

# Adventure Hikes and Canyoneering in the San Gabriels.

---

Christopher E. Brennen  
*Pasadena, California*

Dankat Publishing Company

*For Doug, Troy, Garrett, Simone, Clancy,  
David, Mark, Randi, Scott and John*

Copyright © 2014 Christopher E. Brennen

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, transmitted, transcribed, stored in a retrieval system, or translated into any language or computer language, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission from Christopher Earls Brennen.

ISBN 0-9667409-0-4



# Preface

## Warning

It is important to stress that there is always a significant danger associated with adventures into the wilderness. Those who wish to follow the adventure hikes in this book should be fully cognizant of those dangers and take appropriate precautions. The accounts are primarily intended for experienced hikers who will exercise informed judgment and caution. The hikes requiring technical expertise and equipment should never be undertaken without proper training and qualifications. Even given all this, the dangers should not be minimized. The accounts are offered with the understanding that readers will proceed entirely at their own risk. In “Precautions” we describe some of the precautions that minimize (but do not eliminate) the dangers and risks.

## Acknowledgments

A large part of my enjoyment of these adventures was derived from the group of young people (and a few oldies) who accompanied me. I am immensely grateful to all of them for their companionship. I especially thank Troy Sette who was born with the instinct for adventure, Clancy Rowley whose grace and kindness shines in all he does, Mark Duttweiler with whom hiking was always a pleasure and Garrett Reisman who taught me to climb and whose friendship I shall treasure for the rest of my days. I should also acknowledge Doug Hart who was a great companion on many early hikes. It was my great good fortune to have hiked with these marvellous young men. And Carl Wassgren, Bob Behnken, Sudipto Sur, Tricia Waniewski, Stuart Gibbs, Al Preston, Robert Uy, Simone Francis, Markus Ehrenguber, Deborah Brennen, Susan Sette, Eric Siering, Randi Poer, John Perry, Scott Smith, Ira Lewis, Nathan Wozny, Nathan Schara, Eric Hale, Ken King, Mark Fitzsimmons, Jane Fontana, Johanna Turner, Bernd Haase, Matt Maxon, Keith Goodfellow and others were marvelous company and quite tolerant of elderly eccentricities. My thanks also Alex Kirkaldy who gave us important guidance in the Big Tujunga region and to my old friends David Wales and Paul Jennings. This book is dedicated to all these fellow adventurers who so enriched my travels in the wilderness and, in particular, to Doug, Troy, Garrett, Simone, Clancy, David, Mark, Randi, Scott and John.

### **About the Author**

Christopher Earls Brennen has lived and worked in the San Gabriel Valley for over forty years and has spent many of those weekends exploring the nooks and crannies of the San Gabriel Mountains. In this book he tells of some of the special places that can be discovered by venturing off trail into the rugged canyons that interlace this beautiful range.

# Contents

<b>Preface</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>1 PRELIMINARIES</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction . . . . .	1
1.1.1 The genesis of adventure hikes . . . . .	1
1.1.2 The adventure hikes . . . . .	1
1.1.3 The changing landscape . . . . .	2
1.2 Precautions . . . . .	3
1.2.1 Important Precautions . . . . .	3
1.2.2 Fires . . . . .	5
1.2.3 Flash Floods . . . . .	5
1.2.4 Poison Oak . . . . .	5
1.2.5 Wildlife . . . . .	6
1.2.6 Snakes and Insects . . . . .	7
1.2.7 Parking Permits . . . . .	7
1.3 Navigation . . . . .	8
1.3.1 Introduction . . . . .	8
1.3.2 Maps . . . . .	8
1.3.3 Trails . . . . .	8
1.3.4 Altimeters and GPS Units . . . . .	9
1.3.5 Retracing your steps . . . . .	9
1.3.6 Cross-country hiking . . . . .	10
1.4 Equipment and Provisions . . . . .	10
1.4.1 Introduction . . . . .	10
1.4.2 Clothing . . . . .	11
1.4.3 Backpack . . . . .	12
1.4.4 Essential and emergency equipment . . . . .	13
1.4.5 Other Useful Equipment . . . . .	14
1.5 American Canyoneering Association Ratings . . . . .	15
1.6 Useful References . . . . .	17

<b>2</b>	<b>FRONT RANGE</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1	Saucer Branch . . . . .	20
2.2	Grand Canyon Transit . . . . .	25
2.3	Alpine Canyon . . . . .	29
2.4	Rubio Canyon . . . . .	33
2.5	Upper Rubio Canyon . . . . .	41
2.6	East Fork of Rubio Canyon . . . . .	45
2.7	Upper Eaton Canyon . . . . .	52
2.8	Lower Eaton Canyon . . . . .	57
2.9	Middle Muir Ravine . . . . .	66
2.10	West Muir Ravine . . . . .	74
2.11	Pasadena Glen . . . . .	81
2.12	Hastings Canyon . . . . .	87
2.13	Bailey Canyon . . . . .	92
2.14	Little Santa Anita Canyon . . . . .	97
2.15	East Fork of Santa Anita Canyon . . . . .	103
2.16	Monrovia Canyon . . . . .	108
2.17	Wolfskill Canyon . . . . .	114
<b>3</b>	<b>BIG TUJUNGA</b>	<b>119</b>
3.1	Stone Plus One . . . . .	120
3.2	Suicide Canyon . . . . .	125
3.3	Silver-on-the-Side . . . . .	133
3.4	Silver Canyon . . . . .	139
3.5	Vasquez Creek . . . . .	145
3.6	Ganja Gulch . . . . .	150
3.7	Left Fork of Fusier Canyon . . . . .	155
3.8	Lower Fusier Canyon . . . . .	158
3.9	Mary Jane Canyon . . . . .	161
3.10	White Oak Canyon . . . . .	166
3.11	Great Falls of the Fox . . . . .	172
3.12	Lower Fox Canyon . . . . .	181
3.13	Josephine Creek . . . . .	187
3.14	Classic Canyon . . . . .	191
3.15	Fall Creek . . . . .	195
3.16	Upper Lucas Creek . . . . .	199
3.17	Lower Lucas Creek . . . . .	203
3.18	Big Tujunga Narrows . . . . .	206
3.19	Katharine Canyon . . . . .	211
3.20	Upper Big Tujunga . . . . .	216
<b>4</b>	<b>PACOIMA</b>	<b>221</b>
4.1	Bee Canyon . . . . .	222
4.2	Laurel Canyon . . . . .	226

<b>5</b>	<b>LA CANADA</b>	<b>231</b>
5.1	Hall Beckley Canyon . . . . .	232
5.2	Sutton Canyon . . . . .	237
5.3	Pomeroy Canyon . . . . .	242
<b>6</b>	<b>RED BOX</b>	<b>247</b>
6.1	CCC Canyon . . . . .	248
6.2	Casada Canyon . . . . .	253
6.3	Royal Gorge . . . . .	258
6.4	Colby Canyon . . . . .	262
6.5	Strawberry Peak . . . . .	265
6.6	Cloudburst Canyon . . . . .	269
6.7	Supercloud Canyon . . . . .	273
<b>7</b>	<b>DEVIL'S CANYON</b>	<b>279</b>
7.1	Bobcat Canyon . . . . .	280
7.2	Upper Devil's Canyon . . . . .	285
7.3	Devil's Canyon Loop . . . . .	291
7.4	Lower Devil's Canyon . . . . .	297
<b>8</b>	<b>CRYSTAL LAKE</b>	<b>305</b>
8.1	Bear Creek . . . . .	306
8.2	Upper Soldier Creek . . . . .	314
8.3	Lower Soldier Creek . . . . .	319
8.4	Rockbound Canyon . . . . .	323
8.5	Upper Little Rock Creek . . . . .	329
<b>9</b>	<b>EAST FORK</b>	<b>335</b>
9.1	East Fork of the San Gabriel . . . . .	336
9.2	Allison Mine Loop . . . . .	345
9.3	Iron Mountain . . . . .	353
9.4	Rattlesnake Peak . . . . .	359
9.5	Peacock Canyon . . . . .	363
9.6	Falling Leaf Canyon . . . . .	367
9.7	Lookout Mountain . . . . .	374
9.8	San Antonio Ridge . . . . .	381
9.9	San Antonio Creek . . . . .	391
9.10	Stoddard Canyon . . . . .	397
<b>10</b>	<b>ICE HOUSE</b>	<b>405</b>
10.1	Falling Rock Canyon . . . . .	406
10.2	Sheep Canyon . . . . .	412
10.3	Upper Cucamonga Canyon . . . . .	420
10.4	Middle Cucamonga Canyon . . . . .	428
10.5	Lower Cucamonga Canyon . . . . .	434
10.6	Bull Canyon . . . . .	438

<b>11 LYTLE CREEK</b>	<b>445</b>
11.1 Middle Fork Lytle Creek . . . . .	446
11.2 South Fork of Lytle Creek . . . . .	454
11.3 Spring Canyon . . . . .	460
11.4 Bonita Canyon . . . . .	465
11.5 Green Mountain Canyon . . . . .	471

# Chapter 1

## PRELIMINARIES

### 1.1 Introduction

#### 1.1.1 The genesis of adventure hikes

The San Gabriel mountains are a spectacular wonderland that I have been exploring for many years and that I hope to continue to enjoy for many years to come. I have, throughout, been guided and enthralled by the descriptions of their history and their byways in the books of John W. Robinson. In writing these accounts, I recognized from the beginning that I could and should not compete with Robinson's classic guides. Rather, I shall try and complement them.

In the early years, I followed almost all of the 100 hikes in Robinson's "Trails of the Angeles". Later, seeking to explore beyond the established trails, I and a group of students at the California Institute of Technology began a series of explorations that we termed "adventure hikes". These revealed such marvelous hidden treasures off the beaten paths of the San Gabriels (and surrounding mountains) that it seemed appropriate to record these adventures for those who may be inclined to follow in our footsteps. This is the genesis of the present book.

#### 1.1.2 The adventure hikes

The adventure hikes described are distributed across the San Gabriel range though, as shown in the included map, there is naturally a greater concentration in the steeper and more rugged areas as shown in the first map. For convenience the hike descriptions are divided into the ten, somewhat arbitrarily defined regions shown in the second map. Each chapter includes the adventure hikes for one of these regions.

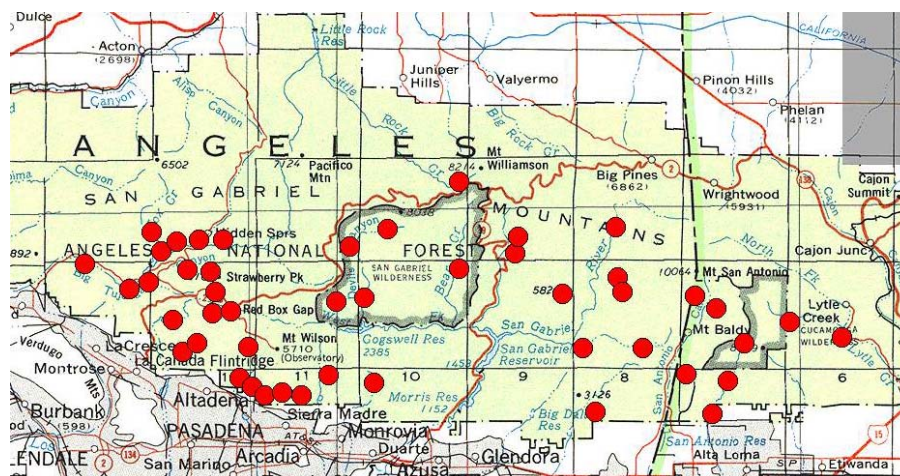
In the description of each adventure hike, I have tried to give as much useful information as possible without spoiling the sense of adventure. When I explored each of these for the first time I had little or no knowledge of what to expect. In the early days, this led to some unexpected adventures such as spending an unplanned night in the canyon of the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. Later, I became more circumspect and often conducted preliminary exploratory hikes before attempting the complete version described here. Thus, for example, I ventured into some of the canyons from both above and below before attempting to travel all the way through.

In each case, I have provided a map on which I have marked prominent features, obstacles or navigational aids. In addition, I have included some photographs so that the reader can gauge his or her own willingness to tackle some of the challenges described herein. Estimates of the times required for the hikes are also provided though the actual time required will vary considerably depending on the weather, stream conditions and personal agility and fitness. Some readers may be able to go significantly faster than indicated here. Groups larger than three or four will most likely be slower especially when rappeling.

An estimate of the distance covered is also provided though this is much less useful than the elapsed time when discussing adventure hikes since average speeds vary greatly with the terrain. Another guide to the difficulty is the listed elevation gain that, unless otherwise specified, is the sum of all the major ascents experienced on the hike. Specific difficulties (and the equipment needed to overcome them) are also listed for reference at the beginning of each description.

### 1.1.3 The changing landscape

Geologically the San Gabriel mountain range is among the youngest in North America. The kink in the San Andreas fault as it runs through the Los Angeles



Distribution of the adventure hikes in the Angeles National Forest.



area has caused our mountains to be thrust up as the tectonic plate of the Pacific basin moves north relative to the North American plate. The erosion and growth that smooth out other ranges have not yet had time to counter this growth and so the San Gabriel mountain range is also one of the most precipitous and dramatic anywhere in North America. Indeed, there may be canyons, perhaps in the Devil's Canyon Wilderness Area, where man has rarely, if ever, set foot.

One consequence of this newness and wildness, is that the mountains are constantly changing and any guide like this runs the risk that it is out of date before it is written. The canyons, in particular, can sometimes be unrecognizable after a large winter storm. The reader should remember this when using the directions and descriptions herein. Logs that once allowed an easy descent may vanish during the winter. Landslides can obliterate significant obstacles or create new ones.

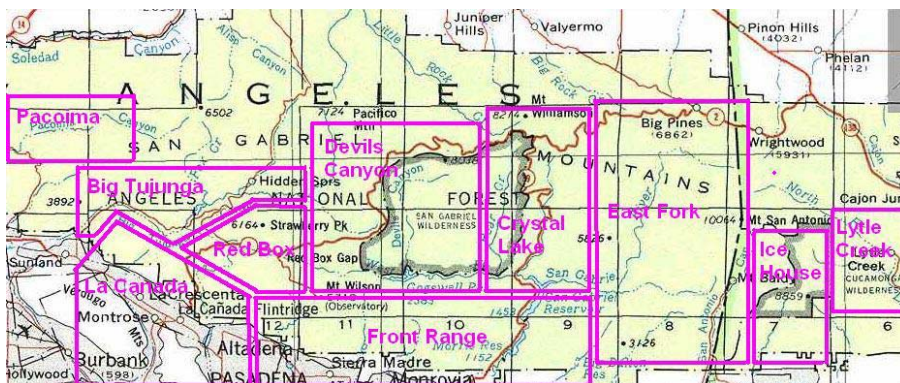
## 1.2 Precautions

### 1.2.1 Important Precautions

We begin by detailing some basic precautions that should always be taken when hiking in the wilderness. When you venture off-trail these become even more important and there are additional factors that need to be considered.

First and foremost the hiker should know his or her limits and only graduate slowly from the regular, maintained trails, to the unmaintained trails and then to more remote areas.

Second, it is very important not to travel alone. On any hike, it is valuable to have companions who can seek help should you become ill or have an accident such as an injury to a leg. On an adventure hike, as simple and common an accident as a sprained ankle could be life-threatening if you were alone. Therefore, you should find some companions with similar interests and be prepared



The ten regions covered in the following ten chapters.

to adjust your itinerary to satisfy the group interests and objectives. The ideal is probably a group of three or four people.

A related and essential precaution is to leave a written description of your proposed route with a family member or friend who will be in a position to seek help if you or your party fail to return. You should also leave clear instructions with that family member or friend as to the steps they should take. I recommend the following instruction: “Call the police or sheriff’s department if you do not hear from me by 9pm on the day you expect me”. A third precaution in the same category is to carry a cellular telephone. However, the hiker should be aware that cellular telephones require line-of-sight for operation. Thus, they will work on many of the peaks and ridges in the San Gabriels when a line of sight with either the basin or the desert exists, but they will not work in the canyons.

On an adventure hike, it is easier than one might imagine for an individual to become separated from the group. Therefore, it is important for the group to always remain “connected”. For example, when struggling through brush in an extended single file every member needs to maintain regular contact both with those ahead and those behind. An important item in any emergency kit is a whistle that everyone should carry on a necklace. Be sure that all members of the group know the universal distress signal: three sharp blasts on the whistle (or three short repetitions of any kind of signal). Note that it is part of the universal creed that every hiker has an obligation to respond to such a signal of distress.

The third category of precaution is to become accustomed and knowledgeable about navigating your way in the mountains. In the next chapter a brief summary of navigation in the San Gabriels is given. For the present, it is valuable to emphasize the importance of knowing where you are. In the wilderness, it is always important to plan ahead and, to do so, you must know your location relative to various destinations. You must always know the location of the next source of water. You must always have some estimate of the distance to your destination and whether you can reach it before nightfall. It is an essential safety precaution to be able to halt at least one hour before sunset so that proper preparations can be made for the night. This is especially critical when you underestimate time and distance and have to spend an unplanned night in the mountains. If you are unwise enough to press on through the wilderness in the darkness you not only risk injury but you also reduce substantially your opportunity to prepare shelter and warmth for the night. I dwell on this because, on the one occasion when this happened to me, I found it very difficult psychologically to resign myself to a night in the mountains and to stop in time to gather firewood and make a fire and a bed for the night. In the wilderness it is often difficult to make accurate a priori estimates of travel time since that depends so much on the terrain. Therefore, it is essential to be flexible and realistic and continuously adjust your plan.

The fourth set of precautions concerns proper safety equipment; we deal with this later in this chapter.

### **1.2.2 Fires**

In many areas of the San Gabriels, open fires are not permitted except in specifically designated fireplaces in campgrounds and, even then, a fire permit is required during the summer months. There are very good reasons for these restrictions. The fire danger is often very high and the chance that a stray spark could start an uncontrollable fire is very real. On overnight hikes, I strongly suggest a small, portable hiking stove for cooking and, if you must have a fire, use only dead wood, keep it small and confined to a safe fire pit, preferably an existing one.

If you are trapped unexpectedly overnight in the mountains and you feel you have no alternative but to light a fire in order to maintain warmth then you must take every possible precaution. Learn how to choose a safe location and how to construct a safe fire pit. Keep the fire small and under control at all times. Never leave the fire unattended. When leaving the campsite, douse the fire with water to ensure that it is completely extinguished and then dismantle the fireplace so that as little remains as possible.

### **1.2.3 Flash Floods**

When hiking during or after rainfall you should be alert to the danger from flash floods, especially when traveling in one of the larger canyons or narrower gorges. If the level of the stream begins to rise quickly, take immediate refuge at a higher elevation. Perhaps the most dangerous phenomenon is a flash flood that involves a “bore” or sudden wave traveling down the canyon. These flash floods often produce a characteristic rumbling or roaring noise (often likened to a train) and you should take especially rapid action if you detect such a noise.

Even in the steepest sided canyons there are often places where it is possible to climb some distance above the level of the stream. About 30ft of elevation should be sufficient for safety in just about all of these situations. But it is best to avoid these kinds of hikes during rain or for several days thereafter.

### **1.2.4 Poison Oak**

Many people are susceptible to poison oak, common at the lower elevations in the San Gabriels. It is therefore wise to learn to recognize this low (3-4ft high) sparse, weed-like plant whose leaves are shaped like those of an oak tree. In the summer and fall, the leaves often turn multicolored, red and green with some yellow. Some individuals are fortunate to be immune from poison oak and can walk through these plants without any fear of the dreaded rash and itch appearing a couple of days later. Others have a mild reaction and merely have to avoid direct contact, for example, by wearing long pants. A third group seem to suffer severely even from second-hand contact such as that acquired by rubbing a hand over clothing that has contacted the plant. During adventure hikes at lower elevations, it is very hard to avoid all contact with poison oak. For those that are susceptible it is wise to cover legs, arms and hands as completely

as possible and to be very alert to the presence of poison oak. Alternatively it is now possible to purchase creams that you can apply to exposed skin and that provide a measure of protection against poison oak. It is always wise to shower thoroughly after returning from an adventure hike and this can also help after exposure to the plant.

### 1.2.5 Wildlife

One of the glories of these mountains so close to the huge urban sprawl of Los Angeles is the fact that so much wildlife still survives. There are deer, bears, cougars, bighorn sheep, coyotes, bobcats and many other smaller animals in the San Gabriels. I hope that you are fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of one or more of these marvelous creatures. Provided you are sensible, the risks are essentially negligible.

Deer are plentiful and, because of their camouflage, you often hear them before you see them. As elsewhere, it is most likely that you will catch a glimpse of them at dawn or at dusk.

The populations of bear and cougar both seem to be increasing. At least this is the conclusion to be drawn from the increasing frequency with which they emerge from the forest and come into confrontation with people. Cougars tend to avoid all human contact and are very rarely seen. In all my years of exploration I have never been fortunate enough to see a cougar. And, despite one incident in 1995 in which a cougar is alleged to have attacked a cyclist on the Mount Wilson Toll Road (the cougar was subsequently hunted down and shot), the danger from cougars is extremely remote. Bears are more frequently seen though I have only had the privilege on one occasion. They may present a marginally larger hazard though still a miniscule one. Probably the only significant danger might occur if you placed yourself between a mother and her cubs.

For those who might read of confrontations between humans and bears in the distant past, we should note that the original bears in these mountains were California grizzlies, an extinct species closely related to the grizzly bears of the northwestern states. The last grizzly in the San Gabriels was shot in 1898. However, smaller black bears were imported by men in the early part of the century and have now found their place in the biological niche originally occupied by the grizzlies. Black bears are much less dangerous than grizzlies and so the confrontations of the distant past would not occur today.

If you are confronted by a bear or cougar, you should stand up, wave your arms, shout and scream. A walking stick is valuable not only to strengthen your own resolve but also for defensive action in the extremely remote chance of an attack by the animal. Do not move forward because such a move might trigger a defensive reaction. Do not turn your back or run away because cougars have a built-in urge to attack a fleeing prey. Rather you should move slowly backward while continuing to make very aggressive motions and noise.

Bighorn sheep can be found in a number of remote places in the Devil's Canyon and Sheep Mountain Wilderness areas. Iron Mountain used to be called

Sheep Mountain because of a large herd that roamed its slopes and remnants of that herd remain to this day. Bighorn can also be found today in Bear and Devil's Canyons, on the slopes of Mount Baldy and Mount Williamson and a number of other locations. I have seen herds of as many as a dozen animals. The canyon bottoms they frequent are readily recognized by the numerous small balls of scat that litter the ground.

### **1.2.6 Snakes and Insects**

Perhaps the most significant danger from wildlife is the possibility of a rattlesnake bite though this is also a rare event. On the few occasions on which I have encountered rattlesnakes I have seen them before they saw me. It is probably sufficient to recognize the rattle noise of these snakes and to step away from the sound when you hear it. If you are unfortunate to be bitten be sure to follow the standard instructions. Try to immobilize the area and get to help as soon as possible. Only if you are a long distance from help (more than four hours) should you resort to drastic measures such as cutting open the area of the bite. It is wise to carry a snake-bite kit just in case and these always come with explicit instructions. Finally, you should note that there are also many harmless varieties of snakes in the San Gabriels, including some whose patterns are similar to those of a rattlesnake. The latter is most readily recognized by its rattle and diamond-shaped head. There are also harmless water snakes that seem to inhabit particular canyons, such as Fox Canyon near the Big Tujunga or Tar Creek near the Sespe in Ventura County.

