how a particular trail came to be under your shoes. Sometimes a good Valley story behind a beautiful path can make the difference when you're seeking out a new trailhead.

This month we recommend a short trip to the East Valley to take on the Andrews-Kinsey Trail.

The actual trail itself isn't daunting. It's just under two miles out and back with a slight elevation gain of around 300 feet. Starting out at the Adero Canyon Trailhead in Fountain Hills to get there, the whole trek is 5.6 miles out and back with a total elevation gain of just over 900 feet.

Never take for granted, though, just what went into trail construction, or the people behind it.

The Andrews-Kinsey Trail stretches some two miles from the Western Loop Trail in Fountain Hills to the Sunrise Trail in Scottsdale it what was the first direct connection between the two preserve areas when it was dedicated in 2014.

"We first called it the Link Trail, and it was the easiest place to make a connection where we knew that our trailhead would be in Fountain Hills and where there was existing trail work, being the Sunrise Trail in Scottsdale," said Bill Craig, who has been a trail builder/designer/maintainer for most of the trails in the Adero Canyon area of Fountain Hills. He also serves as a Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills board member.

The trail offers a connection between the approximately seven miles of preserve trails within Fountain Hills to the more than 300 in the Scottsdale McDowell Mountain Preserve, McDowell Mountain Park, and into Tonto National Forest.

The trail begins at the Adero Canyon Trailhead, where hikers can access it as they enter the Fountain Hills McDowell Mountain Preserve.

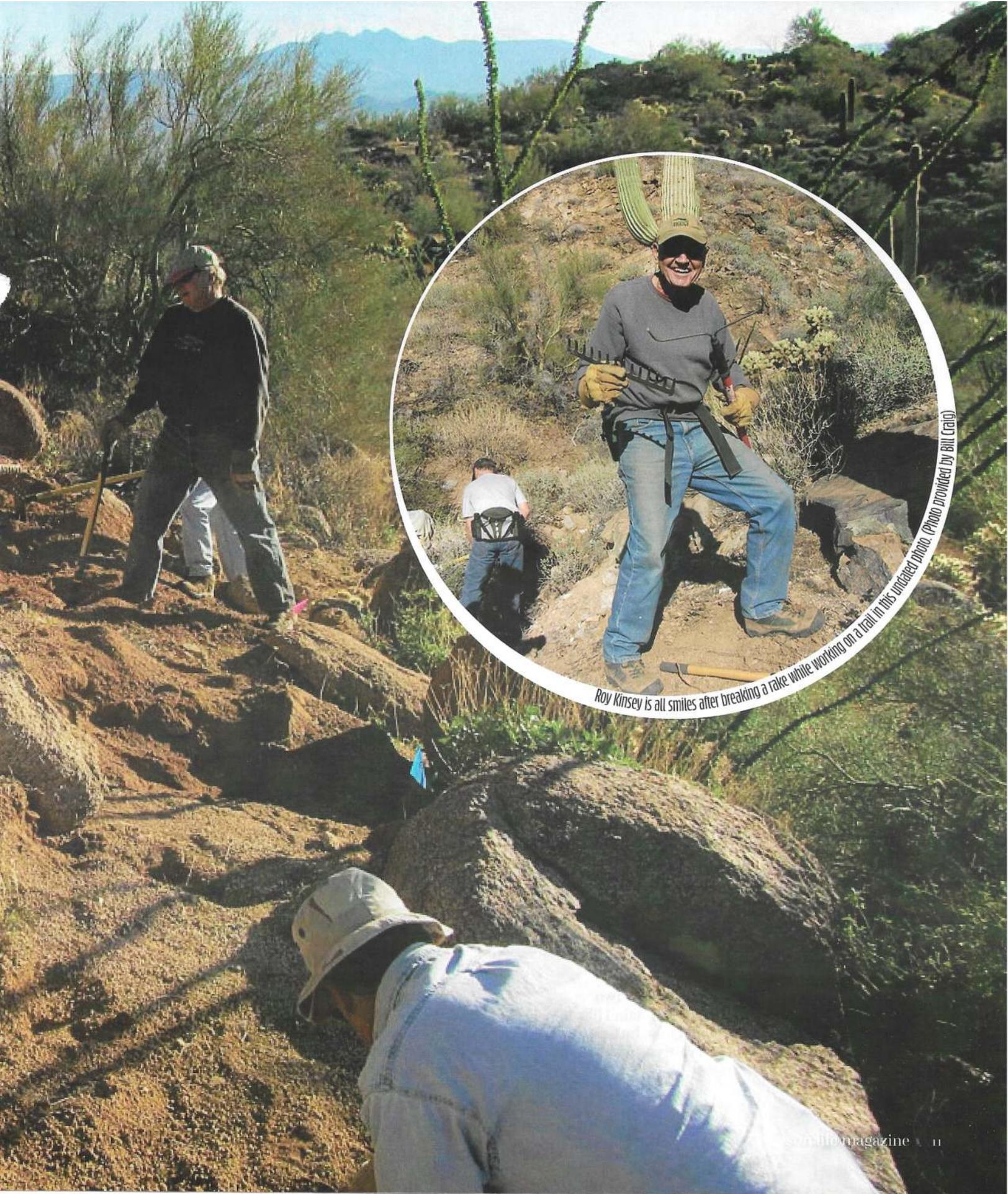
"This quick 1.8-mile out-and-back hike starts with a gentle climb through a landscape of picturesque boulders and desert ridges, then levels off into a wide, well-marked path that seamlessly blends with the surrounding terrain," AllTrails.com notes.