As to insect bites, it may be important for any hiker to ensure that they are not allergic to any insects, for example bees or mosquitoes, and to carry appropriate medication in case of a problem. Even if you are not allergic to wasps, bees or yellow jackets, these can pose a danger comparable to that of rattlesnakes. The author once inadvertently stepped on a wasp nest and was stung about 20 times before he could jump into and immerse himself in a pool of the nearby stream. The subsequent reaction of the body that included dizziness, sharp pains across the forehead and, later, a sore throat were alarming and debilitating. They could have caused a serious problem for someone with a less robust immune system. Some hikers I know carry medication in a hypodermic syringe for such emergencies.

If you have been bushwhacking (or even if you have not) it is wise to check for ticks after returning home. Provided you detect them early and before they have had time to burrow in, ticks are easy to remove. If one has buried its head in your flesh it is probably wise to have a nurse or doctor remove it, otherwise it may itch for a couple of weeks.

### **1.2.7 Parking Permits**

Since June of 1997, it has been necessary to display a "Forest Adventure Pass" if you park anywhere within the local National Forests. This pass, which can be

obtained at many outdoor stores or from the local offices of the Forest Service, costs \$30.00 annually.

Many of the hikes described in this book require parking on Highway 39 or its branches. If you do not have a Forest Adventure Pass you can purchase a \$3.00 parking permit for the day at the Forest Service drive-in on the right as you approach the mountains on Highway 39.

## **1.3 Navigation**

### **1.3.1 Introduction**

Navigation is more important when one ventures off the beaten track. On the maintained trails it is usually sufficient to carry several trail maps (and, in the San Gabriels, Robinson's 100 hikes) and to stop regularly to try to identify your location. On adventure hikes, navigation becomes much more important and significantly harder.

### **1.3.2 Maps**

The first essential equipment in locating yourself and the trails is a collection of trail maps that should be studied in detail before setting out. I have found Tom Harrison's trail maps, specifically the "Trail Map of the Angeles High Country" and the "Trail Map of the Angeles Front Country" to be clear, useful and up to date. The trail maps that come with Robinson's "Trails of the Angeles" are also clear and useful but a little out of date. The US Forest Service map of the San Gabriel National Forest is also useful but of too small scale and significantly outdated. For adventure hikes, you should purchase a 7.5 minute series US Geological Survey map ("topo" map) for the area(s) covering your hike and become accustomed to reading the topology (the mountains, canyons and other identifying features) from these maps as you hike along. Initially, it is not easy to look at a topographical map and to relate it to the scenery around you. But, with a little practice, this becomes second nature and greatly aids in your navigation, to say nothing of your peace of mind. You should also equip yourself with a compass that will allow you to adjust the map to the same orientation as your surroundings. It is important to make a habit of stopping at high points on your hike to consult your maps and the topology of your surroundings. Try to fix the principal features and landmarks in your mind for later reference.

### **1.3.3 Trails**

One problem with the USGS topological maps is that the information on the trails marked on the maps is very out of date. Many of the trails that are marked have long vanished, either because they were washed away or because they have become completely overgrown. Indeed, local topology and trail status can change quickly in the San Gabriels due to the propensity for fires, flash floods and the rapid erosion of the mostly young and crumbling rock.

The adventure hiker will come to learn that many of the negotiable canyons contain “use-trails” beaten down by some combination of animals and humans. These are often useful, particularly when you must find a way around a waterfall or other obstruction. Moreover, the absence of a use-trail is usually a sign that a major obstacle lies ahead.

### **1.3.4 Altimeters and GPS Units**

Another useful navigation device is an altimeter watch that you can now purchase for about \$80.00. If this is properly adjusted to the known elevation at your starting point, it can tell you your altitude to within about 40ft. Not only is this valuable for its own sake, but, in combination with a topographical map, it can greatly help you locate your position. By identifying the contour corresponding to your known altitude and following it on the topo map, you can often factor in other observations (such as a compass bearing to a nearby peak or knowledge that you are in a particular canyon) to closely identify your position. Of course, GPS positioning units can now be purchased for less than \$150.00 and are highly recommended for those who are not confident in using the more primitive methods. In combination with a topographical map, a GPS unit can locate your position to within a few tens of feet. The only circumstance in which the GPS unit might fail to operate is in a deep canyon where line-of-sight with one or more of the satellites can be lost.

### **1.3.5 Retracing your steps**

Another simple rule of navigation that is often overlooked by the novice hiker is the ability to retrace your steps. One of the essential and enjoyable elements of adventure hiking is the challenge of venturing into the unknown. But a necessary corollary is the chance that you might encounter an obstacle that you cannot surmount. Then, it may be necessary to retrace your steps though you had not initially planned to do so. You might also need to retrace your steps in the event of an accident. Therefore, it is a basic safety measure to ensure that you can do this without running the risk of taking a wrong turn and getting lost.

There are several simple steps that you should always take to minimize this danger. First, when traveling down a canyon you can easily pass the mouth of an adjoining canyon without noticing it. The result can be that, when retracing your steps on the way up the canyon, you may not be able to decide which canyon to follow. Therefore, take note of any such junctions while hiking downstream. In particular, when you pass such a junction, look back and fix the right path in your mind. If you are in any doubt mark the entrance to the correct canyon with a “duck”. For those unaware of this term, “ducks” are readily-recognizable human-generated markers created from naturally occurring materials. Most frequently they take the form of a prominently displayed pile of two, three or more rocks sitting unnaturally on top of one another. A series of ducks spaced 20-50yds apart is often used to mark a trail that would otherwise be difficult or

impossible to follow. Alternatively, as suggested here, you can use occasional ducks to mark your trail. Other variations can include a row of rocks and/or logs placed to make an arrow. Such a signal should be used to mark the place where you should leave a trail or a canyon on the return journey. Markers that should not be used are any that may damage plants or animals; do not, therefore, carve marks on trees or break limbs from trees and bushes in order to mark the way; even excessively large ducks should be avoided. In summary, visualize your return by looking backwards fairly frequently and leave markers wherever necessary to remind you of the correct route.

### **1.3.6 Cross-country hiking**

There are several other factors that should be considered when choosing a route through the wilderness. It is clear that, in a rugged and mountainous area such as the San Gabriels, the canyons and ridges form the most natural cross-country routes and, in general, the larger canyons are less brushy and usually allow easier travel except in the more narrow sections. Often one must find a route from a canyon to a ridge or vice-versa. Then, the steep “transverse” ridges or gullies form the most natural routes with which to accomplish such a transition. Again, the best choice is usually the largest gully you can identify and follow. Though you may have to climb over many boulders and waterfalls you are usually saved from the need to plough through bushes. Often such lateral gullies will have the largest cliffs or waterfalls near where they join the main canyon and you should be prepared for this possibility.

Another factor to keep in mind when selecting a route is that the vegetation of the north-facing slopes in the San Gabriels is quite different from that of the south-facing slopes. The former usually consist of oak forest or, at higher elevations, pine forest. These trees coat the ground with an accumulation of soil and leaves that is much easier to travel through than the harsh rock cover under the bushes, yucca plants and scrub of the south-facing slopes. This difference is valuable to remember in plotting a cross-country route. Moreover, the south-facing slopes are more frequently exposed to fire and for this and other reasons tend to be more unstable.

## **1.4 Equipment and Provisions**

### **1.4.1 Introduction**

Being properly clothed, equipped and provisioned can mean all the difference between an exciting wilderness experience and a miserable ordeal. This chapter is intended to give some guidelines on these issues though each person will soon discover their own particular preferences as their experience broadens.



### 1.4.2 Clothing

Choice of clothing will vary with the weather, the time of year and personal tastes. As a general rule it is better to rely on a number of layers for warmth rather than single thick and bulky garments. Of course, in more severe climates, mountaineers can get very technical in choosing these layers. For example, they select one for next the skin, one or more for heat insulation, one for external protection and one for rain. If you wish to invest in these more expensive and coherent systems by all means do so. However, in the San Gabriels it is almost always adequate to choose more inexpensive layers. Thus I use tee shirt and underpants, a thicker upper layer for warmth (usually this is shed once I warm up and I end up carrying it in my pack) and a pair of shorts. Pants, whether long or short, should be roomy enough so that climbing movements are not impaired. While cotton garments may suffice on a hot summer day, it may be wise to invest in “wicking” garments made of modern synthetic materials such as polyester and a warm polartec jacket. These not only dry much faster than cotton but they will also keep in the warmth even when wet. In addition I carry rain gear in the form of lightweight Goretex pants and jacket. This rain gear can also serve as emergency clothing should you encounter an unexpected drop in the temperature or have to spend the night in the mountains.

Some of the above choices need further comment in the context of adventure hiking. First, if you are susceptible to poison oak, you should recognize that it is not easy to completely avoid coming in contact with this plant at some point during adventure hiking. Thus you may be better off wearing long pants and long-sleeve shirts. I am fortunate in that poison oak has virtually no effect on me and despite the almost inevitable scratches on the legs, I still prefer to wear shorts.

Second, one’s outer clothing almost always takes a beating during adventure hikes, whether from pushing through undergrowth, sliding down loose scree or climbing over rocks. Consequently you should avoid expensive outer garments.

Several other items of clothing are almost essential for adventure hiking. First, for protection from the sun you should always wear a hat, preferably one with a brim that protects the eyes, face and neck from the strong sun in the San Gabriels. The hat, along with sunscreen and lip balm, becomes even more important at higher elevations and triply important if you are hiking through the snow. In this last case, good sunglasses are also essential for protection against snow blindness. Some people can also suffer sun blindness in the bright desert; for them, a hat and sunglasses are essential at all times in the San Gabriels.

For different but equally obvious reasons, a good pair of leather gardening gloves (preferably quite tight fitting) is essential for hand protection when bouldering, climbing steep earth slopes or pushing through undergrowth. I use leather rather than cloth gloves for protection against the many prickly plants in the San Gabriels. Leather gloves also provide good friction when clambering over rocks. Some even choose to use gloves while rope climbing or rappelling though this is not recommended.

Another essential purchase is a good pair of hiking boots with lug soles. I

have two pairs. One pair is more flexible but not waterproof. The other is Goretex-lined but not so comfortable. I like the former when the hike involves a lot of climbing and/or wading and the latter for hiking in wet weather or in the snow. Under either pair, I utilize two layers of socks. Next to my skin, I wear a thin pair of polypropylene socks. These minimize the chafing or blistering of the skin. Outside these I wear a thick pair of woolen or polartec socks. This equipment is particularly crucial because comfort for your feet is essential to the enjoyment of hiking.

In addition, many of the canyon bottom hikes will require you to wade in the river and, for these outings, I recommend taking a spare pair of socks to change into when the wading is done. For such occasions, I do not use the waterproof boots; rather I wear an old pair that drain and dry more quickly. While you may choose to take an old pair of sneakers in order to keep your hiking boots dry, I do not recommend this because sneakers slip too easily on the rock. It is better to wade in your boots. Besides, in the warm climate of the San Gabriels and with the warmth generated by hiking, your feet can dry out surprisingly quickly.

For wading (or swimming) through deep pools it is almost essential to bring along a “dry” bag in which to stow your entire pack, or at the very least your valuables. While a large plastic trash can liner might serve, it is also easily ripped. You can purchase very tough and light waterproof bags called “dry bags” in an outdoors store that caters to rafting and kayaking. When swimming, it is also convenient to employ the dry bag as a flotation device. I also suggest you take along a small towel (it has many uses) and spare tee shirt and shorts.

Of course, additional clothing and equipment may be needed if you intend to hike in the snow. Then crampons and an ice axe become essential. However, the hikes described herein are all intended to be tackled in good weather.

### **1.4.3 Backpack**

A sturdy day backpack in which to carry all your equipment is clearly essential. On adventure hikes, a backpack can take quite a bit of abuse as you plough through the bush, slide down slopes, haul the pack up steep slopes by rope or wade through deep pools. Consequently a strong and secure day pack is a must. Mine is roomy, has strong zips, contains two side pockets for water bottles and will float for a brief time without the contents getting wet. For really wet hikes, one can now purchase moderately priced waterproof backpacks that are very convenient.

It is a vital safety measure to keep the contents of your pack dry at all times. Therefore, within your backpack, it is a very good idea to store items or groups of items in sealable plastic bags. This not only provides protection against rain or river dunkings but also helps to keep your stuff organized. Moreover, an essential part of any plan to negotiate a deep pool, is to arrange safe passage for the packs. Many people get careless and allow their safety to be compromised by not ensuring dry passage for their packs. One method is to put your pack in a large, waterproof bag as described above.

On overnight hikes, it may be convenient to use a larger backpack. Then, internal frame packs are preferable to the external frame variety that can be very awkward to manage during climbing or scrambling for they tend to hang up more often on rocks and vegetation. The best idea is to travel as light as possible. Indeed, a large day pack with a strap-on sleeping bag maybe be better than either an internal or external frame pack for the overnighers described herein.

#### 1.4.4 Essential and emergency equipment

The following is a list of the essential and emergency equipment that I carry with me in addition to the clothing described above:

- Maps. Fold these so that the area you will be consulting is on the outside and then install them in separate, sealed plastic bags so that they can be read without removing them. This not only protects the map against wear but is essential in the rain.
- A compass and binoculars. While the latter may not be essential, I have found a small, lightweight pair of binoculars to be very valuable in helping to identify distant features or discerning smaller objects like rappeling anchors.
- A pocketknife.
- A small, quality flashlight and a set of spare batteries. The head lamp variety is particularly convenient.
- A space blanket.
- Two butane lighters and some matches. Warmth is an important key to survival and the lighters, matches and space blanket are to preserve warmth. You should learn how to light a fire in the wilderness (see preceding chapter).
- In addition I carry the lightweight waterproof pants and jacket mentioned earlier not only for use in the event of rain but also as layers for additional warmth.
- Several packages of paper tissues. Please ensure that you bury your waste in a hole at least six inches deep and as far from a stream or creek bed as possible.
- An ace bandage (or athletic tape), several bandaids, neosporin ointment for bites or stings and ibuprofen for pain and muscle relaxant.
- A snake-bite kit with instructions.
- A leather thong for multiple uses including as a tourniquet.

- Sunscreen, lip balm and poison oak protection cream. These I carry in several clear plastic bags with airtight seals.
- Water and Food. It is essential to carry two or more quart-sized water bottles with good quality screw tops so that they do not leak after just a few uses. Despite the weight, I always start out with two full bottles, usually one filled with a quality sports drink and the other filled with plain water. On longer hikes, I notice a significant difference when I use the sports drink rather than plain water and so I recommend it strongly. In addition, I strongly recommend that you carry a light-weight water filter pump and use this rather than water treatment chemicals. The filter pumps now available at camping stores are very effective; in all my years of hiking I have never experienced any problems when I used a filter pump. Besides, the water in the San Gabriels is excellent and worth savoring.

To the beginner, these provisions for drinking may seem excessive. But the experienced hiker knows just how dangerous dehydration and/or hypothermia can be and knows that all of these precautions are essential. Conversely, food is not necessary as an emergency item. I always take a lunch and a snack but little more. You could survive for weeks on the roots and berries of the San Gabriels if it became necessary. Incidentally, it is not a bad idea to learn of some of the edible plants.

### 1.4.5 Other Useful Equipment

In addition to the above, I carry a selection of other items that depend on the circumstances I expect to encounter:

Especially as you get older, a good hiking stick can be useful on many adventure hikes. It is particularly valuable as an aid in the many stream crossings that are a part of many of the adventure hikes described herein. It can also be useful in dealing with brush, as an aid in climbing or for dealing with snakes or other hazards. Even for those without any formal training in rock climbing, I recommend purchasing some rudimentary climbing gear in order to fabricate some simple protection when climbing in places where a slip could mean a serious accident. Rather than a rope, I recommend for this purpose the 1in wide tubular webbing that you can buy in most sports shops. At about 30c per foot it is quite inexpensive and can therefore be left behind if necessary. Webbing is easier to grip than a rope and can be adapted for many purposes. I have several lengths (10ft, 30ft and 60ft) and I choose whichever piece seems most useful for a given hike. In addition, carabiners are useful and I carry several of these in my pack. Some of the hikes described herein require both the training and equipment to allow you to rappel down cliffs of various heights, from 12ft upwards. You should not attempt these particular hikes unless you have obtained such training. However, it is fairly simple to learn to rappel and not as frightening as you might imagine. I learned some simple rock craft at the age of 53 and enjoyed it much more than I had imagined I would. The necessary

equipment consists of a good quality climbing rope (at least 150ft and preferably 200ft long), a climbing harness, a rappeling device (a figure eight design

## 1.5 American Canyoneering Association Ratings

Since most of the adventures described in this collection involve canyoneering and since it is valuable to provide as much information as possible on the technical difficulty of each adventure, an American Canyoneering Association (ACA) Rating is provided with each account. A description of these ratings can be found at the American Canyoneering Association website, specifically at the ACA Ratings System webpage or in Tom Jones' Canyoneering site under Ratings.

A rating begins with a number from 1 to 4 signifying the following:

1. **Canyon Hiking.** Non-technical; no rope required. May involve some easy scrambling requiring the occasional use of hands for balance and support.
2. **Basic Canyoneering.** Scrambling, easy vertical or near vertical climbing and/or down-climbing requiring frequent use of hands. Rope recommended for hand lines, belays, lowering packs and possible emergency use. Exit and/or retreat possible without ascending fixed ropes.
3. **Intermediate Canyoneering.** Exposed technical climbing. Down-climbing could be difficult and dangerous; most people will rappel instead. Rope required for belays and single-pitch rappels. Obvious natural or fixed anchors. Retreat up canyon will require ascending fixed ropes. Basic pot-hole escape techniques (i.e. partner assist, counter-weights) may also be required.
4. **Advanced Canyoneering.** Route may involve any combination of the following: 1) difficult and exposed free climbing and/or down-climbing, 2) climbing using direct aid, 3) multi-pitch rappels, 4) complex rope work (i.e. guided rappels, deviations, rebelayes), 5) obscure or indistinct natural anchors, 6) advanced problem-solving and anchor-building skills.

This is followed by a letter indicating how wet the hike may be:

- A. Normally dry or very little water. Dry falls. Water, if present, can be avoided and/or is very shallow. Shoes may get wet, but no wetsuit or drysuit required.
- B. Normally has water with no current or light current. Still pools. Falls normally dry or running at a trickle. Expect to do some deep wading and/or swimming. Wetsuit or drysuit may be required depending on water and air temperatures..

- C.** Normally has water with strong current. Waterfalls. Expect to do some deep wading and/or swimming in current. Wetsuit or drysuit may be required depending on water and air temperatures.

Note that the water level in any canyon can fluctuate greatly from year-to-year, season-to-season, even day-to-day. If, upon arrival at a canyon, you discover the water volume/current is greater than indicated by the rating, descent will be more difficult. It will be necessary to reevaluate your decision to attempt the descent.

The third symbol, either the letter R or X, is optional and is used to designate unusual risks:

- R.** Risky. One or more extraordinary risk factors exist that could complicate the descent. Solid technical skills and sound judgment critical. Not recommended for beginners.
- X.** Extreme. Multiple risk factors exist that will complicate the descent. Errors in technique or judgment will likely result in serious injury or death. Descent should only be attempted by expert canyoneers.

Note that the presence of an R or an X in a rating suggests that the canyon will involve higher than average risk. The absence of an R or an X does not suggest that there will be no risk. All canyoneering involves risk. Risk factors include number and frequency of rappels, length of rappels (single- or double-rope) and exposure, anchor availability, anchor quality, route finding, obstacles, problem-solving, terrain encountered between technical sections, flash flood potential, availability of exits and high ground, water temperature, prolonged immersion, and difficulty of evacuation or rescue.

The last alphanumeric symbol is a Roman numeral indicating the time duration of the hike:

- I.** Short. Normally requires only a couple of hours.
- II.** Normally requires a half day.
- III.** Normally requires most of a day.
- IV.** Expected to take one long, full day. Get an early start. Bring a head lamp. Plan for possible bivy.
- V.** Expected to take an average one and a half days.
- VI.** Expected to take two or more days.

Note that time estimates are based on average group of 6 people or less. Larger groups and less experienced groups will take longer. An accurate self-assessment of your abilities will be important. For some users, it may be adequate to refer to time in terms of half day, full day or multi day. Others may prefer a more specific estimate and choose to use the Roman Numeral Grade system common in traditional multi-pitch rock climbing.

Finally, I have followed the example of Tom Jones and added an expression of my own enjoyment of each of the hikes by attaching one, two or three stars:

\*\*\* A classic. Really good.

\*\* Pretty good, well worth doing.

\* Has redeeming qualities.

Of course, there were many canyons that we dropped into with high hopes only to find little of interest to canyoneers. These are not included in this book.

## 1.6 Useful References

- Harrison, Tom. 1990. Trail Map of the Angeles High Country.
- Harrison, Tom. 1995. Trail Map of the Angeles Front Country.
- Leadabrand, Russ. 1970. Guidebook to the San Gabriel Mountains of California (2nd revised edition). Ward Ritchie Press, Los Angeles.
- Liskow, George. 1990. Wildflowers of the Mount Wilson trails and San Gabriel Mountains.
- McKinney, John W. 1987. Day Hiker's Guide to Southern California. Olympus Press, Santa Barbara, California.
- McKinney, John W. 1992. Walking Southern California. A Day Hiker's Guide. Harper Collins West.
- Robinson, John W. 1986. Mines of the San Gabriels. La Siesta Press.
- Robinson, John W. 1989. Mines of the East Fork. La Siesta Press.
- Robinson, John W. 1990. Trails of the Angeles: 100 hikes in the San Gabriels (6th edition). Wilderness Press, Berkeley.
- Robinson, John W. 1991. The San Gabriels. Big Santa Anita Historical Society.
- Schad, Jerry. 1991. Afoot and Afield in Los Angeles County. Wilderness Press.
- US Army Survival Manual, FM21-76. Reprint of Department of the Army Field Manual, Dorset Press, New York.





## Chapter 2

# FRONT RANGE

The Front Range Canyons are those lying in the San Gabriel foothills directly north of the Pasadena and the adjoining cities. They are located in what is some of the steepest terrain in the San Gabriels, ideal terrain for canyoneering adventures. Yet they are readily accessible from one of the largest urban areas in the United States. Standing at the top of one of the larger rappels in the Front Range, it is hard to believe that you are only about 15mi from the center of Los Angeles. These are great canyons for the beginner and many of them have been bolted to make them even easier for the novice. Lower Eaton Canyon is one of the favorites because it is a natural water park and great fun on a summer day. But it is still a challenge that should not be taken lightly. Other great favorites are Rubio Canyon and Little Santa Anita Canyon.



Front Range region.

## 2.1 Saucer Branch

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 200 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Wilson, Pasadena
- Difficulties: Some downclimbing, one 70ft rappel
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, harnesses, a rappel ring, 10ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The Saucer Branch of Millard Creek in the mountains north of Altadena is best known to hikers of the Sunset Ridge fire road because, a short distance up that road, you get a fine view to the north of the spectacular waterfalls that guard the entrance to the Saucer Branch. This adventure hike takes you from Eaton Saddle on the Mount Wilson road, down the Mount Lowe fire road and along the firebreak to the Tom Sloan Saddle. The off-trail section begins when you leave the firebreak to drop into the bowl (or saucer) that feeds the Saucer Branch of Millard Creek. It is a pleasant, open canyon with a number of interesting artifacts and a spectacular cliff halfway down. The only technical challenge are the waterfalls just before the canyon end but even these can be bypassed for those who do not want to rappel. It is ideal for a late fall or early winter day before the rains have arrived.



*Left: Cliffs in Saucer Branch. Middle: Saucer Branch Waterfalls. Right: 70ft Waterfall*

## Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. First you should deposit the return vehicle by the gate at the bottom of the Sunset Ridge Fire Road. From Loma Alta in Altadena, drive up the Chaney Trail to the top of the ridge. The left fork here descends to Millard Picnic Ground. Park by the gate at the end of the short right fork ( $34^{\circ}12.88'N$   $118^{\circ}8.72'W$  and elevation 2090ft). Then, in the other vehicle, descend into Altadena and up the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box junction. Turn right here onto the Mount Wilson Road and drive 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft). Park in the broad dirt area here.

## Hike

Proceed past the gate at Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft) and along the fire road, through the short tunnel and up to Markham Saddle (elevation 5270ft), 0.5mi and 10min from the trailhead. Past Markham Saddle, the fire road contours over to behind Mount Lowe and then west along the south side of Bear Canyon and high above it. Approximately 1.8mi and 45min from the trailhead, the road makes a 180 degree turn around the head of the ridge. At this point ( $34^{\circ}14.07'N$   $118^{\circ}7.06'W$  and elevation 4890ft) you proceed straight on along a small spur road, past a water tank to a wide clearing used as a helicopter pad. The trail down to Tom Sloan Saddle is well marked and leaves from the far side of the clearing. A well-maintained trail with excellent views it proceeds down the apex of the ridge. Three miles and 1hr 15min from the trailhead, you arrive at Tom Sloan Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.13'N$   $118^{\circ}7.80'W$  and elevation 4070ft) where trails down to the Dawn Mine in Millard Canyon, down into Bear Canyon and along to Mount Lowe campground all converge. Do not take any of these but continue on the use-trail that follows the apex of the ridge (firebreak) in a westerly direction. This climbs steeply at first and then proceeds over and around a series of rocky knobs. From the top of the first prominence take time to survey the surroundings to the southwest. You should identify the first substantial lateral ridge west of Tom Sloan Saddle that runs south from the main ridge you are following. Notice also a white rock prominence on that ridge a short distance south of the main ridge. The use-trail follows the main ridge and, about half a mile from Tom Sloan Saddle (3.45mi from Eaton Saddle) passes along the north side of the rocky knob where the lateral ridge meets the main ridge. You need to be aware of this and to climb to the top of that rocky knob ( $34^{\circ}14.13'N$   $118^{\circ}8.20'W$  and elevation 4320ft). From this vantage point it looks as though there is nothing but solid brush between you and the white rock prominence below you on the lateral ridge. However, if you start down the apex of the lateral ridge there are just a few places where you must push through heavy brush. There are also some clear sections. Head toward the white rock prominence and, about 10yds before it, veer right down toward the apex of the small spur ridge that runs west from it. A short way down that ridge you will see an open draw heading down into the gully on the south side of the spur

ridge. Follow this draw to the bottom of the gully and follow the gully down to a junction with two other gullies. You have now reached the bottom of the large bowl-like catchment area that feeds the Saucer Branch of Millard Creek.

From this point on (3950ft, 2hr 30min from trailhead), you will follow the stream bed all the way to the end of the Saucer Branch. Just 100yds downstream from the junction of the gullies, you will arrive at the only significant obstacle in the upper canyon, a 25ft dryfall where there are two alternatives. The first is a rough exposed use-trail to the left of the lip that contours around to a point where you can downclimb. The alternative is to follow the animal trail up to the ridge on the left about 25yds upstream of the falls, and then down-climb the steep apex of the ridge to a point downstream of the falls. Once you reach the streambed again, go back up to the dryfall; there is a horizontal mine shaft hewn out of the rock near its base.

Downstream of the dryfall, the stream has cut to the bedrock and the going is fairly easy as you gradually enter a more wooded and shady canyon. About 3hr from the start at an elevation of 3600ft you will come to another 25ft dryfall that is easily bypassed by the trail on the left. This second dryfall drops you into a broad, shady and fairly flat area that may have been the site of an encampment at one time. Just to the right of the streambed is the wreckage of an aircraft, a Nordyn Norseman, that crashed here on May 13, 1948. This same canyon contains the remains of an unusual "hanging cabin" that, according to John Robinson, one brave goldminer attached to a cliff somewhere in the Saucer Branch.

As you near the downstream end of this broad, wooded clearing, the canyon closes in and 3.6hr from the start at an elevation of 3400ft you will arrive at the top of a long, steep rocky glen where the going is much slower. A rough use-trail proceeds down the earthy slopes to the right of the rocky streambed. Eventually, 4hr from the start at an elevation of 3100ft, you reach the bottom of the rocky glen and also emerge from the woods. Almost immediately, you will approach a place where the use-trail climbs a short distance up onto a scree bench on the left. Look for the ducks that I left to mark this transition. It is important to identify this point because the use-trail that descends the other side of this scree bench is much easier going than the streambed. This stretch of the canyon is spectacular because of the high cliff on the left; rockfalls from this cliff have formed the scree bench that you surmount and descend. About 4.5hr from the trailhead at an elevation of 2800ft you will reach the streambed again at the bottom of the scree slope. Downstream of this point, the use-trail proceeds along the left side of the canyon and about 4.8hr from the start, enters an overgrown section of canyon where the going is quite slow.

This overgrown section ends when you suddenly arrive at the top of the series of waterfalls near the end of the Saucer Branch (5hr from the start at elevation of 2600ft). The first of these is a 70ft waterfall that is a relatively simple rappel. A large metal bolt embedded in the rock on the right side of the lip provides a good anchor, though it would be wise to back it up with webbing to the tree on the right. There is a second metal bolt nearer to the lip and further to the right but that would make it more difficult to stay out of the pool at the bottom. In

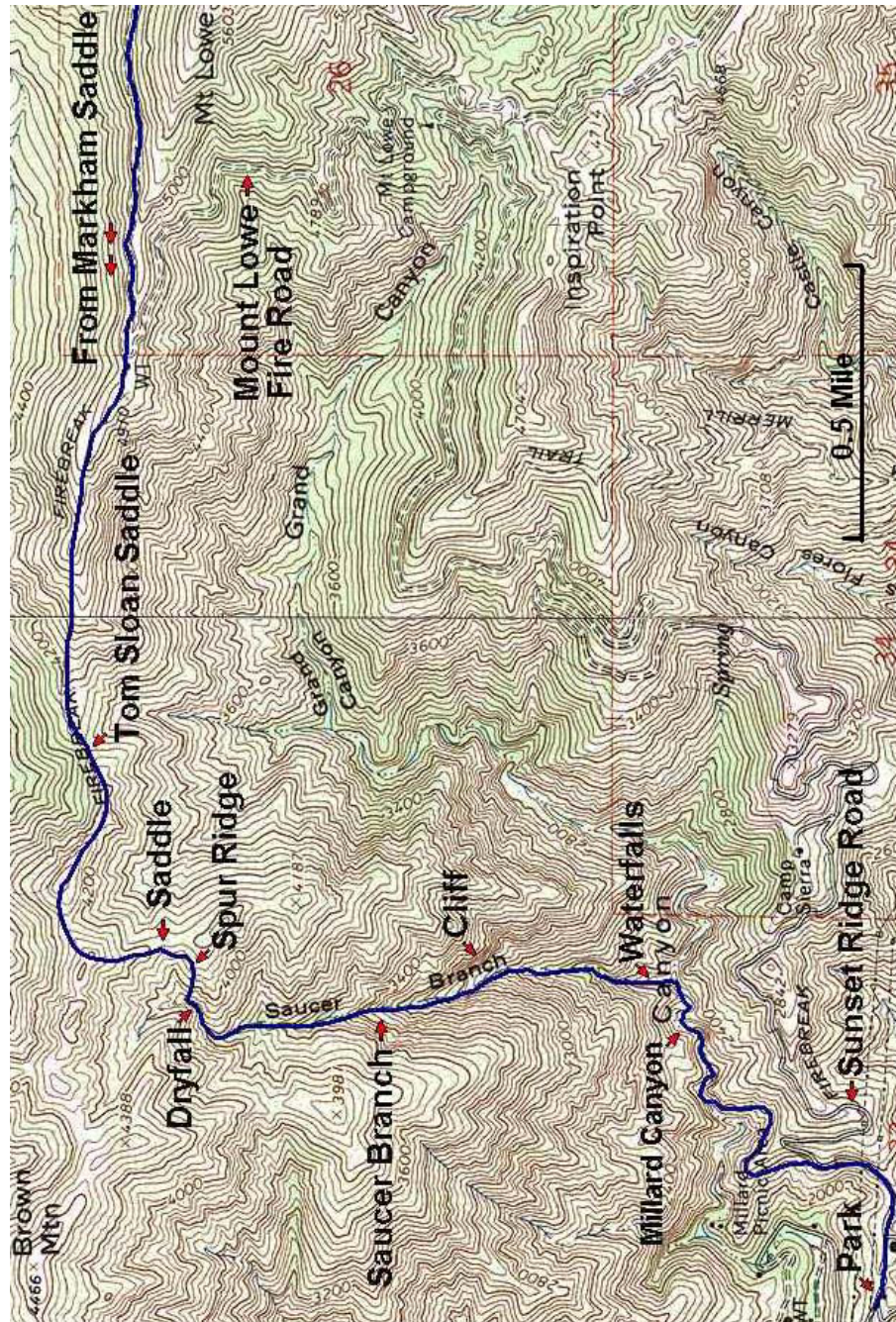
fact, near the bottom of the rappel, you should transition from the right side (looking downstream) to the left side of the stream in order to land on a dry bench.

There are two other ways to bypass this 70ft waterfall. At the lip you will notice on the right side a very exposed semi-trail that starts at the lip and contours around to a bluff that could be downclimbed. This is dangerous and should not be attempted. If you wish to avoid the rappel, hike about 30yds back up the canyon. There, on the left side (looking downstream) you should be able to identify a steep, earthy slope with many signs of passage. Climb up this slope and find a rough use-trail that contours around and then descends a steep gully to a point downstream of the series of waterfalls.

At the bottom of the rappel down the 70ft waterfall, you will encounter two more waterfalls, both about 25ft high. These are best bypassed by following the use-trail around to the right. Climb about 6ft up on the rock to access the top of this trail that is somewhat exposed for the first 10ft but thereafter is relatively safe. The trail continues downstream at some height above the stream on the right but I recommend descending to the bottom and then climbing up the rock to admire the three waterfalls from below.

Climbing back up to the trail after this excursion, it is only about 100yards from there to the end of the Saucer Branch. You should reach this point ( $34^{\circ}13.20'N$   $118^{\circ}8.25'W$  and elevation 2380ft) about 6hr and 4.7mi from the start. Turn right and follow the well-used trail along the main branch of Millard Canyon. About 0.25mi down the canyon, you need to identify the point where the trail climbs up to the left ( $34^{\circ}13.16'N$   $118^{\circ}8.47'W$  and elevation 2190ft). If you miss this you will arrive at the top of Millard Falls and have to backtrack. The trail climbs briefly and then contours around two spectacular amphitheaters before emerging from the canyon and joining the asphalt Sunset Ridge fire road. About 300yds down the road you will come to the gated trailhead where the return vehicle was parked. You should reach this gate ( $34^{\circ}12.88'N$   $118^{\circ}8.72'W$  and elevation 2090ft) about 6.5hr from the start, having hiked 5.7mi.





Map of Saucer Branch Hike

## 2.2 Grand Canyon Transit

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 10.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 2340 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson, Pasadena
- Difficulties: A few steep earthy slopes
- Special equipment: 20ft webbing (optional)
- ACA Rating: 2A III

Try this for a relatively short, introductory adventure hike in the mountains just north of Pasadena. Below the slopes of Mount Lowe, the “Grand Canyon” is modest by the standards of the San Gabriels and certainly bears no resemblance to the famous ditch of the same name. The uphill leg of this adventure follows the well-traveled Mount Lowe fire road. The off-trail hike down the length of the Grand involves the descent of several steep but short earthen slopes (most safely accomplished by sliding on one’s rear end), but is otherwise a quite straightforward off-trail hike. It involves a pleasant wooded canyons where there are several human artifacts of interest. At its terminus the Grand discharges into Millard Canyon where you again pick up a trail and follow it down to the Sunset Ridge fire road and the Cheney Trail.



*Left: View up Grand Canyon from Tom Sloan/Brown Mountain ridge. Right: Shaft of Dawn Mine.*

## Trailhead

The trailhead is by the locked gate on Sunset Ridge (34°12.88'N 118°8.72'W and elevation 2100ft) at the top of Chaney Trail. Take Lake Avenue north through Pasadena and Altadena to the end of that street and turn left onto Loma Alta. Go about 0.5mi and then turn right onto the narrow Chaney Trail. Drive up this winding road into the mountains until you reach a junction just beyond the summit where the left fork proceeds on down to Millard Camp ground. Instead take a right turn and park by the iron gate.

## Hike

The narrow asphalt road (2N50) continues east from here, running up the ridge known as Sunset Ridge. Hike up this road about 2mi where you pass through another open iron gate just beyond a large flat area that used to be a helicopter pad. At about 2.7mi you reach the junction with the trail to Echo Mountain that joins from the right. Shortly after this trail junction the fire road changes from asphalt to dirt. Continue up this road, the Mount Lowe fire road, and about 3.5mi beyond the Echo trail junction you reach the Mount Lowe campground that lies to the left of the road amidst the remains of the old Mount Lowe tavern. This campground (34°13.59'N 118°6.62'W and elevation 4440ft) is a good place for lunch.

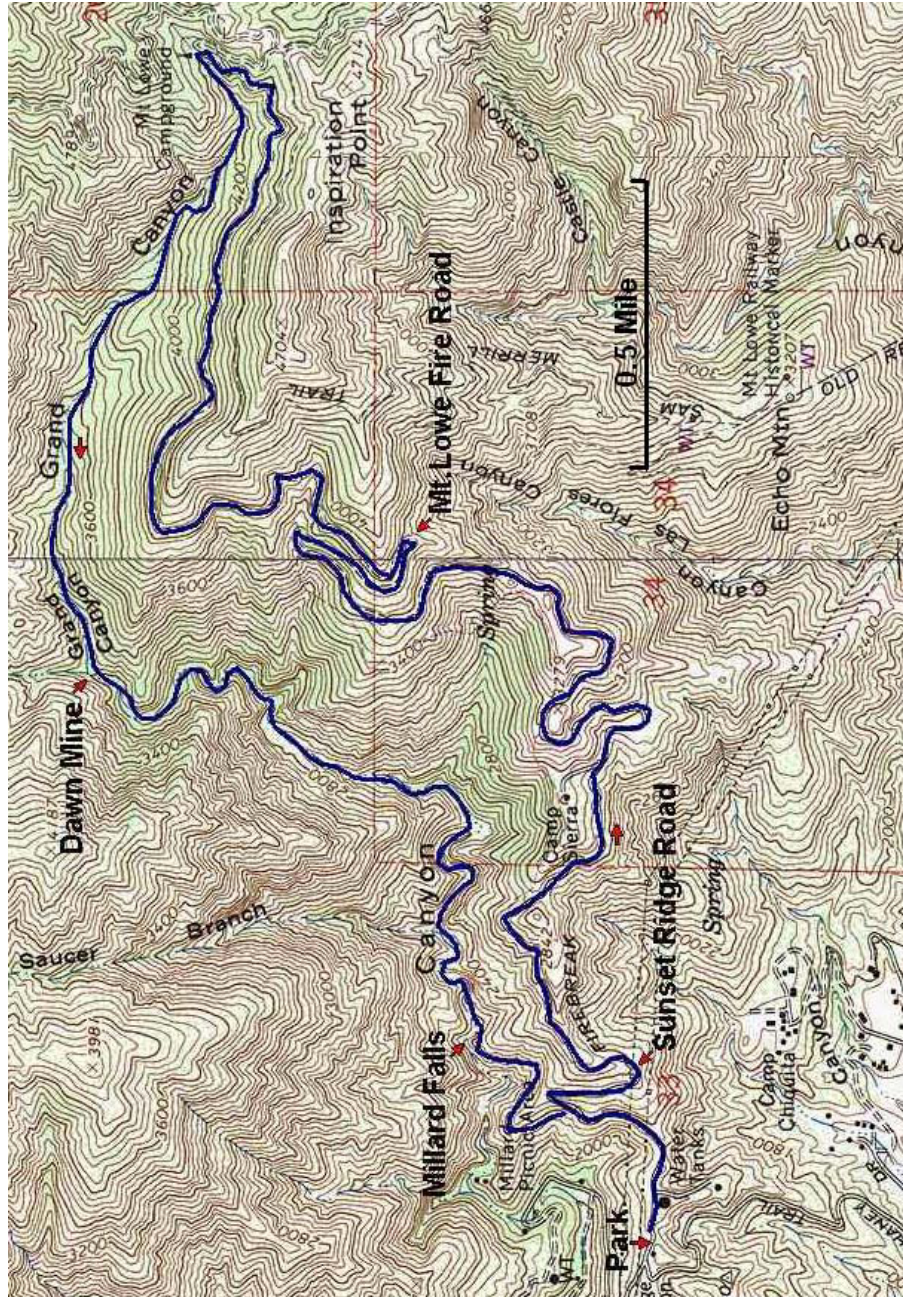
To begin the off-trail part of the hike, climb down into the gully to the south of the ruins, between the campground and the road. This is the start of Grand Canyon and you will travel down it (with one detour) all the way to Millard Canyon. Very shortly after the start you will encounter the only obstacles on this hike where some scrambling is required, specifically several places where it is necessary to descend quite steep earthen slopes. In all cases there are convenient roots to provide holds though you should be careful not to rely on these too much. I recommend sliding down slowly on your rear while utilizing the hand and footholds provided by the roots. However none of these slopes are more than about 20ft high. About 20min below the campground, a much more dramatic obstacle bars your way. From above all you can see is a narrow, vertical slot that the stream has cut through solid rock. Almost perfectly sliced, this slot is only about 3ft wide and, in entering it, the stream makes an initial vertical drop of about 15ft. However, it is clearly fruitless to attempt to climb down into the slot for about 20yds further on the slot suddenly opens up into a very large bowl whose dimensions and depth one cannot discern from upstream. Fortunately, there is a fairly simple way to negotiate this dramatic obstacle. From a point in the streambed just upstream of the slot, you should be able to detect a use-trail that climbs up to the left (south). Follow this. Above the gully the terrain is much flatter though, on your right, is the edge of the cliff forming the large bowl. The faint trail contours around this abyss for about 100yds until it reaches a sidewash where it is fairly obvious that you can now climb down again into the bottom of the canyon. After the descent, you may



choose to hike upstream to examine the bowl. Unfortunately it is filled with an accumulation of tree trunks and branches, debris that is not easy to penetrate.

From this point on, the descent of Grand Canyon is a straightforward and pleasant hike in a pretty, wooded canyon. About 1hr from the campground you encounter the remains of several stone cabins with quite a few artifacts scattered around. And, along the same stretch, you may be able to find the remains of an old airplane embedded in the streambed. As you approach the junction with Millard Canyon (34°13.75'N 118°7.77'W and elevation 3200ft), more ruins are encountered and just above and to the left of the trail you will see the first of the horizontal shafts of the Dawn Mine. Unlike some of the other shafts this one is safe to enter but only extends back about 10yds into the canyon wall.

From the mid-1890s to the 1950s many dreamers tried their luck extracting gold from the Dawn Mine and there are many shafts in the canyon walls near the junction of Grand and Millard Canyons. One miner built a trail from this location up to the tracks of the Mount Lowe railway (some 410ft above) in an effort to find an easier way to transport ore to the valley below. This trail still exists and provides an alternate return route for this hike. But it is easier to continue on down Millard Canyon on the fairly good trail that frequent use maintains. It is a relatively easy hike downstream but you must look out for the point where the trail leaves the stream and ascends the left side of canyon in order to bypass Millard Falls (34°13.16'N 118°8.47'W and elevation 2190ft). The first few feet of this trail are steep and it looks unpromising when viewed from the stream; but a short distance above it turns into a good trail. If you miss this turn-off you will arrive at the top of Millard Falls that are dangerous to negotiate without proper safety equipment. For this hike you should backtrack and find the trail described above. Once it climbs a hundred feet or so the trail then contours along the left wall of Millard Canyon passing the Falls well below. Shortly after turning left and leaving Millard Canyon the trail joins the asphalt of the Sunset Ridge Road and a few hundred yards bring you back to the trailhead and your vehicle (34°12.88'N 118°8.72'W and elevation 2100ft).



Map of Grand Canyon Transit

## 2.3 Alpine Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 1400 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: 4 rappels, one of 250ft
- Special equipment: 250ft rope, 250ft pull cord, 20ft webbing, rappeling gear with 4 rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3A II

The adventure described here descends the short canyon leading to and including Chapman Falls (sometimes also called Alpine Falls), a tourist attraction during the heyday of the Mount Lowe Mountain Railway and the Mount Lowe Tavern. A trail from the Tavern led just a short distance down Grand Canyon to Chapman Falls which is at the end of a steep tributary that drops precipitously down the south face of Mount Lowe. It is a short canyon with three other shorter rappels before you come to the 240ft Chapman Falls. Because of the small catch basin the water only runs occasionally and the canyon and falls are likely to be completely dry for most of the summer. The hike is probably best during the spring, fall or winter though the shade also eases the heat in the summer.

### Trailhead

This canyon is most easily accessed from Eaton Saddle on the Mount Wilson Road. Drive north from La Canada/Flintridge on the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box Junction where you turn right onto the Mount Wilson Road and proceed 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle (34°14.36'N 118°5.60'W and elevation 5090ft). Park here in the broad dirt area near the metal gate across the fire road.

### Hike

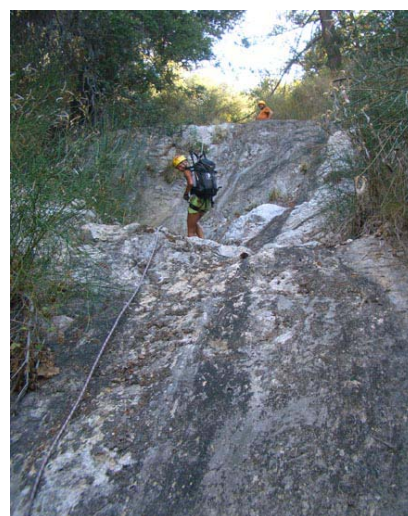
Once you pass the metal gate across the Mount Lowe fire road (34°14.36'N 118°5.60'W and elevation 5090ft) you are immediately rewarded by a spectacular view down into the cliff-ringed amphitheater that is the head of Eaton Canyon. Take a moment to enjoy these fabulous surroundings before proceeding up the fire road and through the tunnel, gaining elevation as you approach



Markham Saddle and its watertank (elevation 5260ft). Continue along the gently descending fireroad as it rounds the end of the ridge and then descends eastwards toward the Mount Lowe junction. However, before you reach that junction you will be contouring around the head of Alpine Canyon and at that head you will encounter the Tom Sloane trail (with marker) forking off the road to the right at  $34^{\circ}13.71'N$   $118^{\circ}6.61'W$ , an elevation of 4680ft, and 1hr and 2.7mi from the start.