Naming the trails connector was the easy part.

DID YOU KNOW?

The McDowell Mountain Range, located about 20 miles northeast of downtown Phoenix, shares borders with the cities of Fountain Hills, Scottsdale, and Maricopa County.

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Roy Kinsey is all smiles after breaking a rake while working on a trail in this untreated photo. (Photo provided by Bill Craig)

ANDREWS-KINSEY TRAIL

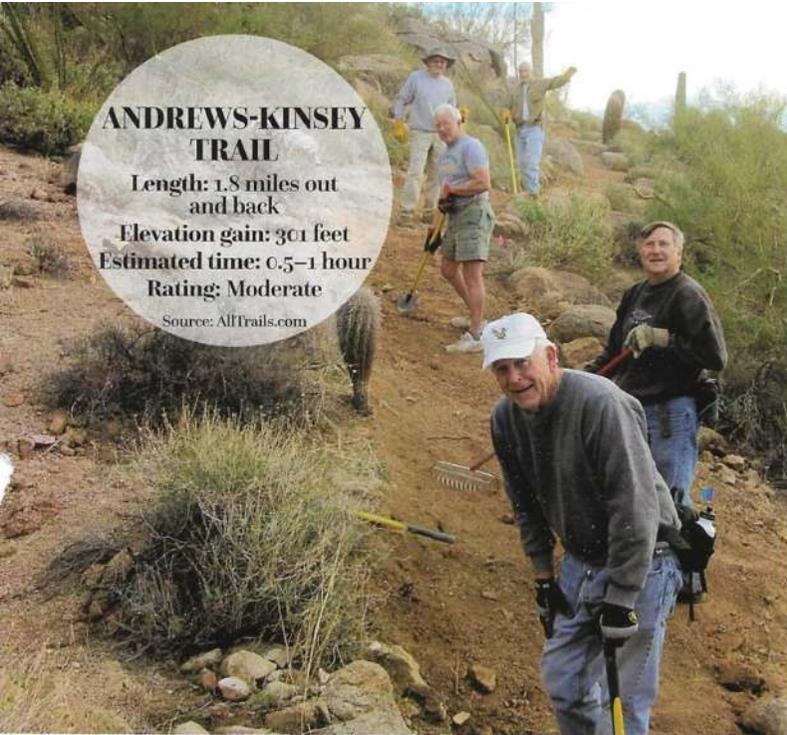
Length: 1.8 miles out and back

Elevation gain: 301 feet

Estimated time: 0.5–1 hour

Rating: Moderate

Source: AllTrails.com



Volunteers work to build the Andrews-Kinsey Trail which, by the time it was dedicated in 2014, became the first hiking trail to link the approximately seven miles of preserve trails within Fountain Hills to the more than 300 in the Scottsdale McDowell Mountain Preserve, McDowell Mountain Park, and into Tonto National Forest. (Photo provided by Bill Craig)

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Chet Andrews, who died in 2014 at age 84, helped build trails at McDowell Mountain Regional Park, and his leadership was instrumental in the preservation of the McDowell Sonoran Mountains.

Roy Kinsey, who died in 2018, volunteered with the McDowell Sonoran Conservancy in Scottsdale, and played a key role in the formation of the McDowell Mountain Preservation Commission, which maintains the existing natural landscape while developing a trail system. Kinsey served on that board as well as the Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills board.

It was in that spirit of trail stewardship and cooperation that the Andrews-Kinsey Trail was born.

As the Trailblazers – a tireless group of trail volunteers and maintainers – worked up a canyon in 2013 and 2014, a crew from Scottsdale worked across the mountains to meet at the Preserve borders, the Sonoran Conservancy of Fountain Hills notes on its website.

“When we joined from both ends,” Steve Fleming, a former Trailblazer and friend of Kinsey, told scfh.org, “it was like the excitement at the completion of the TransContinental Railroad! There was a lot of satisfaction.”

The Andrews-Kinsey Trail has everything: access for most skill levels and gorgeous scenery, and the added benefit of giving hikers the chance to truly salute those stewards of our desert landscape trail system.

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