Leave the road and proceed down the Tom Sloane trail for about 50yds to where a small gully descends steeply down to the left. Follow this down to the bottom of Alpine Canyon at 4540ft. Once in the canyon bottom it is only about 100yds to the top of the first rappel (elevation 4450ft) that you should reach about 1.5hrs from the start. This first rappel is a sloping 30ft drop from a bush anchor on the left. It is then a very short way to the second rappel at 4350ft, that consists of a 50ft rappel from a tree anchor on the left. Just a few steps bring you to 4300ft and the third rappel, a 40ft two-step rappel from bushes on right near the lip (it is possible to bypass this drop on the left). You should reach this point 2hr 10min from the morning start.

Downstream of this third rappel there are a couple of small dryfalls that are readily bypassed before you approach the top of the 250ft Chapman Falls, the highlight of this adventure, at an elevation of 4270ft. Several small precursor steps precede the main drop of Chapman Falls and thus prevent a view of the vertical drop that comprises most of the descent. The drop requires a 250ft rope and a similar pull cord. After the precursor steps it is a vertical drop with a few steps, a large one near the bottom. The best anchor is a stout tree on the left at the top of one of the precursor steps. You should use enough webbing (about



*Left: View of Chapman Falls from Mount Lowe Fire Road. Right: Third rappel (photos by Gabe Sabloff).*

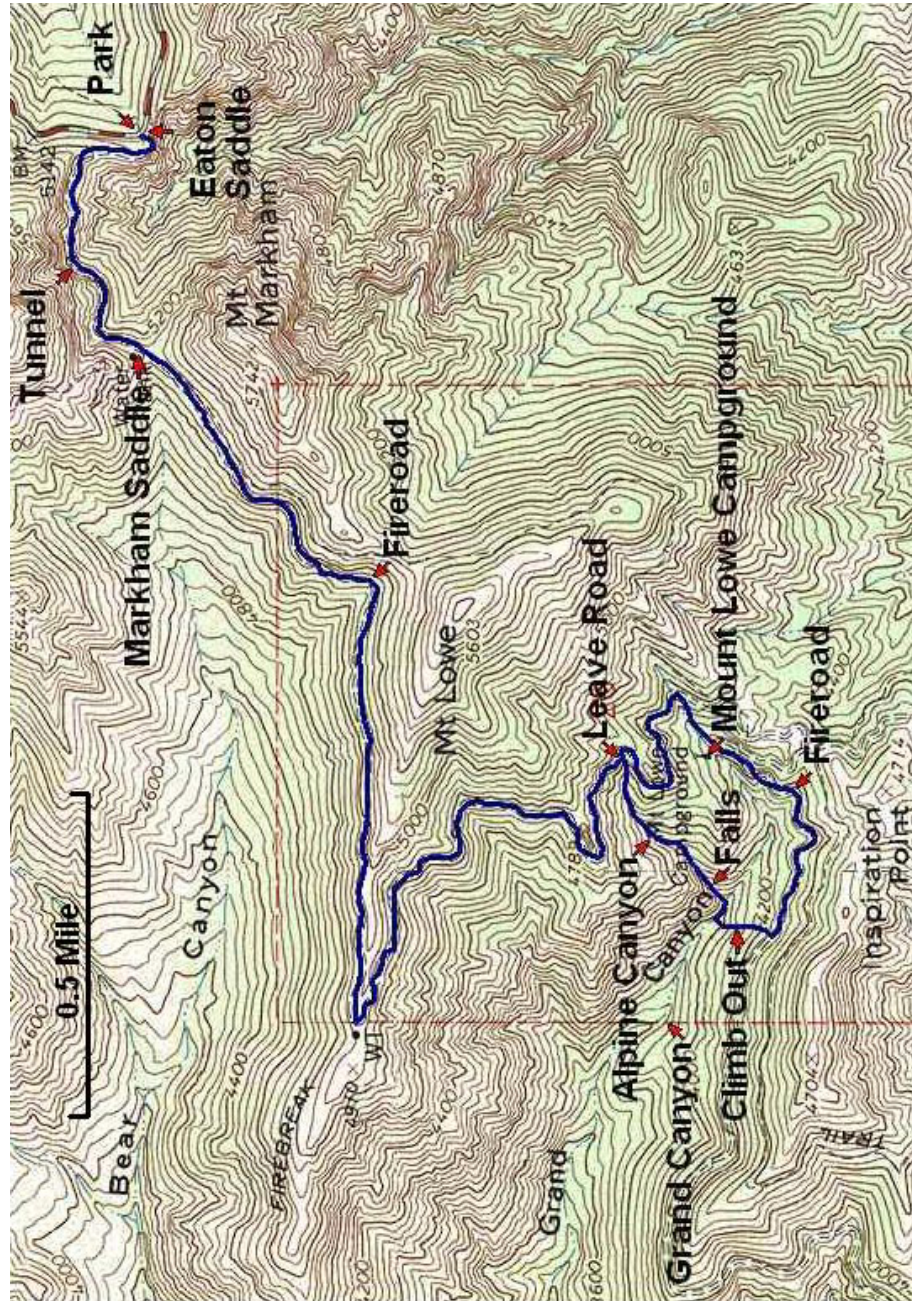
12ft) so that the quicklink or rappel ring is beyond the lip of that step and thereby ease the rope recovery. Also use a vigorous rope toss so as to minimize possible hang-ups with bushes on the way down. You should reach the bottom of Chapman Falls at 4030ft about 3hrs after the morning start. It is a quiet and cool place for a break or lunch.

From the bottom of Chapman Falls it is just 50yds to the junction of Alpine Canyon with Grand Canyon at  $34^{\circ}13.56'N$   $118^{\circ}6.85'W$ , and elevation of 4030ft and 3.0mi and 3hrs from the morning start. You may choose to go up Grand Canyon to explore the slot canyon drop that represents the only technical hurdle in the descent of the Grand Canyon described elsewhere in this collection (that hurdle can also be bypassed). But following the present route you should turn right at the junction and proceed down Grand Canyon for about 50yds to where you can discern a shallow gully and climbable slope on the left. Climb straight up this wooded slope for about 230ft to the Mount Lowe Fire Road at  $34^{\circ}13.50'N$   $118^{\circ}6.91'W$ , and an elevation of 4260ft. At the road turn left and hike up the fireroad (the route of the old Mount Lowe railway) to the hairpin bend with the turn off to Mount Lowe Campground (on the left) at  $34^{\circ}13.58'N$   $118^{\circ}6.60'W$ , 4450ft and 3.5mi from the start. At this hairpin leave the road and follow the signed Mount Lowe trail up to where it again joins the fire road. Turn left and follow the fireroad all the way back to Eaton Saddle, passing the Tom Sloan trail junction on the way. It is about a two hour hike from the bottom of Chapman Falls back to Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft), so the total hike duration should be about 5hrs during which you travel about 6.5mi.



*Left: Descending the 250ft Chapman Falls. Right: Exiting Alpine Canyon (photos by Gabe Sabloff).*





Map of Alpine Canyon Hike

## 2.4 Rubio Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4 miles
- Elevation gain: 1408 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson, Pasadena
- Difficulties: Five or six rappels ranging in height from 15ft to 80ft, several with flowing water.
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 120ft rope, 50ft of webbing, 6 rappel rings and dry bags.
- ACA Rating: 3B II

This hike presents the adventurer with a special combination of intriguing stories of human endeavor and the challenges of a precipitous canyon in the foothills north of Pasadena. It involves a straightforward trail hike to the top of the historic promontory known as Echo Mountain followed by a descent through the rugged Rubio Canyon. Rubio is a relatively small canyon that begins on the southern slope of Mount Lowe, swerves to the east as it runs behind Echo Mountain and then turns south again as it emerges from the mountains.



*Left: Thalehaha Falls from ridge opposite (photo by Robert Bowman). Right: Descending Thalehaha Falls.*

The history of this region took a dramatic turn in 1892 when the balloonist, inventor and Pasadena entrepreneur Thaddeus Lowe and the engineer David Macpherson began construction of their mountain railway to the top of Echo Mountain and beyond. Opened in 1893, the railway consisted of a long extension of the Pasadena tramway system up and into Rubio Canyon. This tramway penetrated about 0.5mi into the mountains; the present rough trail into Rubio follows what remains of the road bed and a few old ties can still be discerned in places. At the terminus of this tramway inside Rubio Canyon, Lowe built a substantial pavilion on a wooden trestle spanning the canyon and, until it was severely but inevitably damaged in a winter storm flood, this pavilion was a major tourist attraction. Wooden walkways and staircases were built up and down the canyon to allow visitors to enjoy the beauty of the wilderness. Of course, almost nothing remains of these facilities but many old photographs survive to remind us of the details. From these we know that a wooden staircase and walkway up the canyon climbed several substantial waterfalls before terminating at the base of the much larger and more spectacular Thalehaha Falls, called Bridalveil Falls by some. All that remains today are a few anchors in the rock where the walkways were affixed. The last part of this adventure involves a series of rappels down these historic waterfalls.

To summarize the rest of the history, Lowe and Macpherson then built a dramatic cable railway from the Rubio pavilion up the steep slope to the top of Echo Mountain. Hotels and other facilities were constructed on the summit and the settlement became known as the White City. They then built another tramway leading from Echo Mountain and the White City on up to Crystal Springs at the base of Mount Lowe, a distance of about four miles. Another rustic inn and resort were constructed at Crystal Springs.

Unfortunately, these world-renowned resorts and engineering feats were no match for the furies that nature visits on the San Gabriels at regular intervals. Every few years fires, storms, rock slides or high winds would cause major damage to some part of the railways or the tourist complexes. Thaddeus Lowe soon became bankrupt and subsequent owners were equally unsuccessful. In 1937, the entire complex was abandoned and nature began the process of absorbing the remains (with a little help from the Park Service who removed whatever dilapidated structures were left). Now only foundations remain on Echo Mountain and almost all trace of the facilities in Rubio Canyon have been swept away. A few sparse remnants still exist to allow imaginary reconstruction of the vanished grandeur. Of course, the lovely waterfalls in Rubio Canyon still remained to be enjoyed by many generations of hikers.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the summer of 1998, earth movers high above the west wall of Rubio Canyon caused a huge landslide that covered all the features described below from midway down Thalehaha Falls to a point just downstream of Moss Grotto Falls. Two huge canyon-filling rock piles were created. One stretched from about 30ft above the base of Thalehaha Falls to the narrows downstream of



Suspended Boulder Falls. The other much larger rock pile stretched from just downstream of the first pile to downstream of Moss Grotto Falls with its apex roughly above Mirror Lake. At that point the second rock pile was about 50ft deep.

For several years it was unclear whether the perpetrators of this terrible destruction of our natural and historic heritage would be called to account for their despicable acts. Even the Forest Service seemed intent in trying to deny its dubious role in approving the earthmoving and in avoiding any subsequent remedial actions. Then, nature herself intervened. On the night of October 19/20, 2004, an extraordinary event occurred in Rubio Canyon. After an intense rainstorm, a flash flood high in the east fork of Rubio came careening down into the main canyon and crashed over Thalehaha Falls. The energy it gained in its near 100ft drop down Thalehaha agitated the upper rock pile to such a degree that it initiated a remarkable debris flow. This awesome debris flow swept down the narrow Rubio gorge and set in motion almost the entire rock pile, consisting of up to 4ft in diameter. Once it hit the flatter canyon bottom downstream of Moss Grotto Falls the debris flow began to slow down. Most of the huge rocks appear to have come to rest within the next hundred yards creating a new canyon floor about 20ft higher than before. Smaller rocks, gravel and sand traveled much further, even as far as the debris basin about a mile downstream.

The result of this extraordinary event was that the original falls were largely uncovered with the exception of Moss Grotto Falls that were reduced to a small drop and Maidenhair Falls that were now completely buried. In the account



*Left: Roaring Rift Falls from overhead (photo by Robert Bowman). Right: Ribbon Rock and Moss Grotto Falls.*

below we have left the original account of the Rubio Canyon descent largely unchanged but inserted in parentheses the current state of the canyon.

## Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the end of Lake Avenue in Altadena ( $34^{\circ}12.25'N$   $118^{\circ}7.83'W$  and elevation 1800ft). But the adventure hike requires a short car shuttle. Consequently a return vehicle should be placed where the trail into Rubio Canyon starts. To reach this point drive up Lake Avenue and, near the top, turn right onto Delores Drive. Turn left onto Maiden Lane and then right onto Rubio Canyon Road. Follow Rubio Canyon as it winds northeast; just before the wooden bridge over Rubio creek, turn left on Rubio Crest and then right on Rubio Vista. At the top of Rubio Vista the road turns left and becomes Pleasantridge. Leave the return vehicle at this corner ( $34^{\circ}12.18'N$   $118^{\circ}7.38'W$  and elevation 1820ft). Note that the trail up Rubio Canyon leaves from the apex of this corner and proceeds through a narrow gap between the hillside and a wall along the side of a house. You will emerge at this point at the conclusion of this adventure.

Having deposited the return vehicle, drive back to Lake Avenue, proceed north to the top or end of this avenue and park near the junction of Lake and Loma Alta.

## Hike

The first part of this adventure involves hiking up to Echo Mountain along the Sam Merrill trail. This begins at the junction of Lake and Loma Alta ( $34^{\circ}12.25'N$   $118^{\circ}7.83'W$  and elevation 1800ft) and first follows the old driveway that proceeds east from that intersection. Follow the trail to the right of the driveway that contours into Las Flores canyon, crosses the streambed and then climbs the east wall of Las Flores toward Echo Mountain summit. The trail switchbacks back and forth and, about 1hr 20min and 2mi from the start, it emerges onto the ridge at a point just a short distance north of the ruins of the old resort at the top of Echo Mountain ( $34^{\circ}12.74'N$   $118^{\circ}7.31'W$  and elevation 3200ft). Walk south past ruins of buildings and relics of the railways. Here at the end of the trail a set of old concrete stairs marks the entrance to a once grand hotel, immediately adjacent to the location of the upper terminus of the cable railway. You may wish to proceed a short distance down the cable railway track in order to look down into Rubio Canyon.

After this pause, you should now walk back north along the main trail to the point where the Castle Canyon trail contours off to the right. About 50yds before this trail junction (at  $34^{\circ}12.71'N$   $118^{\circ}7.28'W$  and elevation 3200ft), leave the trail and climb down to the lower levels of the ruins. Then continue straight down the grassy, wooded slope on the back side of Echo Mountain. It is a fairly easy descent down this slope into Rubio Canyon and it only takes about 10min to reach the streambed. There are numerous indistinct trails but once you find your way through the bushes near the top you should veer left to

access a shallow, wooded gully with a loose earth floor that provides for an easy descent. You should reach the open canyon bottom ( $34^{\circ}12.78'N$   $118^{\circ}7.15'W$  and elevation 2850ft) about 1hr 45min from the start; just in case you need to return this way, note the distinctive duck that marks the entrance to the wooded gully. Turning to travel downstream, it is easy going down the open wooded canyon. There is a use-trail on a series of benches on the right side and there are two small waterfalls to negotiate before the canyon makes an abrupt right turn. As you make this turn it is wise to follow the pipe a little distance up the canyon wall on the right; this allows you to bypass a tricky slot that the stream follows on the left side. About 2hr 10min will have elapsed since you set out.

A fair-sized tributary known as the east fork of Rubio enters from the right just after the abrupt right turn. You may wish to proceed up this tributary for about 50yds to the base of a large multistage waterfall (Leontine Falls) whose lowest, vertical drop is about 90ft high; however, two upper sections that cannot be seen from below but are visible from Echo Mountain, add about 30ft each to the drop.

Back at the junction with Rubio Canyon and proceeding downstream, the walls of the canyon become ruggedly vertical and you enter the dramatic and exciting part of this adventure as the canyon drops precipitously during its southward progress to the valley below. Just after the junction you must wade for the first time and, about 10yds further downstream, you come to a double waterfall comprising 15ft and 12ft drops with an inviting, large circular pool in between. This is the pool that Professor Lowe called Diana's Bath. A water pipe is suspended above you on the right and there is a shelf (spanned by the water pipe) on the right above the circular pool. There are several ways to descend the uppermost of these two falls. Perhaps the easiest is to climb up to the pipe and, using it, access the shelf on the right. Then you can either rappel using the pipe as a support or downclimb to the pool. The lower falls can be simply downclimbed at low water; alternatively you may continue your rappel to the bottom.

About 30 yds downstream you will arrive at the awesome Thalehaha Falls, that drop about 80ft vertically down into a narrow, rockribbed cleft. When Professor Lowe's Rubio Pavilion was in its heyday at the turn of the century, the wooden walkways and staircases allowed tourists to come upstream all the way to this point at the base of Thalehaha Falls. In John Robinson's story of the San Gabriels there is a photograph of the Falls (which he calls Bridalveil Falls) with visitors perched on a wooden platform.

There are two possible routes for the descent of Thalehaha Falls. There is a good single bolt anchor on the right about 4ft above the lip; it could be backed up from a pipe embedded in the cliff about 5ft above the bolt. At low water this is a pleasant rappel with an easy entry. At higher water you will mostly be rappelling in the water. In either case it pays to stay to the right where there is a sheltered groove in the cliff face. The drier alternative is to use as anchor the tree about 15ft up the ridge on the left above the lip. This will take you down to a point a few yards downstream of the bottom of the falls.

Two smaller waterfalls follow immediately (they can be seen from the top of Thalehaha). The first, called Roaring Rift Falls, is about 20ft high; a good bolt has been installed in the rock on the right of the lip and allows you to rappel down the right of the falls. The second, called Suspended Boulder Falls, follows immediately and occurs where the canyon makes an abrupt right turn. [This can now be downclimbed though you may choose to rappel from a webbing wrap around one of several large boulders upstream of the falls.]

Another 40yds down canyon you will encounter the partial remains of a small dam that was built during the heyday of Rubio to create a small reservoir known as Mirror Lake. The dam forms the lip of a two stage waterfall called the Grand Chasm Falls with drops of 25ft and 45ft [now about 35ft]. There used to be a risky climbing trail up to a tree above the lip on the right that accesses a ledge from which it was relatively easy to climb down the scree slope to the bottom of these falls. Now you must rappel down both falls; for an anchor you can use a webbing wrap around one of several large boulders in mid-canyon. It is probably easiest to descend using two separate rappels and an anchor around an old pipe on the intermediate platform.

About 30yds further you come to the last rappel down yet another beautiful, two-stage waterfall with drops of 20ft and 30ft. Professor Lowe gave separate names to the two parts of this waterfall and called them Ribbon Rock Falls and Moss Grotto Falls (another account suggests he named them for his wife and called them Leontine Falls). If you have had enough of rappeling at this point, you may choose to take the old, badly eroded trail to the bottom instead. This proceeds to the left from the lip of the falls and climbs a short way. I recommend that, instead of climbing down the dangerous slope at the first point where the trail has been washed out, you continue to travel horizontally past several badly eroded spots and contour into the gully down which it is easy to climb. This takes you to the bottom of falls. Otherwise, if you choose to rappel, there are several large rocks a short distance upstream of the lip that can be used as anchors [note that it is no longer necessary to rappel down what little remains of Moss Grotto Falls].

In the old days (and up until about 1980), there was a beautiful and deep circular pool on the shelf between Ribbon Rock Falls and Moss Grotto Falls. Then, some large winter storm deposited a huge boulder in this pool and ruined it. Fortunately, I swam in it before it was filled with the boulder. The wooden stairway proceeded up the left side of Moss Grotto Falls and visited the circular pool on the way.

Proceeding downstream from the bottom of Ribbon Rock/Moss Grotto Falls you cross the location of the old 15ft Maidenhair Falls now buried beneath the debris flow. Below this it is a short way to the location of Rubio Pavilion, identifiable by the large concrete foundation blocks that are all that now survive of that famous enterprise. At this point (34°12.32'N 118°7.04'W and elevation 1940ft) climb up the right wall at one of several points to access the trail along the roadbed of the old tramway up to Rubio Pavilion. This trail will take you out of the canyon to the trailhead; it is now washed out in a number of places but still allows a relatively easy exit to the point where you left the return

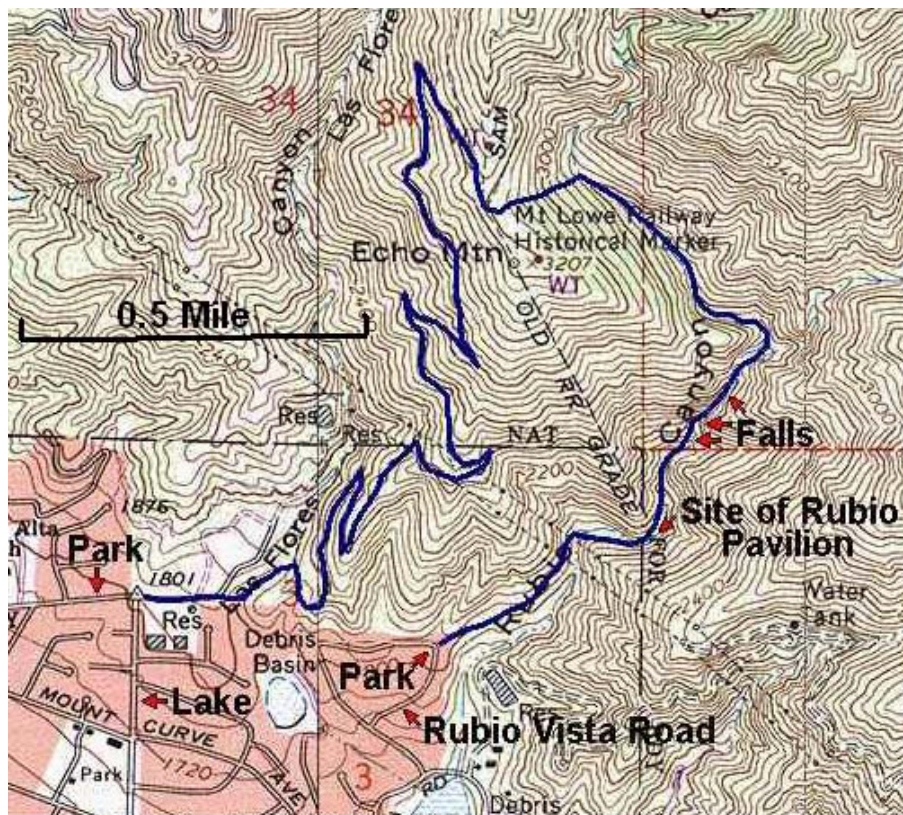
vehicle (34°12.18'N 118°7.38'W and elevation 1820ft).

## **Extension in upper Rubio Canyon**

Upstream of the point where the above hike descends into Rubio, there is a wooded stretch of canyon that makes for a pleasant extension of this adventure or, alternatively, for a much easier and shorter hike. To access this stretch, take the Castle Canyon trail from Echo Mountain (34°12.74'N 118°7.30'W and elevation 3200ft). This contours into upper Rubio Canyon and passes above the junction of Castle and Rubio Canyons. After 15min, you will reach the stream crossing in Rubio (34°13.10'N 118°7.10'W and elevation 3390ft). Leave the trail here and proceed down this small, wooded canyon. About 20min into this off-trail hike, you will arrive at the first of the two modest obstacles in this extension. This occurs at the junction of Rubio and Castle Canyons; both streams tumble over waterfalls just before they merge. The larger waterfall is in Rubio Canyon and makes for a nice rappel if you choose this means of descent. However, a fairly easy alternative that does not require ropes is to round the apex of the junction into Castle Canyon, and then cross to the other side of Castle where a steep earthy slope allows descent to the bottom.

Another 25min will bring you to the second modest obstacle, a 20ft waterfall that can be seen from Echo Mountain. This is easily circumvented on the left by using the pipe as a handhold and, a very short distance beyond, the canyon broadens and you will notice a substantial meadow above the stream on the left. This is the landmark by which to recognize the point where the main adventure descends into Rubio Canyon from Echo Mountain at 34°12.78'N 118°7.15'W and elevation 2850ft). The duration of this detour is about 1hr and so adds about 50min to the main hike.

The detour can be employed as an extension to the main hike or, by directly ascending to Echo Mountain, as a short adventure hike. In the latter case, the total duration beginning at the Lake Avenue trailhead and returning there is 3hr 40min.



Map of Rubio Canyon Hike

## 2.5 Upper Rubio Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours plus access time to Inspiration Point
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.5 miles plus access to Inspiration Point
- Elevation gain: None except for access to Inspiration Point
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: 6 rappels up to 140ft in upper canyon
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 160ft recovery cord, 60ft webbing, 6 rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3B III

The main Rubio Canyon descent described in another chapter constitutes one of the classic canyoneering adventures in the San Gabriel mountains. The seven rappels are all now equipped with good double-bolt anchors that make that descent easier and faster. For the experienced canyoneer, a different adventure in this same canyon is to descend the upper section of Rubio starting at Inspiration Point. This can be terminated where the Castle Canyon Trail crosses Rubio Canyon (34°13.10'N 118°7.10'W and elevation 3390ft), or you could continue down the whole length of Rubio as described in the Rubio Canyon chapter and the extension into upper Rubio described at the end of that chapter.

The adventure described here descends Upper Rubio Canyon, the top being accessed from Inspiration Point. The descent involves 6 rappels plus the 7 in the main canyon if you choose that option. The hike is probably best for a winter, spring or fall day, since it could be very hot in the summer.

### Trailhead

This hike begins at Inspiration Point (34°13.39'N 118°6.56'W and elevation 4520ft) and there are a number of different ways to get to this starting point. The natural conclusion to this hike would be to either continue to descend Rubio to the Rubio Canyon trailhead (see the Rubio Canyon chapter) or to follow the Castle Canyon Trail to Mount Echo and then descend the Sam Merrill trail to the trailhead at Lake and Loma Alta in Altadena (see the starting point for the Rubio Canyon descent in the Rubio Canyon chapter).

If you choose to access Inspiration Point from the Lake and Loma Alta trailhead via the Sam Merrill Trail, Mount Echo and the Castle Canyon trail, that approach involves a substantial elevation gain of 2700ft, a hike that takes about 2hrs 40min. An alternative would be a lengthy car shuttle to Eaton Saddle (34°14.36'N 118°5.60'W and elevation 5090ft) and then a 1hr 10min hike down



the fire road to Inspiration Point. In this description the times and distances are given from the Inspiration Point start.

## Hike

Before leaving the shelter at Inspiration Point ( $34^{\circ}13.39'N$   $118^{\circ}6.56'W$  and elevation 4520ft) look out to the southwest and note the small but clear skyline saddle with several old pine trees sticking up from it that is at roughly the same elevation as the Inspiration Point shelter. This is the drop-in saddle for this hike. Fix this important waypoint in your mind and keep track of its location as you head toward it.

Setting out from Inspiration Point, you should follow the rough use trail up the ridge immediately west of Inspiration Point. In a few minutes you should reach the 4714ft summit adorned with various artifacts from the days of the Mount Lowe Tavern. From the summit, continue along the ridgeline as it veers south. Beyond one small rise, there is a short stretch of difficult buckthorn bushwhacking but the use-trail on the ridgeline resumes after this and soon you will arrive at the afore-mentioned drop-in saddle, readily recognized by the group of pine trees off to the right. You should reach this drop-in saddle at  $34^{\circ}13.24'N$   $118^{\circ}6.79'W$  and an elevation of 4450ft about 45min after leaving Inspiration Point. Whereas any attempt to leave the ridge prior to this would encounter thick brush, the slope west from this drop-in saddle is remarkably clear of brush and allows easy descent into a gully that eventually leads down into Upper Rubio Canyon.

As the gully deepens there are several small downclimbs and, about 4000ft the old electricity wires that litter this canyon make their first appearance.



*Left: Third rappel. Right: Fourth rappel.*

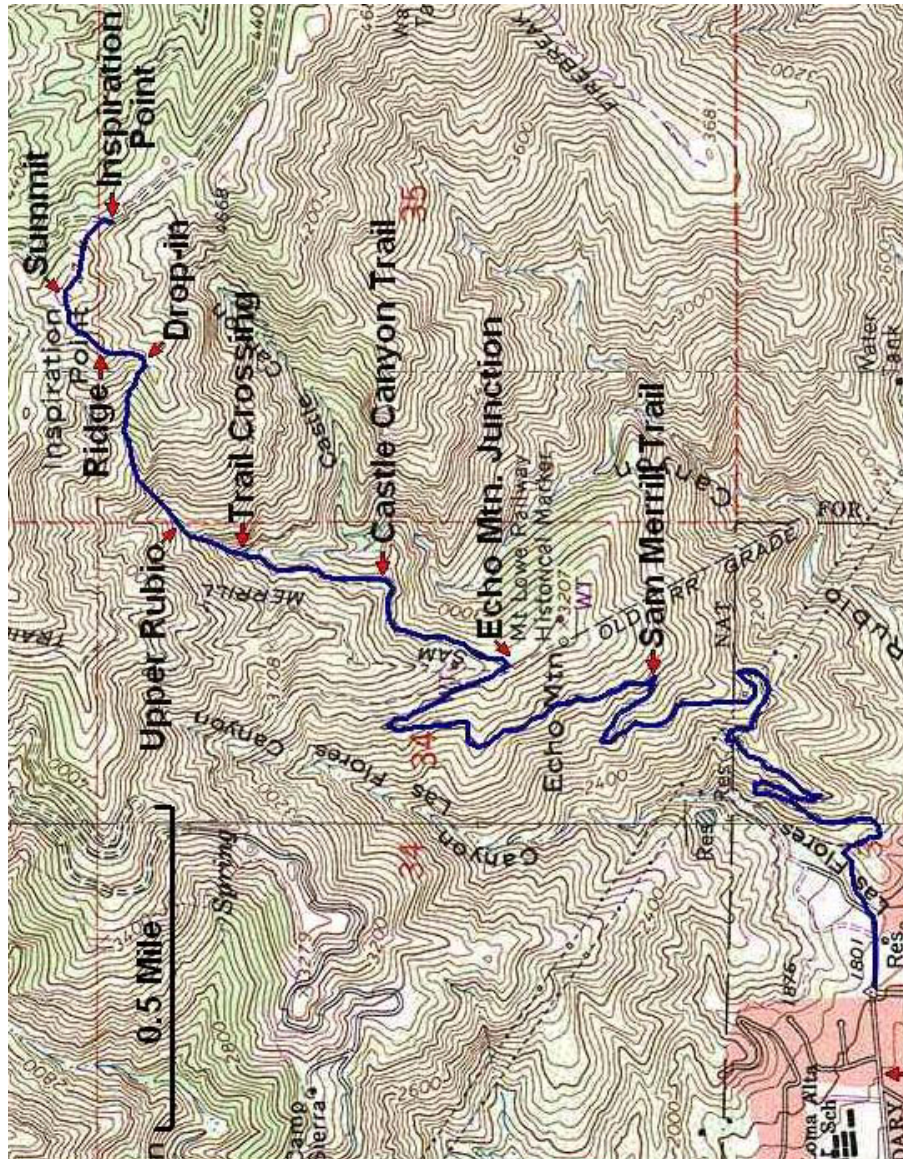


These wires are not only unsightly but can pose an additional hazard on some of the rappels. They could and should be removed. Just downstream of this at 3990ft and 1hr 45min from Inspiration Point you arrive at the top of the first rappel, a clean 100ft two-step drop from a bush anchor on the left. This could be broken up into two rappels since there are good anchors on the intermediate shelf but a 200ft rope will just allow a combined double-rope descent. This drop is immediately followed by the second rappel, a 140ft drop from an anchor bush high on the right of the lip. Here the wires are a menace and care must be taken that the ropes do not get entangled with them. Care must also be taken to set up a successful rope pull. It is just a few yards downstream to the last of this series of rappels, a 60ft sloping rappel from a bush on the left.

This third rappel deposits you at a major canyon junction where a large canyon, perhaps the major tributary in these headwaters, enters from the right. You should reach this confluence at  $34^{\circ}13.21'N$   $118^{\circ}7.03'W$  and an elevation of 3700ft about 2hr 45min after leaving Inspiration Point. From there it is just a few hundred yards to the second series of rappels in Upper Rubio Canyon. This begins at 3630ft with a vertical 50ft rappel from a boulder anchor in midstream down onto a broad bench. This is immediately followed by a dramatic 120ft vertical drop from a bush anchor in the right wall down into a cliff-ringed slot. There are also boulders here that provide alternative anchors. The final descent in this series is just a few yards downstream and is a 40ft drop down a sloping rockface anchored by a tree on the right. This last drop could also be downclimbed on the right.

From the bottom of this last rappel it is less than a hundred yards to the place where the Castle Canyon Trail crosses Rubio Canyon. This is located at  $34^{\circ}13.10'N$   $118^{\circ}7.10'W$  and an elevation of 3400ft. You should reach this point about 3hrs 45min after leaving Inspiration Point having covered about 0.8mi.

If you have decided to proceed on down Rubio Canyon then that descent is covered in the chapter on Rubio Canyon. If, on the other hand, this is enough for the day then you should follow the Castle Canyon Trail as it contours out of the canyon bottom to the right. It is a 15min and 0.5mi hike back to Echo Mountain ( $34^{\circ}12.74'N$   $118^{\circ}7.30'W$  and 3200ft). From there it takes an additional hour to descend the 3mi of the Sam Merrill Trail down to the trailhead at the top of Lake Avenue in Altadena ( $34^{\circ}12.25'N$   $118^{\circ}7.83'W$  and 1800ft). Thus the total duration of the descent from Inspiration Point is about 5hr.



Map of Upper Rubio Canyon Hike

## 2.6 East Fork of Rubio Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 9 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.1 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: 18 rappels up to 150ft with one serious anchor challenge
- Special equipment: Two 200ft ropes, 150ft webbing, rappeling gear with at least 10 rappel rings, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 4B IV

The main Rubio Canyon descent described in another chapter constitutes one of the classic canyoneering adventures in the San Gabriel mountains. The seven rappels are all now equipped with good double-bolt anchors that make that descent easier and faster. For the experienced canyoneer, a different adventure in this same canyon is to descend the East Fork of Rubio that joins the main canyon just upstream of Diana's Bath and those rappels. This East Fork adventure includes a descent of the spectacular Leontine Falls located a short way above the confluence. Leontine Falls also constitute a serious anchor challenge discussed below in more detail.

The adventure described here descends the full length of the East Fork of Rubio Canyon, the top being accessed from Panorama Point at the end of the fire road spur that runs east from Inspiration Point. The descent involves 11 rappels in the East Fork plus the 7 in the main canyon. This makes for a long, tough day, partly because of the number of rappels and partly because of the long approach to Panorama Point. A small, fast group is therefore recommended. Be sure to carry adequate water for the long approach hike and the canyon descent (at least 3 liters) plus a filter for when you reach the spring. The hike is probably best for a spring or fall day, but not after prolonged rain.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a long car shuttle. First park your vehicles at the Rubio Canyon trailhead. To reach this drive up Lake Avenue and, near the top, turn right onto Delores Drive. Turn left onto Maiden Lane and then right onto Rubio Canyon Road. Follow Rubio Canyon Road as it winds northeast; just before the bridge over Rubio creek, turn left on Rubio Crest and then right on Rubio Vista. At the top of Rubio Vista the road turns left and becomes Pleasantridge.

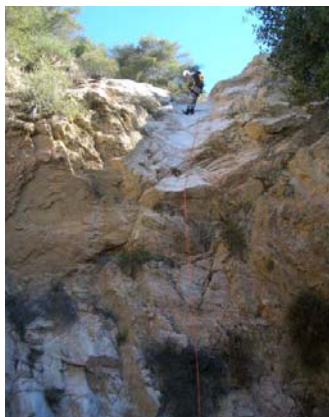
Leave the return vehicle(s) at this corner ( $34^{\circ}12.18'N$   $118^{\circ}7.38'W$  and elevation 1820ft) where the Rubio trailhead is located.

Then retrace your route to Lake Avenue, drive south to the 210 Freeway and follow it west to the Angeles Crest Highway. Drive north on the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box where you turn right onto the Mount Wilson Road and proceed 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft). Park here in the broad dirt area near the metal gate across the fire road.

## Hike

Once you pass the metal gate across the Mount Lowe fire road ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft) you are immediately rewarded by a spectacular view down into the cliff-ringed amphitheater that is the head of Eaton Canyon. Take a moment to enjoy these fabulous surroundings before proceeding up the fire road and through the tunnel, gaining elevation as you approach Markham Saddle and its watertank (elevation 5260ft). Continue along the gently descending fireroad as it rounds the west side of Mount Lowe and reaches the Mount Lowe junction at 4470ft (and  $34^{\circ}13.46'N$   $118^{\circ}6.61'W$ ) about 1hr and 3.2mi from the start. At this junction follow the signs for Inspiration Point and hike the gently ascending fireroad for 0.25mi to this popular overlook. Inspiration Point is at  $34^{\circ}13.27'N$   $118^{\circ}6.55'W$  and an elevation of 4500ft. After a brief stop, continue hiking east along the good, level, dirt road that eventually rounds Muir Peak (4688ft) and turns onto the south side of that ridge. After the sharp turn you are contouring around the head of the Middle Muir Ravine. The road ends at a spectacular overlook known as Panorama Point ( $34^{\circ}12.85'N$   $118^{\circ}6.15'W$  and an elevation of 4550ft). You should reach this point about 1hr 45min from the start having traveled 4.4mi. Pause here to get your bearings.

Begin the drop-in on the west side of the Panorama Point roads-end clearing. Drop steeply down an earthen slope following an animal use-trail that winds



*Left: Second rappel in East Fork of Rubio. Right: Descending Leontine Falls.*

between the patches of bushes and leads down into the start of a gully with a steep cliff on your right. As you begin the descent of the gully some minor bushwhacking is needed before the gully clears and deepens. There are a couple of easy whiterock downclimbs until, 45min from the drop-in at 3890ft, you arrive at the top of the first rappel. This is a two-step, 90ft drop anchored by a stout bush on the left. It descends down into a narrow slot. Just a short distance downstream this slot joins a large steep wash that has clearly experienced a recent major debris flow and is probably located just below the large triangular scar in the top of the East Fork that can be seen from the valley far below.

This larger gully descends steeply and it is only a short distance downstream to the top of the second rappel that you should reach at 3710ft about 1hr 30min from the drop-in. Anchored by a bush on the right, this steep second rappel descends about 80ft of clean, white rock. This is immediately followed by a 90ft rappel anchored by a bush on the left that descends past a small hanging recess down into a narrow gully going right where another canyon comes in on the left. Another brief hike leads to an awkward 10ft downclimb where a partner assist is needed and then to a 20ft rappel from a boulder anchor on the left. You should reach this small rappel at 3480ft about 2hrs 10min from Panorama Point or 3hrs 50min from the morning start.

Just beyond this small rappel, the character of the canyon changes radically because a spring here creates a small water flow throughout the year and causes much more luxurious growth. The flowing water will allow you to replenish your water supply. This same location saw the crash of an AT6 fighter-trainer aircraft in June 1941 and the death of its two crewmen. Some pieces of the plane can still be found in this part of the canyon.

Not far downstream from the spring at an elevation of about 3290ft, you arrive at the top of a 70ft sloping rappel down through a slot. The problem here is a lack of a nearby anchor; using a tree high on the left bank some distance upstream means you will need a doubled 200ft rope to descend. Another short hike brings you to the top of a series of rappels beginning at 3190ft. The first of these is a 70ft multistep rappel from a bush anchor in the approach slot just upstream of the lip. This is immediately followed by a 50ft rappel from a tree anchor up a slope on the left (do not anchor from the big dead tree in the middle). At the bottom of this rappel the canyon turns sharp left and begins a long sloping and stepped descent down bedrock that is wet and slippery in places. Though you can downclimb some way, it is probably best to use the large hidden tree on the left to rappel down about 150ft to where you can resume safer downclimbing. You should reach this location at 3050ft about 3hrs 40min from the drop-in at Panorama Point.

Below the long sloping rappel there is a small 30ft rappel from a bush anchor on the right followed by a scrubby section with lots of ground plants. Here you begin to find the pipes of the water company. After some mild bushwhacking you will finally arrive at the top of the series of steps that lead to the majestic Leontine Falls, the most serious technical challenge in this canyon. You will arrive at the first of these steps, or Leontine precursors, at an elevation of 2760ft about 4hrs 50min from Panorama Point.



The first Leontine precursor is a small 15ft drop that is most readily bypassed by climbing up behind a large tree on the left and then descending. The second precursor is a easy downclimb via the bedrock in the streamcourse. The third precursor is a 25ft vertical rappel using a small bush on the left or the boulder wrap discussed below. However, before descending the second (or third) precursor note the large wedged boulder halfway down the small waterfall in the second precursor. This is the only really solid natural anchor available for Leontine itself but it requires a very long piece of webbing (about 50ft) from that boulder to the lip of Leontine described below. This is one solution to the anchor problem. Another would be to roll some boulders down the first three precursors in order to construct a deadman anchor for Leontine. But the ledge after the third precursor is also one of the few places in the San Gabriels where a good double bolt anchor would be merited.

After the third precursor you arrive at the top of the main Leontine Falls, a spectacular 130ft vertical drop from this ledge that is recessed so that you cannot see the bottom from here. Some canyoneers have rappeled down a “fourth precursor” of about 30ft to a small hanging pothole where there is a single, dubious bolt anchor. However the full 130ft drop from the ledge after the third precursor is strongly recommended and provides an easier rappeling exit from the hanging pothole. Below the pothole Leontine is a dramatic vertical descent that is usually wet and slippery. In times of heavier flow this descent could be very challenging for it would be hard to avoid descending in a torrent of water.

Below Leontine Falls there are two modest downclimbing challenges, the first of which traverses a ledge on the right and the second of which may require



*Left: Leontine Falls. Right: Thalehaha and Roaring Rift Falls.*

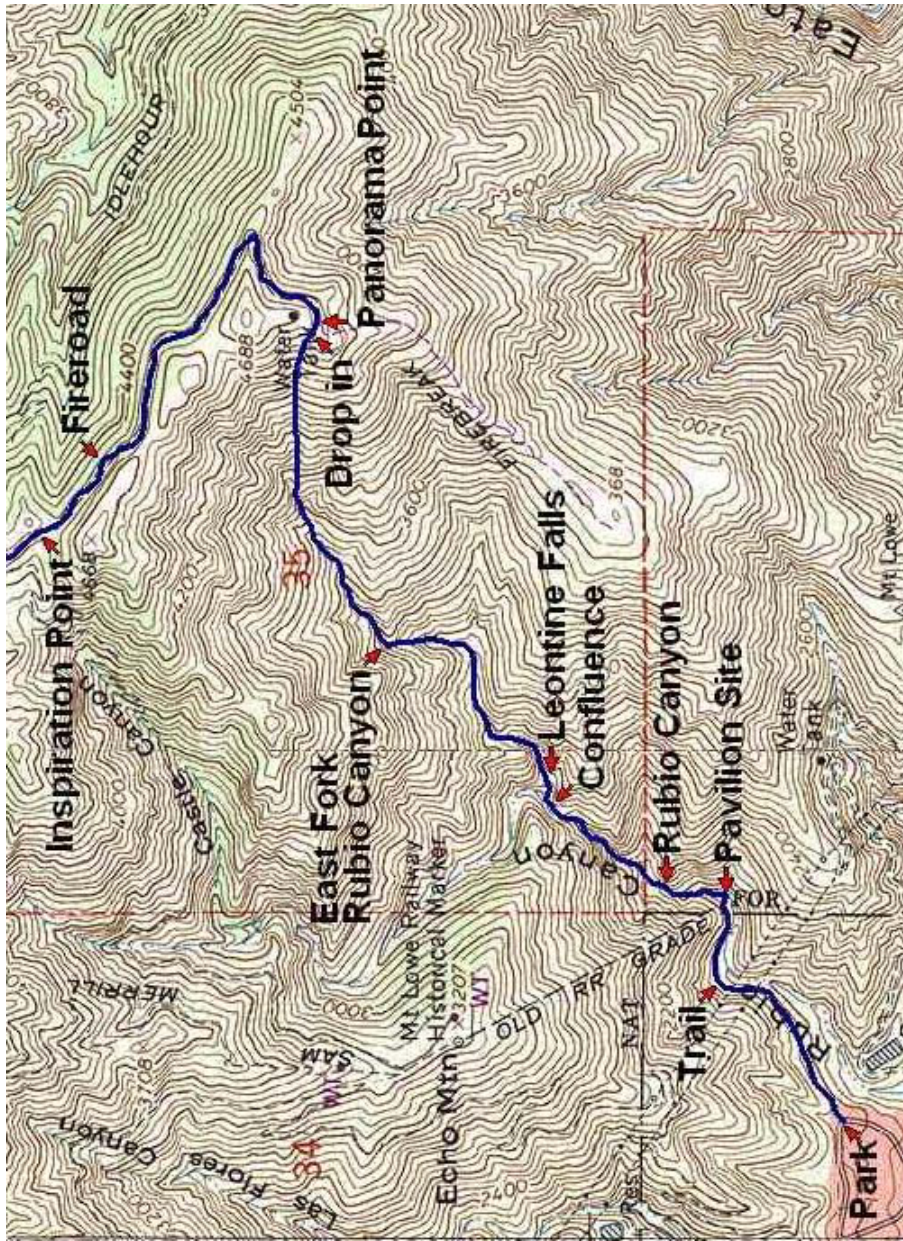
a partner assist. Just below the second you arrive at the junction with the main channel of Rubio Canyon. You should reach this milestone at  $34^{\circ}12.56'N$   $118^{\circ}6.88'W$  and an elevation of 2480ft about 5hrs 50min after the drop-in at Panorama Point or 7hrs from the morning start having covered a total distance of 5.3mi.

The descent of Rubio Canyon downstream of the confluence has been described in the chapter on Rubio Canyon and will not be repeated here. A group for whom the East Fork descent is appropriate should not have any great difficulty with the seven rappels in the main canyon and should be able to reach the trailhead about 1hr 40min after the confluence. The trailhead is located at  $34^{\circ}12.18'N$   $118^{\circ}7.38'W$  and an elevation of 1820ft. The complete hike is just 6.1mi and should take about 9hrs.



Map of northern part of East Fork of Upper Rubio Canyon Hike





Map of southern part of East Fork of Upper Rubio Canyon Hike

## 2.7 Upper Eaton Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.6 miles
- Elevation gain: 680 feet up the Idlehour Trail
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: Much boulder hopping
- Special equipment: None
- ACA Rating: 1A III

Unlike the lower reaches of Eaton Canyon (see Lower Eaton Canyon hike) the upper part of Eaton Canyon makes for a relatively easy adventure hike that requires no technical equipment. The drop in on the south side of Eaton Saddle off the Mount Wilson Road is much easier than might at first sight appear and the going all the way to the Mount Lowe/Idlehour trail is straightforward boulder-hopping. It makes for a delightful fall, or spring hike provided any possible storm runoff has passed.

### Trailhead

The hike requires a long car shuttle. First leave one vehicle near the gate on the Mount Wilson Toll Road (2N45). Drive north or east on Altadena Drive,



*Left: View down Eaton Canyon from Eaton Saddle. Right: Eaton Canyon near Idlehour.*

turn north on Mendocino Lane and immediately east on Pinecrest Drive. You may have to park on Mendocino because of parking restrictions on Pinecrest. But it is still just a short distance along Pinecrest to the Mount Wilson Toll Road gate (34°11.51'N 118°6.33'W and elevation 1300ft). Then drive south again to the 210 Freeway and follow it west to the Angeles Crest Highway. Drive north on the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box where you turn right onto the Mount Wilson Road and proceed 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle (34°14.36'N 118°5.60'W and elevation 5090ft). Park in the broad dirt area.

## Hike

Once you pass the metal gate across the Mount Lowe fire road (34°14.36'N 118°5.60'W and elevation 5090ft) you are immediately rewarded by a spectacular view down into the cliff-ringed amphitheater that is the head of Eaton Canyon. Take a moment to enjoy these spectacular surroundings. And from this elevated vantage point examine the progress of the canyon as it winds its way off to the south southeast. On a clear day you will note that, in the distance, the canyon makes a turn to the west and disappears from view. Just around this turn is Idlehour campground where your route will take you later in the hike. You may also be able to see the trail from Mount Lowe down to Idlehour as it switchbacks down the west slope of the canyon just before the westerly turn.

When you are ready to proceed hike up the fire road and through the tunnel, gaining elevation as you approach Markham Saddle and its watertank (elevation 5260ft). The drop-in point for Eaton Canyon (34°14.38'N 118°5.93'W and elevation 5240ft) is on the left side of the road just a yard or two before you reach Markham Saddle (and about 0.5mi from the trailhead). You descend down a steep earth slope that transitions into a boulder-strewn gully. Other large tributaries soon merge on the left and the route turns southward. For the most part the going is easy though slow boulder-hopping. This upper reach is dramatically ringed with cliffs and must be an awesome site after a large storm. About 1hr and 1.3mi from the trailhead (at an elevation of 4000ft) we encountered first water and, not far beyond this point, the flow became continuous, in part because another large canyon enters on the left.

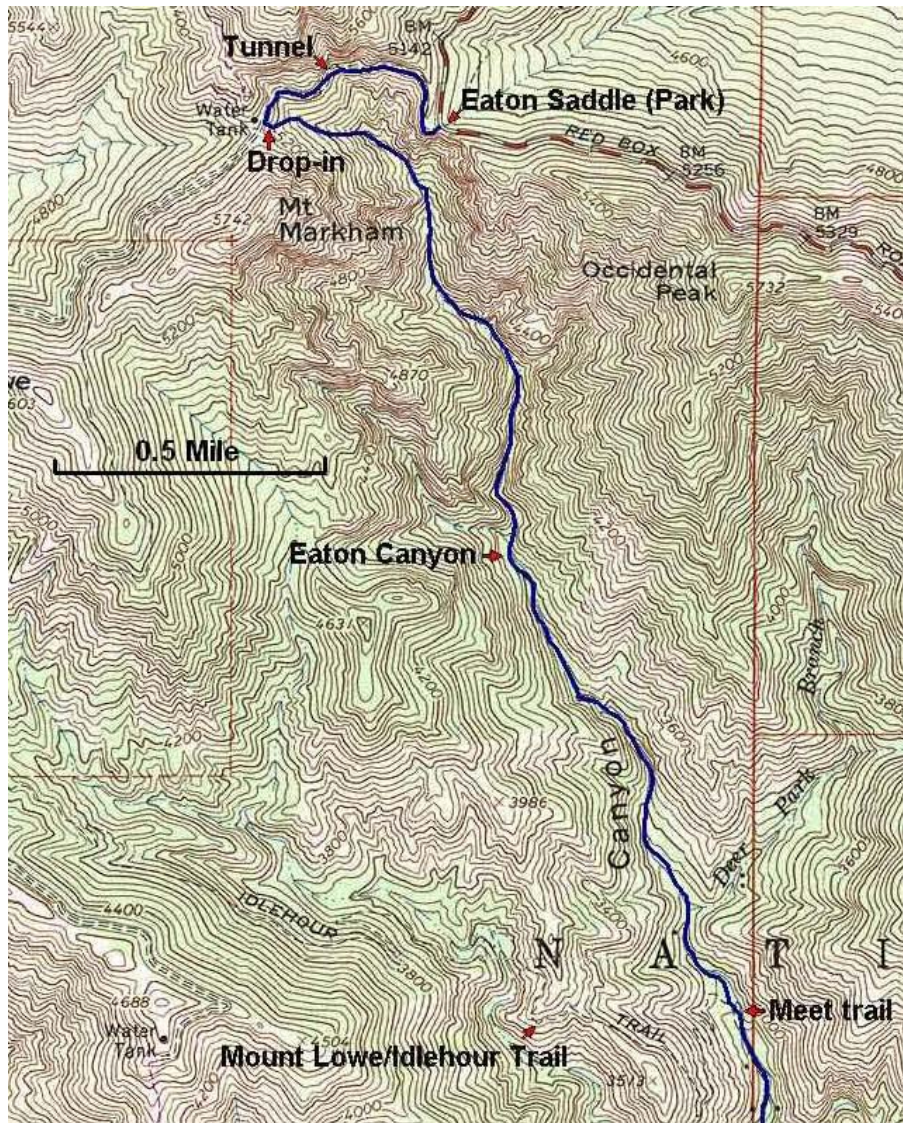
As you continue on down, the canyon gradually becomes less precipitous and, at the same time more verdant. Here there are some beautiful wooded sections where you can rest and enjoy this wilderness. About 1.5hr from the trailhead and at an elevation of 3760ft, you will come to a broad "gate" marked by 100ft cliffs on both sides. This is a particularly scenic stretch. Shortly thereafter, about 1hr 45min from the start, you will come to the first of the two small waterfalls in the upper canyon. This first (at 3600ft) is a beautiful little 15ft cascade that is easily bypassed on the left. It has a great pool for a hot summer day. Just a short way further is a second 15ft waterfall (at 3500ft) that requires a modest downclimb in a slot on the right. There are good hand and footholds so this single piece of climbing should not present a serious obstacle on the hike.

After these modest obstacles, the canyon begins to broaden and flatten out. There are large benches in places with traces of a use-trail. And you pass several boulder fields. At an elevation of 3080ft and 2.5mi from the start a large tributary, the Deer Park Branch, enters on the left and shortly after that you should encounter the trail from Mount Lowe to Idlehour when it descends the right wall to the canyon bottom. You should reach the trail about 3hr and 2.6mi from the start at an elevation of 2970ft. The trail is well-maintained and easy going and it takes only about 20min to hike down to Idlehour Campground located on a bench on the left side of the canyon (at  $34^{\circ}12.48'N$   $118^{\circ}5.04'W$  and elevation 2680ft). Several metal stoves and old Forest Service signs mark the location. You should reach Idlehour about 3hr 15min and 3.3mi from the start. It is a good idea to rest here for a while before embarking on the ascent ahead. It would also be a good place to spend the night if that is part of your plan.

Just a few yards downstream of Idlehour, the trail veers into a side canyon and begins to switchback up the left wall of the canyon. Most of the ascent is in pleasantly shaded woodland, particularly welcome on a hot day. As you ascend some spectacular views of the Eaton Canyon basin open up. Pause to enjoy the grandeur of this great bowl in the mountains; to the north you can see Mount Wilson on the rim above the basin carved out by the headwaters of Eaton Canyon. The ascent finally climaxes at a saddle (elevation 3360ft) after a climb of 680ft that should take about 40min. After a short descent the trail then joins the Mount Wilson Toll Road. You should reach this point ( $34^{\circ}11.96'N$   $118^{\circ}4.80'W$  and elevation 3140ft) about 4hr 20min and 4.7mi from the start.

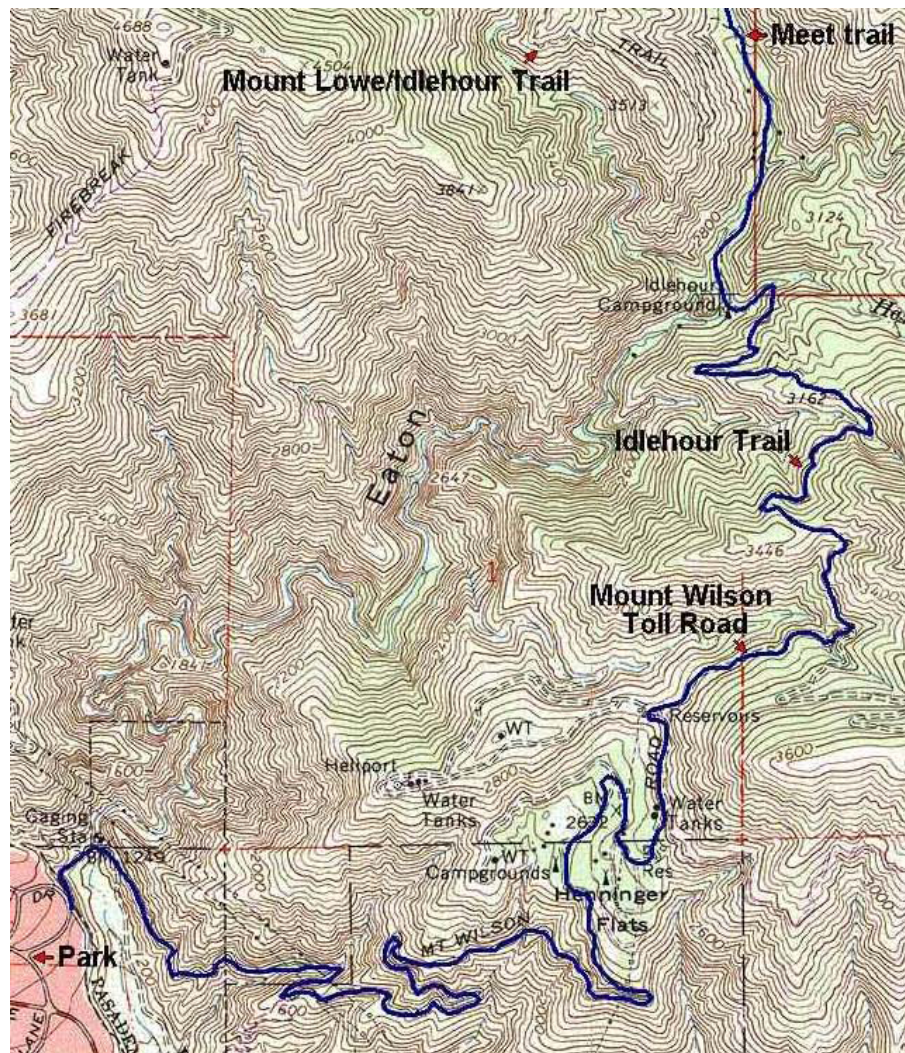
From here it is simply a matter of descending along the Toll Road to Henninger Flats ( $34^{\circ}11.60'N$   $118^{\circ}5.37'W$  and elevation 2530ft) and from there down to the start of the Toll Road in Altadena ( $34^{\circ}11.51'N$   $118^{\circ}6.33'W$  and elevation 1270ft) The hike is 8.5mi long and should take just about 6hr.





Map of northern part of Upper Eaton Canyon Hike





Map of southern part of Upper Eaton Canyon Hike

## 2.8 Lower Eaton Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8 miles
- Elevation gain: 2130 feet up the Mount Wilson Toll Road
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: 4 more advanced rappels, about 6 simpler rappels, significant downclimbing, much wading and swimming
- Special equipment: 160ft rope, 80ft webbing, rappeling gear with at least 6 rappel rings, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3B IV

In its lower reaches, Eaton Canyon is one of the most rugged and impenetrable canyons in all of the San Gabriels. This adventure hike that traverses the length of lower Eaton Canyon is one of the more challenging described in this book and should not be undertaken lightly. Experience with other, easier hikes and with rappeling is essential for the enjoyment of this adventure. It should not be attempted during or after a rainstorm for to encounter a flood while in the Eaton Canyon Narrows could be extremely hazardous. Schedule it during the dry summer months not only because the chance of a flood is greatly reduced but also because much wading and swimming is necessary and this is much more comfortable when the water is warmer.

On the map it might appear as though this hike could be easily accomplished in a half day; in fact, because of the obstacles you will have to surmount it is really a full day adventure.

### Trailhead

The trailhead is the start of the Mount Wilson Toll Road (2N45) in Altadena. Drive north or east on Altadena Drive, turn north on Mendocino Lane and immediately east on Pinecrest Drive. You may have to park on Mendocino because of parking restrictions on Pinecrest. But it is still just a short way along Pinecrest to the gate on the Mount Wilson Toll Road (34°11.51'N 118°6.33'W and elevation 1300ft). The gate is sometimes locked at night and often the Forest Service employee does not arrive to unlock it until 7.30 or 8.00am. This is frustrating for those intent on an early start.

## Hike

Proceed down the Toll Road to the bridge across the mouth of Eaton Canyon (elevation 1250ft). At the end of this adventure you will emerge at this Toll Road bridge after your transit through Eaton Canyon. This is one hike for which it is advisable to make a preliminary, exploratory hike up the canyon from the entrance in order to examine Eaton Canyon Falls and understand one of the challenges of this adventure. On that preliminary hike you would leave the road at the bridge and hike up the streambed. But on the main hike, you proceed up the Toll Road past Henninger Flats to a saddle ( $34^{\circ}11.83'N$   $118^{\circ}5.18'W$  and elevation 2900ft) above the Flats where the road reaches a T-junction. I call this Esme Junction and you should arrive there about 1hr 20min into the hike. Pause here and take in the topology now revealed. To the north you look down into Esme Canyon that descends to the left or west and feeds into Eaton Canyon near the lower end of the gentle middle section of Eaton Canyon Narrows.

At this point there are two options. The first option is rougher but quicker and shorter and is advisable when doing a day trip. The second or leisurely option follows an easy route to Idlehour Camp, a pleasant place to stay the night if you choose to do so.

**First Option:** Turn left instead of right at Esme Junction and proceed down the dirt road several hundred yards. Do not turn left onto the road to the heliport. Instead proceed downhill to the place where the fire road turns to the left and starts climbing again ( $34^{\circ}11.87'N$   $118^{\circ}5.42'W$  and elevation 2730ft). Here there is an old, overgrown dirt road that switchbacks down to the right. At this point look across to the other side of Esme Canyon and you should see



*Left: Big Boulder. Right: Point of no return.*



the trail that is your immediate objective. It runs down along the other side of Esme Canyon and is strangely distinguished by the telephone poles installed along its route. By proceeding down the overgrown dirt road and crossing the creek in Esme Canyon you access the trail I call Telephone Trail. The telephone posts even have wires installed on them though where they went is a puzzle. In any case, you follow this trail as it proceeds down Esme Canyon and then contours into Eaton Canyon high on that canyon's east wall. Here you are looking down into the gentle middle section of Eaton Canyon Narrows.

Telephone trail ends at a flat area (Telephone Flat) in a saddle ( $34^{\circ}12.18'N$   $118^{\circ}5.49'W$  and elevation 2580ft) behind a promontory or ridge that juts out into Eaton Canyon. As the river winds its way around the end of this promontory, it is forced through the narrow gorge you will be descending later. Pause at Telephone Flat to get your bearings. First look down the gully on the south side of the Flat; though steep this can be safely climbed and allows access to or exit from the middle section of the canyon. Having absorbed that you are now ready to follow the very rough and faint trail that leaves the north side of the Flat and contours along the steep side of Eaton Canyon. You proceed upstream for about 150yds, at which point there are several short switchbacks as the faint trail descends. The last part of the descent to the canyon bottom follows a scree-filled gully. Once you reach the stream you have joined the route of the second option. It only takes about 50min from Esme Junction to the canyon bottom.

**Second Option:** Continue up the Toll Road that turns to the right at Esme Junction. After 0.6mi the road switchbacks to the right but you take the well-maintained Idlehour Trail that forks off to the left at  $34^{\circ}11.96'N$   $118^{\circ}4.80'W$  and elevation 3140ft. The distance from the start to this junction is about 3.5mi and can be covered in about 1hr 30min. Proceeding along the Idlehour Trail (12W16), you climb briefly to a saddle on the crest of a ridge (elevation 3380ft) and then begin the descent toward Idlehour Campground. This is a pleasant trail that passes through pine forest on the north-facing slopes. The last section descends more steeply as you climb down into the depths of Eaton Canyon. Pause along here to enjoy the grandeur of this great bowl in the mountains; to the north you can see Mount Wilson on the rim above the basin carved out by the headwaters of Eaton Canyon. Idlehour Campground ( $34^{\circ}12.48'N$   $118^{\circ}5.04'W$  and elevation 2600ft) is located a few yards upstream from the point where the trail reaches the canyon bottom; it is about 1.5mi from the Toll Road and 2hr 20min from the start of the hike. Located in a pleasant wooded area by the stream, it is a good place to spend the night.

Initially, when you leave Idlehour and start downstream the going is straightforward. In a few places there is a faint use trail but most of the time you pick your way over the rocks in a pleasant wooded canyon. You pass the remains of at least two stone cabins that are marked on the topo map. Later, there are several places where it is wise to climb up the left bank in order to bypass small waterfalls. After approximately 50min, you may notice the large pile of rocks (or "duck") I constructed to mark the place where the two options rejoin.

This second option is about 1hr longer than the first. I will leave it to the reader to add this hour to the elapsed times quoted below.

**Both Options:** Just downstream of the point where the two options merge you must climb up the slope on the left in order to bypass a small waterfall and a beautiful, deep pool where you might be tempted to pause for a swim. Continuing downstream, after a short distance you reach the first significant obstacle in the canyon, a huge boulder that has blocked the entire width of the canyon. This can be downclimbed though you may have to wade the shallow pool below it. However, before this wade you should prepare for much wading and swimming. Here the canyon narrows dramatically and you enter the spectacular gorge known as the Eaton Canyon Narrows. The stream has cut a narrow and winding gorge through the rock leaving tortured vertical walls towering overhead.

Just downstream of the large boulder obstacle and about 2hrs 30min from the start, you arrive at the point of no return where you must slide or jump about 6ft into a deep pool. This is the first of many swims. Several other gorge-spanning pools follow and then, quite abruptly, you arrive at the first major obstacle, a vertical 45ft waterfall descending into a shallow pool. This requires a rappel. There are several possible anchors, the best of which is a tree some distance back from the lip. The entry to the rappel is tricky because of the moss covered rock. Getting over the lip of the falls is particularly awkward. Be certain to use the proper rappel stance; any attempt to support your weight on your feet could leave you very vulnerable to a slip. The rappel becomes easier as you descend to the right of the falls (as you look downstream) and the rope above you becomes vertical.

Immediately downstream of this first waterfall are several small waterfalls and pools and these are followed by a smooth, inclined 20ft cascade that drops into a pool that can be up to swimming depth. You can set up a rappel here using a webbing wrap around one of the large boulders just upstream of the edge.

However, many young people chose to slide down these falls. I suggest that the first person rappel to check the depth for the sliders who follow.

A few yards further downstream you encounter a 50ft waterfall called "The Gully", one of the most dramatic obstacles on this hike. The stream plunges down through a very narrow gap into a large cavern and drops 50ft to the deep pool in the shade below. Fortunately there is a good anchor just to the right of the falls consisting of webbing around a large rock. There is a very old bolt and hanger plate in the wall but these are badly corroded and should not be trusted. The steep crevice just below the anchor provides an easy entry for this rappel. Further down the rockface becomes slippery but not as bad as the first waterfall. Near the bottom, it may not be possible to avoid some encounter with the falls themselves. The rockface curves inward here and, at higher stream flows, it is easier to get behind the waterfall, between the water and the rockface. Hanging here in this cavity is one of the more awesome moments I have experienced in the San Gabriels. It is also easier to unhook yourself in the shelter of this cavity

for there are several convenient, underwater ledges to stand on. Some years the pool at the bottom requires a swimming disconnect.

Downstream of The Gully there is a narrow slot waterfall that can be down-climbed by chimneying the first section and then using footholds below the lip of the lower section. The deep pool that follows must often be swum. Downstream of this pool, the canyon broadens and you come to the end of the most dramatic section of the Eaton Canyon Narrows. There is a large sunny rock shelf on the right that makes a good place for a rest and dry out. You should reach here 4hr from the start.

Below this point there is a long stretch of canyon without any major obstacles. It is a pleasant wooded canyon with many potential camp sites should you choose to overnight here. It takes about an hour to cover this middle reach. Approaching the end of this section you will recognize that a large canyon is entering from the left. This is Esme Canyon. If you look up at the left wall of the main canyon just before the Esme Canyon junction, you will see the remains of an old trail.

Just after the junction, Eaton Canyon makes an abrupt right turn and immediately narrows. Here one must negotiate a series of small slides each of which plunges into a deep pool requiring swimming. This series culminates in a vertical, 12ft waterfall that drops into a pool approximately 5ft deep. Though modest, this small waterfall presents a dilemma for the nearest secure anchor is quite some distance upstream requiring the use of a substantial length of webbing. The young people I was with belayed me as I rappelled. I then checked out the pool and they jumped.



*Left: First falls. Right: Descending the Gully.*

Having descended this waterfall, it would be wise to take stock of your situation. At this point you should be about 5hrs from the start. It will take about another 3hrs to make it back to the trailhead so you should plan accordingly and find a camping place if there is insufficient daylight.

Continuing downstream, you encounter a small but awkward waterfall that proceeds through a narrow slot between rock walls in which several large boulders are jammed. Descend using one of these large rocks as anchor. Further downstream, there are many smaller obstacles in the canyon bottom but only one that causes any hesitation. This is a large and deep pool between vertical walls and fed by a small waterfall, only about 3ft high. The pool is over 6ft deep and you must therefore swim across it. On the way downstream it presents a minor hurdle for it is relatively easy to slip into the pool from above. However, when hiking upstream on another occasion, it presented a substantial obstacle for it proved very difficult for the first person to clamber up the falls from a swimming position in the pool. Because of the heroics of one of our party, we came to call this "Naked Triumph Falls".

Just downstream there is a place where a thick log is jammed between the two sides of the canyon high above the stream, seemingly holding the canyon walls apart. One wonders how long it can remain suspended. A short distance downstream of this oddity, you will encounter a small dam about 6ft high that, many years ago, served as a reservoir for a water supply to the basin far below. The water from this reservoir flowed through a pipe that led through a tunnel in the left wall of the canyon. The tunnel entrance is about 20yds downstream of the reservoir just above the canyon floor. Twenty years ago it was still possible to get through this tunnel, walking along the pipe, to emerge at a point we will encounter a little later. However, the other end of the tunnel is now blocked by a stone wall.

Approximately 30ft upstream of the tunnel and the same distance downstream of the small dam, there is a climbable slot in the cliff wall on the left. This slot is the start of the alternative exit option that consists of a climb up to the ridge above (Eaton Falls Ridge) and then a long descent into Eaton Canyon at a point downstream of the last large waterfall, Eaton Falls themselves. This exit option is described in more detail in a footnote at the end of this chapter. It cuts about one hour from the total time but is not recommended for the descent on the other side of the ridge is quite loose.

It is strange to think that Eaton Canyon downstream of Eaton Falls is just on the other side of the left ridge. Despite this you have still a long stretch of canyon bottom to follow when you continue on along the course of the stream. After several hundred yards you will come to a small 15ft waterfall that must be rappelled. The anchor is a stout tree on the right but the entry to this rappel is very awkward because of the overhang. Moreover the pool at the bottom is often deep and must be swum. Another small waterfall with a large deep pool follows immediately. At present this can be bypassed by walking along a very large log that spans the falls and the pool on the right. But when this log floats away you will have to swim this pool.

There follows another section of wooded canyon before you arrive at the penultimate waterfall, a 50ft vertical drop from a narrow rock slot. Here there are several routes of descent. If you climb the steep slope on the right you will find a use-trail that easily bypasses the falls. Alternatively, on a hot day, it is a fun, wet rappel into a deep pool though you need to be prepared to rappel while in the main water stream. For an anchor, wrap one of the large rocks a short distance upstream of the lip. It is just possible to avoid the main stream by careful route selection on the right (as you look downstream). But the pool at the bottom usually must be swum whatever rappel route you use. Finally we note that many young people choose to slide down these falls, the little chute at the top projecting them into a free fall to the deep pool below.

Downstream of this waterfall, there is another wooded section before you finally arrive at the top of the 60ft Eaton Falls. Many young people climb up around these falls using an airy use-trail high up on the right wall. It is so frequently used that it is relatively easy to find if that is your preference. But it requires several exposed moves, not pleasant at the end of a long hike. It is quicker, easier and more fun to rappel down the falls. There are several large boulders on the left near the lip that make excellent anchors for the rappel. Like the penultimate falls this is a very wet descent in the main stream. The entry on the left is quite dry but it then becomes very difficult to avoid an encounter with the main falls. Near the bottom you can veer to the right before dropping into the shallow pool at the base. You are likely to have a sizeable audience for this descent of Eaton Falls for it is a favorite picnic spot.



*Left: Next-to-last Falls. Right: Eaton Falls.*

Downstream of Eaton Falls to the entrance of Eaton Canyon is an easy hike of about 0.5mi. With a final short haul up to the Toll Road from under the bridge and then up to the gate at the start of the Toll Road (34°11.51'N 118°6.33'W and elevation 1300ft) you have successfully completed this challenging adventure. It should take about 8hrs.

### **The Eaton Ridge Alternative:**

The Eaton Ridge alternative can be used to shorten the last part of the hike by three rappels, two dunkings and about one hour. It begins immediately downstream of the small dam described earlier. You begin the ascent of the ridge by climbing up the left or south wall of the canyon a few yards downstream of the dam and a few yards upstream of the tunnel entrance. There is a good but steep use-trail that switchbacks back and forth to the summit of the ridge. The first 15ft or so are the trickiest but you should be able to locate a place in the rockface where there are a series of good foot and handholds. When you reach the sharp crest of the ridge, a spectacular view is revealed. Off in the distance you can see the Los Angeles basin and it is clearly not far, as the crow flies, from here to the trailhead. However, the remaining section of Eaton Canyon lies about 400ft almost straight down below you. To your right you can see Eaton Falls, the large obstacle that this ridge climb bypasses. Above these falls, Eaton Canyon makes a 180 degree bend and you are now perched on the ridge separating the branches of the canyon on either side of this bend.

Despite appearances, the descent to the canyon floor below you is not technically difficult but a slip or misstep could be disastrous so it should be taken slowly and carefully. Moreover it is important to follow the route described here. Familiarity gained by an exploratory hike up from below is also valuable.

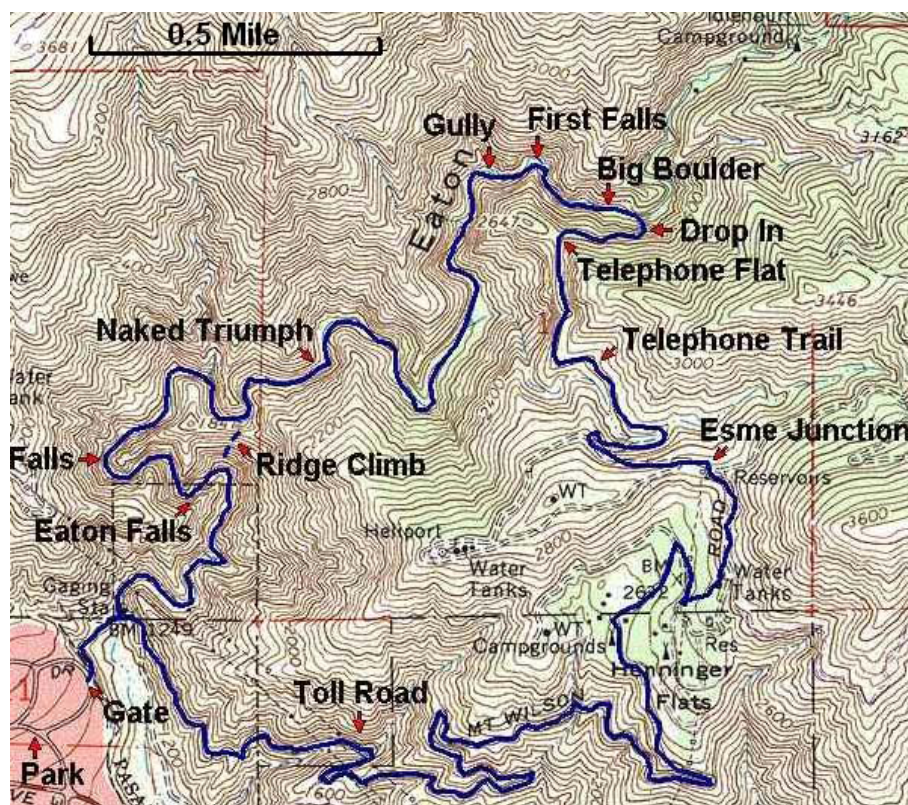
The first part of the descent from the crest of the ridge is the most worrisome because the rock is extremely fragile and the entire slope is clearly in the process of rapid disintegration. Loose material is sliding down several chutes that descend toward the left. The first part of your descent lies down to the right of these chutes along the bottom of a small cliff. I recommend rappeling down the first part of this descent (or at least using a long piece of webbing to halt a slip caused by the disintegration of a hand or foothold). About 60ft down you will find yourself on a more stable scree slope that would be comfortable if it did not disappear over a cliff some distance below. Descend this scree slope slowly and carefully heading for a bush-covered outcropping. It is somewhat easier to get around the left side of this outcropping but do not venture too far left. The outcropping marks the end of the loose rock and the top of a much more solid layer of rock. It is quite reassuring to reach this rock, that forms a substantial ledge. And here, at the back of the ledge, you will find the other end of the afore-mentioned tunnel, now blocked by a stone and cement wall.

Twenty years ago a trail climbed up the canyon wall to this tunnel entrance. The water pipe from the reservoir was laid alongside this airy trail. In a number of places the hiker had to ascend wooden staircases in order to negotiate the steeper places. However, about the time they blocked the tunnel, the Forest



Service also dismantled the staircases in order to dissuade people from trying to make the dangerous climb.

The route down from the tunnel entrance requires a short rappel down a cliff about 10yds to the right of the tunnel. Fortunately there are two quite secure metal stakes (the remnants of staircase anchors) to which you can attach lengths of webbing. The rappel is about 25ft and has a substantial shelf in a recess about 10ft from the top. It ends on a fairly secure sloping bench where you will also find more staircase anchors. Having negotiated this steep section the remainder of the descent follows the remains of the old trail. This first traverses to the right and then reverses for a longer switchback to the left across the lower face of the cliff. Finally you descend through weeds that have grown in the scree slope just above the stream. The point you have descended to is about 40yds downstream of Eaton Falls.



Map of Lower Eaton Canyon Hike



## 2.9 Middle Muir Ravine

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 10.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7.6 miles
- Elevation gain: 300 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 12 rappels up to 110ft, substantial downclimbing, much bushwhacking and some swimming
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 60ft rope, 100ft webbing, rappeling gear with 12 rappel rings, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3B IV

The Muir Ravines are a series of three rugged and precipitous side canyons that descend the southeastern slopes of Muir Peak to meet the lower section of Eaton Canyon. The descent of Middle Muir Ravine has two parts, an unpleasant and extended period of bushwhacking in the upper canyon followed by a spectacular, exhilarating and precipitous descent into Eaton Canyon. The latter visits one of the most awesome viewpoints in the San Gabriel mountains at a place called the Eagle's Eerie. The descent of Middle Muir involves about 10 rappels (followed by four more in Eaton Canyon) some of which are part of multi-pitch descents. Though the price paid in the long approach and unpleasant bushwhacking is high, the lower Middle Muir is a spectacular adventure for the experienced canyoneer.

It is also a long, tough day, partly because of the bushwhacking and number of rappels, partly because of the long approach and partly because of the long and wet descent of Eaton Canyon downstream of the confluence. The ravine itself can be hot and is usually dry but it is followed by the numerous cold water swims in Eaton Canyon. Consequently care should be exercised in choosing the right day for this adventure. It is best for a cool fall day with sufficient daylight but before the rains have swelled the Eaton Canyon flow. This probably means that you will need to carry a wetsuit for the Eaton Canyon section. Be sure to carry adequate water for the long, dry approach hike and the descent in the ravine (at least 3 liters) plus a filter for when you reach Eaton Canyon. This is such a long day hike that a small, fast and experienced group (three or four people) is recommended.

## Trailhead

The hike requires a long car shuttle. First leave one vehicle near the gate on the Mount Wilson Toll Road (2N45). Drive north or east on Altadena Drive, turn north on Mendocino Lane and immediately east on Pinecrest Drive. You may have to park on Mendocino because of parking restrictions on Pinecrest. But it is still just a short distance along Pinecrest to the Mount Wilson Toll Road gate ( $34^{\circ}11.51'N$   $118^{\circ}6.33'W$  and elevation 1300ft). Then drive south again to the 210 Freeway and follow it west to the Angeles Crest Highway. Drive north on the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box where you turn right onto the Mount Wilson Road and proceed 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft). Park in the broad dirt area.

## Hike

Once you pass the metal gate across the Mount Lowe fire road ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft) you are immediately rewarded by a spectacular view down into the cliff-ringed amphitheater that is the head of Eaton Canyon. Take a moment to enjoy these spectacular surroundings before proceeding up the fire road and through the tunnel, gaining elevation as you approach Markham Saddle and its watertank (elevation 5260ft). Continue along the gently descending fireroad as it rounds the west side of Mount Lowe and reaches the Mount Lowe junction at 4470ft (and  $34^{\circ}13.46'N$   $118^{\circ}6.61'W$ ) about 1hr and 3.2mi from the start. At this junction follow the signs for Inspiration Point and hike the gently ascending fireroad for 0.25mi to this popular overlook. Inspiration Point is at  $34^{\circ}13.27'N$   $118^{\circ}6.55'W$  and an elevation of 4500ft. After a brief stop, continue hiking east along the good, level, dirt road that eventually rounds Muir Peak (4688ft) at a prominent hairpin bend with a watertank above



*Left: View from third rappel - Telephone Trail in the distance. Right: Second rappel in Middle Muir Ravine.*

it. Immediately beyond the hairpin the road overlooks Middle Muir Ravine and you can drop in anywhere here. The object is to find the least brushy route for the initial descent though almost all routes require substantial bushwhacking. In this regard, the best drop-in point is probably about 100yards beyond the hairpin where the initial descent has a few clearings and some animal trails. This drop-in point is at 34°12.90'N 118°6.10'W and an elevation of 4500ft). You should reach this point about 1hr 40min from the start having traveled 4.3mi.

Beginning at the drop-in point and extending below it for about 900ft of elevation loss, the descent in the Middle Muir Ravine requires almost continuous bushwhacking. Initially there are some small clearings and animal trails through the brush. Stay near the low point in the canyon and follow the open gully washes where they exist (often they peter out). When the canyon deepens, the brush continues. Several similar gullies join from the left (for example at 3790ft and at 3710ft) and each time the brush eases a little. At an elevation of 3630ft, the canyon has a kink as it winds its way past some rocky bluffs. Finally at 3390ft and about 2hrs after the drop-in (3.5hrs from the start) you will arrive at the top of the first rappel, a vertical 40ft descent from a bush anchor on the right. More bushwhacking follows and about 20min later at an elevation of 3230ft you come to the second rappel, a 100ft vertical drop from an anchor bush on the left.

Finally, at an elevation of about 2950ft and about 3hrs 15min from the drop-in, the bushwhacking is behind you, the canyon steepens markedly and you begin the dramatic and precipitous descent into Eaton Canyon whose far wall can be glimpsed in the distance. This steepening begins with some bouldering including a clamber under one big boulder as well as some downclimbs. Shortly thereafter in a narrow section of canyon with a small window of view ahead, that view explodes and you arrive at the top of a huge drop that requires three consecutive rappels. The first is a 100ft sloping drop down granite bedrock from



*Left: Third rappel in Middle Muir Ravine. Right: Looking down into Eaton Canyon from below the Eagle's Eerie.*

a wedged rock anchor in midstream a short distance back from the lip. This deposits you onto a platform where a bush on the right anchors the second step, a short 20ft rappel down onto a small shelf. There a large bush on the left provides an anchor for the third step, an 80ft rappel down onto a shelf with a walk-off to the left.

This three-step drop is followed by a series of downclimbs in a narrow slot characterized by friction slides and culminating in a short 20ft rappel from an anchor around a large yucca on the left. At an elevation of about 2400ft this is shortly followed by another small, sloping 20ft rappel using a bush on the left as the anchor. This brief respite from the precipitous final descent is about to end for just around the corner where the bedrock canyon narrows and the view ahead is just a narrow window, you become aware of an awesome drop ahead. Arriving at the window you are treated to a marvelous overview of Eaton Canyon whose river can be heard a jaw-dropping 340ft below this Eagle's Eerie. Directly ahead on the other side of the canyon you can see the promontory behind which Telephone Flat is located and to the right of that the Telephone Trail that contours down to Telephone Flat. Further to the right you get a good view of the lower reaches of Esme Canyon as it descends to join Eaton. On the other side, to the left of the promontory you can sense where the upper narrows of Eaton lie, though you cannot see into them. You should reach the Eagle's Eerie at an elevation of 2390ft about 4hr 45min after the drop-in (6.5hrs from the morning start).

The descent to the canyon bottom from the Eagle's Eerie requires three consecutive rappels. The lip of the Eerie comprises several small potholes in a narrow slot and, using a human belay in one of these, your best climber should contour around to the right of the lip to a stout bush that is the best anchor for the first of these rappels. From this bush, you rappel vertically down about 80ft into a slot with a comfortable hanging shelf at the right end. There another bush at the right provides the anchor for the second step, a vertical 100ft drop onto a broad shelf with a tall lip ridge. Hike down this shelf to the left to where the shelf ends. There select one of a group of bushes as anchor for the final rappel, a 110ft drop down into a side drainage to the left of the main discharge from Middle Muir. With a 200ft rope you will need a short piece of additional rope or webbing for the pull cord; send one person down first on a long single line and then set up the pull cord.

This final rappel in Middle Muir Ravine deposits you on a steep scree slope in this small side drainage. Stay to the left as you descend the final 100ft into Eaton Canyon. You should reach the confluence at 34°12.20'N 118°5.65'W and an elevation of about 2050ft about 7.5hrs from the morning start having traveled about 5.4mi. It is a good place to rest and prepare for the very different challenges in the water of Eaton Canyon during your descent to the trailhead.

The descent through Eaton Canyon from the confluence is covered in the Lower Eaton Canyon hike; the confluence is just a short distance downstream of the narrows in Eaton. Downstream of the confluence there is a long stretch of canyon without any major obstacles. It is a pleasant and wooded with many potential camp sites should you choose to overnight here. Approaching the

end of this section you will recognize that a large canyon is entering from the left. This is Esme Canyon. Just after this junction, Eaton Canyon makes an abrupt right turn and immediately narrows. Here one must negotiate a series of small slides each of which plunges into a deep pool requiring swimming. This series culminates in a vertical, 12ft waterfall that drops into a swimming pool. Though modest, this small waterfall presents a dilemma for the nearest secure anchor is quite some distance upstream requiring the use of a substantial length of webbing. The young people I was with belayed me as I rappelled. I then checked out the pool and they jumped.

Continuing downstream, you encounter a small but awkward waterfall that proceeds through a narrow slot between rock walls in which several large boulders are jammed. Descend using one of these large rocks as anchor. Further downstream, there are many smaller obstacles in the canyon bottom but only one that causes any hesitation. This is a large and deep pool between vertical walls and fed by a small waterfall, only about 3ft high. The pool is over 6ft deep and you must therefore swim across it. On the way downstream it presents a minor hurdle for it is relatively easy to slip into the pool from above. However, when hiking upstream on another occasion, it presented a substantial obstacle for it proved very difficult for the first person to clamber up the falls from a swimming position in the pool. Because of the heroics of one of our party, we came to call this "Naked Triumph Falls".

Just downstream there is a place where a thick log is jammed between the two sides of the canyon high above the stream, seemingly holding the canyon walls apart. One wonders how long it can remain suspended. A short distance downstream of this oddity, you will encounter a small dam about 6ft high that, many years ago, served as a reservoir for a water supply to the basin far below. The water from this reservoir flowed through a pipe that led through a tunnel in the left wall of the canyon. The tunnel entrance is about 20yds downstream of the reservoir just above the canyon floor. Twenty years ago it was still possible to get through this tunnel, walking along the pipe, to emerge at a point we will encounter a little later. However, the other end of the tunnel is now blocked by a stone wall.

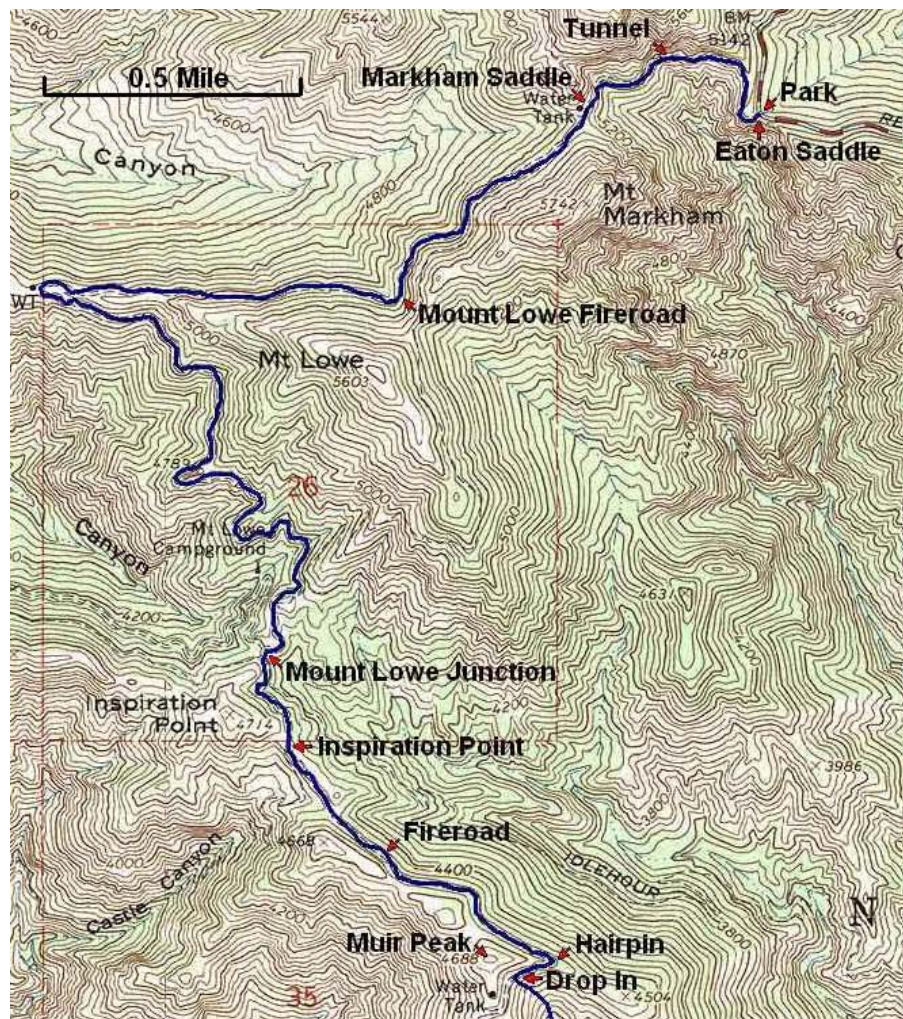
Several hundred yards beyond the dam you will come to a small 15ft waterfall that must be rappelled. The anchor is a stout tree on the right but the entry to this rappel is very awkward because of the overhang. Moreover the pool at the bottom is often deep and must be swum. Another small waterfall with a large deep pool follows immediately. At present this can be bypassed by walking along a very large log that spans the falls and the pool on the right. But when this log floats away you will have to swim this pool.

There follows another section of wooded canyon before you arrive at the penultimate waterfall, a 50ft vertical drop from a narrow rock slot. Here there are several routes of descent. If you climb the steep slope on the right you will find a use-trail that easily bypasses the falls. Alternatively, on a hot day, it is a fun, wet rappel into a deep pool though you need to be prepared to rappel while in the main water stream. For an anchor, wrap one of the large rocks a short distance upstream of the lip. It is just possible to avoid the main stream

by careful route selection on the right (as you look downstream). But the pool at the bottom usually must be swum whatever rappel route you use. Finally we note that many young people choose to slide down these falls, the little chute at the top projecting them into a free fall to the deep pool below. Downstream of this waterfall, there is another wooded section before you finally arrive at the top of the 60ft Eaton Falls. Currently there is a two bolt anchor on the left wall that can be used for this rappel. Like the penultimate falls this is a very wet descent in the main stream. The entry on the left is quite dry but it then becomes very difficult to avoid an encounter with the main falls. Near the bottom you can veer to the right before dropping into the pool at the base that often requires swimming. You are likely to have a sizeable audience for this descent of Eaton Falls for it is a favorite picnic spot.

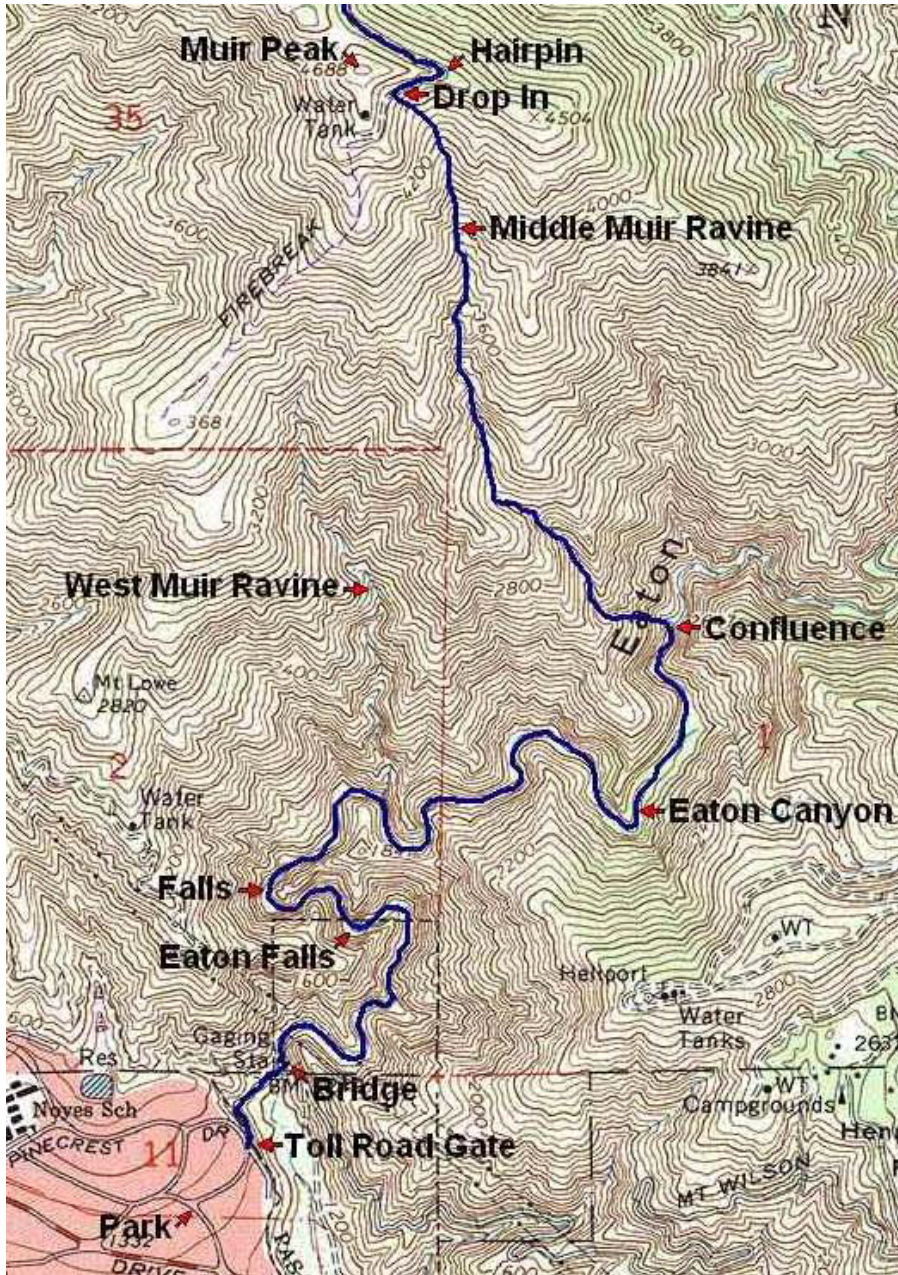
Downstream of Eaton Falls to the entrance of Eaton Canyon is an easy hike of about 0.5mi. With a final short haul up to the Mount Wilson Toll Road from under the bridge and then up the road to the gated entrance to the Toll Road ( $34^{\circ}11.51'N$   $118^{\circ}6.33'W$  and elevation 1300ft) you will come to the conclusion of this challenging adventure about 10hrs 30min from the morning start having covered about 7.6mi.





Map of northern part of Middle Muir Ravine Hike





Map of southern part of Middle Muir Ravine Hike

## 2.10 West Muir Ravine

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 10.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.8 miles
- Elevation gain: 300 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 15 rappels up to 100ft with some serious anchor challenges, substantial downclimbing, some bushwhacking and some swimming
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 120ft webbing, rappeling gear with at least 14 rappel rings, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 4B IV

The Muir Ravines are a series of three rugged and precipitous side canyons that descend the southeastern slopes of Muir Peak to meet the lower section of Eaton Canyon. The West Muir Ravine, the subject of this adventure, represents perhaps the most serious canyoneering challenge that the San Gabriel Front Range has to offer. Its descent involves about 12 serious rappels (and, at the end, an additional three more in Eaton Canyon) many of which are part of multi-pitch descents and some of which pose serious anchor challenges. It is a spectacular adventure but only for the experienced canyoneer with good anchor building skills.

It is also a long, tough day, partly because of the number of rappels and partly because of the long approach. The ravine itself is hot and dry but is followed by the cold water swims in Eaton Canyon. Consequently care should be exercised in choosing the right day for the descent. It is best for a cool fall day with sufficient daylight but before the rains have swelled the Eaton Canyon flow. Be sure to carry adequate water for the long, dry approach hike and the descent in the ravine (at least 3 liters) plus a filter for when you reach Eaton Canyon. This is such a long day hike that a small, fast group is recommended; if the group is four or more you should carry two 200ft ropes so that some of the adjacent rappels described below can be done with longer drops but fewer rappel anchors.

### Trailhead

The hike requires a long car shuttle. First leave one vehicle near the gate on the Mount Wilson Toll Road (2N45). Drive north or east on Altadena Drive, turn north on Mendocino Lane and immediately east on Pinecrest Drive. You may have to park on Mendocino because of parking restrictions on Pinecrest.

But it is still just a short distance along Pinecrest to the Mount Wilson Toll Road gate ( $34^{\circ}11.51'N$   $118^{\circ}6.33'W$  and elevation 1300ft). Then drive south again to the 210 Freeway and follow it west to the Angeles Crest Highway. Drive north on the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box where you turn right onto the Mount Wilson Road and proceed 2.3mi to the overlook at Eaton Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft). Park in the broad dirt area.

## Hike

Once you pass the metal gate across the Mount Lowe fire road ( $34^{\circ}14.36'N$   $118^{\circ}5.60'W$  and elevation 5090ft) you are immediately rewarded by a spectacular view down into the cliff-ringed amphitheater that is the head of Eaton Canyon. Take a moment to enjoy these spectacular surroundings before proceeding up the fire road and through the tunnel, gaining elevation as you approach Markham Saddle and its watertank (elevation 5260ft). Continue along the gently descending fireroad as it rounds the west side of Mount Lowe and reaches the Mount Lowe junction at 4470ft (and  $34^{\circ}13.46'N$   $118^{\circ}6.61'W$ ) about 1hr and 3.2mi from the start. At this junction follow the signs for Inspiration Point and hike the gently ascending fireroad for 0.25mi to this popular overlook. Inspiration Point is at  $34^{\circ}13.27'N$   $118^{\circ}6.55'W$  and an elevation of 4500ft. After a brief stop, continue hiking east along the good, level, dirt road that eventually rounds Muir Peak (4688ft) and turns onto the south side of that ridge. After the sharp turn you are contouring around the head of the Middle Muir Ravine. The road ends at a spectacular overlook known as Panorama Point ( $34^{\circ}12.85'N$   $118^{\circ}6.15'W$  and an elevation of 4550ft). You should reach this point about 1hr 45min from the start having traveled 4.4mi. Pause here to get your bearings. The prominent ridge directly south of you is the route ahead. Far below you should be able to make out your next waypoint on this ridge namely a long saddle with a prominent rock mass in the middle. This ridge divides the upper



*Left: Looking down the firebreak at Rockmass Saddle. Right: 100ft rappel at the top of the first major multi-rappel series.*



east forks of Rubio Canyon on your right from the Muir Ravines on your left.

Once oriented you proceed down the firebreak that, though steep and rocky, is relatively brush-free. In places you will discern the remnants of an old dirt road that must have climbed up this ridge. After descending about 200ft you pass the ridge dividing Middle and West Muir Ravines so that below this you begin traversing around the head of West Muir Ravine. About 900ft below Panorama Point you will arrive at a long level saddle with a prominent rock mass in the middle, Rockmass Saddle ( $34^{\circ}12.55'N$   $118^{\circ}6.38'W$  and an elevation of 3640ft). You should reach this important waypoint about 2.5hrs and 4.8mi from start. From Rockmass Saddle you leave the ridge and drop into the head of West Muir Ravine. Follow the braided animal trails down through the brush veering gradually left into a small gully. The descent to and in the gully requires some modest bushwhacking. The gully gradually deepens and steepens and progress requires a number of bum-sliding descents down sandy chutes. Eventually this gully meets the main canyon coming in on the left at an elevation of about 3240ft. You should reach this junction about 3hrs 10min from the morning start. Hereafter the descent is brush free. Immediately downstream of the junction there is a small 10ft downclimb/rappel and there are a several more small drops beyond this that require a short belay or rappel.

About 4hrs from the start at an elevation of 2980ft you come to the first substantial rappel, a three step drop anchored by a bush off to the right of the lip. This can be descended either as a single rappel of 90ft or by two rappels of 30ft and 60ft using the tree on the left below the first step. This triple step is followed by many small downclimbs before you arrive at the first big rappeling challenge at 2620ft about 4hr 40min from the start.

This first big challenge consists of a series of cliff-ringed bedrock steps with a turn that obscures a view of the bottom. Done in two stages, the descent first involves a 100ft rappel down two vertical steps using a bush anchor on the right side of the lip. This drops you onto a modest rock and gravel platform where there is with a deadman anchor (it may need to be rebuilt) that is used for the second 70ft rappel to the bottom. This is followed by a number of small downclimbs in this steeply descending lower section of the ravine.

It is not far to the top of the second major multistep drop requiring two successive rappels. You should reach this elevation of 2340ft about 6hrs from the morning start. First you descend 100ft down several steps using as anchor a bush high up on the right side. This descends into a narrow perch in an inclined slot behind a large boulder. Then a second 90ft rappel from an anchor around the big boulder takes you down the inclined slot to a broad platform above several downclimbs. These are immediately followed by the first of three individual vertical drops of about 50ft; this first one is anchored by a bush high on the right side. A second, separate 50ft rappel is just a short distance downstream and this one is anchored by a bush on the left side. Yet another single rappel of 40ft follows shortly but this had no easy anchor and required the construction of a deadman anchor in the streambed just a short distance from the lip. You should reach the 1970ft elevation of the top of this third single rappel about 8hrs after the morning start.

The close proximity of Eaton Canyon will have been evident for some time but you now arrive at the top of the series of four rappels that will finally deposit you beside the stream in Eaton Canyon. Just a short distance downstream of the last single rappel and at an elevation of 1930ft, you will arrive at the top of another two-pitch drop where the second rappel is out of sight around a right hand bend. The first stage is a 50ft rappel from a bush anchor on the left down a deep, awkward slot to a narrow rocky platform at the right hand bend. Beyond the bend is the second rappel, a 40ft drop from a webbing anchor around a wedged rock on the left side of the lip. This is almost immediately followed by the last two rappels. First another deadman anchor in midcanyon is used for a 40ft rappel down to a broad shelf at the top of the last rappel in West Muir Ravine. Once on the broad shelf, go to the next lip overlooking Eaton Canyon and look for a big blue rock wedged on the left side behind a rock promontory. This is used to anchor the 90ft rappel down into the base of Eaton Canyon. Once down to the river in Eaton Canyon, the stream provides a welcome cooldown and cool drink after the efforts in the lower section of the West Muir Ravine. You should reach this confluence at 34°11.97'N 118°6.11'W and an elevation of 1680ft about 8hrs 40min from the morning start having covered 5.7mi.

The confluence is about 30yds upstream of the small 15ft rappel in Eaton Canyon (it is also just a few hundred yards downstream of the small dam) and the descent from this point is covered in the Lower Eaton Canyon hike. The anchor for the 15ft rappel is a stout tree on the right but the entry to this rappel is very awkward because of the overhang. Moreover the pool at the bottom is



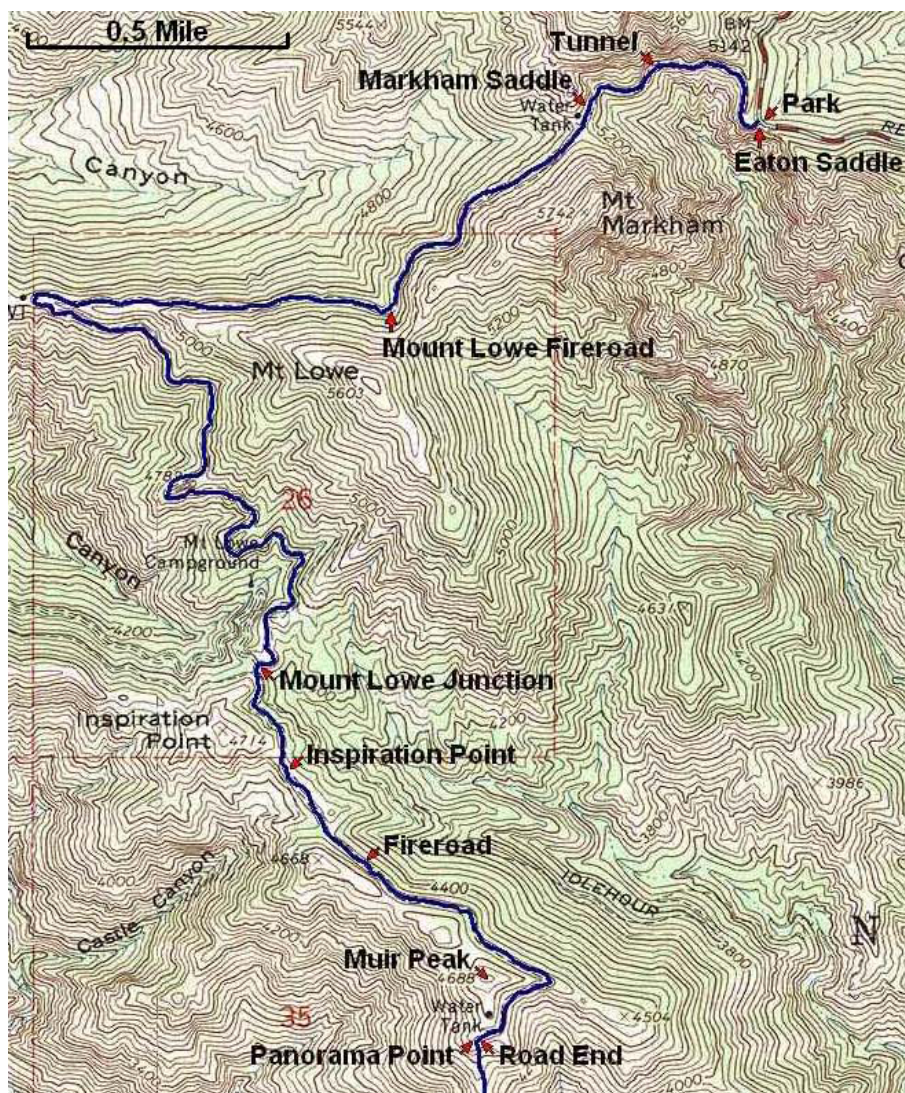
*90ft inclined slot rappel at the bottom of the second major multi-rappel series.*



often deep and must be swum. Another small waterfall with a large deep pool follows immediately. At present this can be bypassed by walking along a very large log that spans the falls and the pool on the right. But when this log floats away you will have to swim this pool.

There follows another section of wooded canyon before you arrive at the penultimate waterfall, a 50ft vertical drop from a narrow rock slot. Here there are several routes of descent. If you climb the steep slope on the right you will find a use-trail that easily bypasses the falls. Alternatively, on a hot day, it is a fun, wet rappel into a deep pool though you need to be prepared to rappel while in the main water stream. For an anchor, wrap one of the large rocks a short distance upstream of the lip. It is just possible to avoid the main stream by careful route selection on the right (as you look downstream). But the pool at the bottom usually must be swum whatever rappel route you use. Finally we note that many young people choose to slide down these falls, the little chute at the top projecting them into a free fall to the deep pool below. Downstream of this waterfall, there is another wooded section before you finally arrive at the top of the 60ft Eaton Falls. Currently there is a two bolt anchor on the left wall that can be used for this rappel. Like the penultimate falls this is a very wet descent in the main stream. The entry on the left is quite dry but it then becomes very difficult to avoid an encounter with the main falls. Near the bottom you can veer to the right before dropping into the pool at the base that often requires swimming. You are likely to have a sizeable audience for this descent of Eaton Falls for it is a favorite picnic spot.

Downstream of Eaton Falls to the entrance of Eaton Canyon is an easy hike of about 0.5mi. With a final short haul up to the Mount Wilson Toll Road from under the bridge and then up the road to the gated entrance to the Toll Road (34°11.51'N 118°6.33'W and elevation 1300ft) you will come to the conclusion of this challenging adventure about 10hrs 30min from the morning start having covered about 6.8mi.



Map of northern part of West Muir Ravine Hike





Map of southern part of West Muir Ravine Hike

## 2.11 Pasadena Glen

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 11.5 hours (13 hours if you take Option 2)
- Estimated hiking distance: 6 miles
- Elevation gain: 1870 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 9 to 12 rappels ranging in height from 25ft to 80ft, many smaller waterfalls and much bouldering and scrambling
- Special equipment: Full rappelling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 120ft rope, a 120ft recovery cord, 150ft of webbing, 10 rappel rings and, as insurance, a bolt setting kit.
- ACA Rating: 3B IV

Pasadena Glen drops steeply through the foothills north of Pasadena and provides a substantial challenge both in terms of the number of waterfalls and rappels and the degree of difficulty of several of them. Water flows year round in the Glen but the hike is best undertaken in the summer months since you are likely to take a soaking two or three times during the descent. There is also sufficient shade from the summer sun. The hike should not be undertaken in the winter or at times of heavy or even moderate run-off for this would make some of the rappels almost impossible. The Glen is very pretty in places and, were it not for the difficulty of lowering full packs down some of the rappels, it would make a better two-day adventure.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. First you must deposit a return vehicle at the exit from Pasadena Glen. From New York Drive in eastern Pasadena, drive north on Sierra Madre Villa Drive and turn right onto Vosberg Street. This drops into Pasadena Glen and you should park the return vehicle in the turnout (at about 34°10.61'N 118°4.73'W and elevation 1230ft) on the left just after the road crosses the stream since there is little parking further up Pasadena Glen Road.

Then return to New York Drive, and turn right and proceed to Altadena Drive where you turn right again. The trailhead is the start of the Mount Wilson Toll Road (2N45) in Altadena. Drive north on Altadena Drive, turn north on Mendocino Lane and immediately east on Pinecrest Drive. You may have to park on Mendocino because of parking restrictions on Pinecrest. But it is still

just a short way along Pinecrest to the gate on the Mount Wilson Toll Road ( $34^{\circ}11.51'N$   $118^{\circ}6.33'W$  and elevation 1300ft).

## Hike

Proceed down the Toll Road to the bridge across the mouth of Eaton Canyon (elevation 1250ft) and on up the Toll Road past Henninger Flats. After several switchbacks above the Forest Service buildings, locate an old, disused fire road that branches off the right side of the Toll Road at  $34^{\circ}11.66'N$   $118^{\circ}5.16'W$  and elevation 2900ft approximately 200yds before the saddle and T-junction above the Flats. You should reach this point about 1hr 15min from the start. The junction with the disused fire road is quite indistinct because of many washouts; it is opposite a large water tank that is below you on the left of the Toll Road. The disused fire road switches back toward the southeast and contours around the south side of the hill above and to the east of Henninger Flats. There is a moderately good trail along it though the road itself is washed out in many places.

The trail ascends gradually in order to surmount the prominent ridge that forms the western wall of Pasadena Glen. You will reach the summit (elevation 3120ft) where the fire road crosses this ridge about 30min after leaving the Mount Wilson Toll Road. Make a careful mental note of the ridge and of the use trail along it that goes all the way down to the valley below. This trail represents an escape route from Pasadena Glen since there are several places in the canyon where you can climb up to the ridge.



*Left: Narrows in upper canyon. Right: Big falls.*

But your route continues along the disused fire road as it flattens out and then begins a gentle descent into Pasadena Glen. At one point a short distance beyond the summit, you will pass about 200ft below another saddle on the Mount Wilson Toll Road. Though you will encounter wash outs with increasing frequency (and several require careful negotiation), continue along the trail until it finally vanishes. This occurs about 100yds past a major washout and at a headland (elevation 3140ft) where you can see the canyon bottom and its trees about 150ft directly beneath you. It is important that you do not try to descend into the canyon too soon for you would then have to negotiate a very large cliff that cannot be seen from above. Instead follow the trail until it vanishes and take the next gully leading down into the canyon. The descent is straightforward except, perhaps, for the last 25ft that is quite steep. You should arrive in the canyon bottom (elevation 3000ft) about 2hr 40min from the start.

Immediately below the point you have reached in the canyon bottom is a rugged section in which the stream first drops about 150ft and then makes an abrupt left turn through a narrow chasm containing several water falls. There are two options here.

Option one is probably the wisest given the length of this hike and the difficulty of following the stream. It is to bypass the difficult series of waterfalls immediately ahead of you. To do this, climb a short distance up the earth slope on the left side directly opposite the point where you descended into the canyon and just above the first large waterfall. By climbing a short way up to the ridge at the top of the earth slope you can then cut the corner and descend a steep and rough slope to access the bottom downstream of the very narrow section of canyon.

Option two is to follow the stream through the first section and complete the three rappels that are necessary to negotiate it. The first waterfall is a modest and straightforward 20ft rappel using as anchor one of the small trees a little way up the right bank. The second waterfall follows immediately and requires a 100ft rappel. The only available anchor is a large tree high on the left; it is an awkward climb to access this tree. Having completed this long rappel, you find yourself in a small open area surrounded by cliffs with large waterfalls on two sides. The exit from this space is a very narrow chute with an abrupt left turn about 15ft below you so that you cannot see what follows. In fact there is a further drop of about 10ft followed by a long narrow pool and then a further vertical drop of about 20ft. This is a very awkward rappel, particular when the stream is flowing full. There is no problem finding an anchor for there are several fallen trees nearby. But you need about 200ft of rope for a double rappel and the rope recovery can be very difficult due to the abrupt corner. However, you can climb up on the right and circumvent this waterfall if need be. Option two does, however, require a considerable additional expenditure of time (about 1hr 30min) relative to option one and therefore results in a very long day.

Moving on down the canyon from the point where option one descends, you find a 20ft waterfall followed by a series of three measuring 15ft, 40ft and 10ft. All of these may be bypassed on the right side. On a ledge above and to the right of the 40ft falls you will find pipes that are the remains of an old water



supply system. Descend to the bottom just around the corner from this ledge.

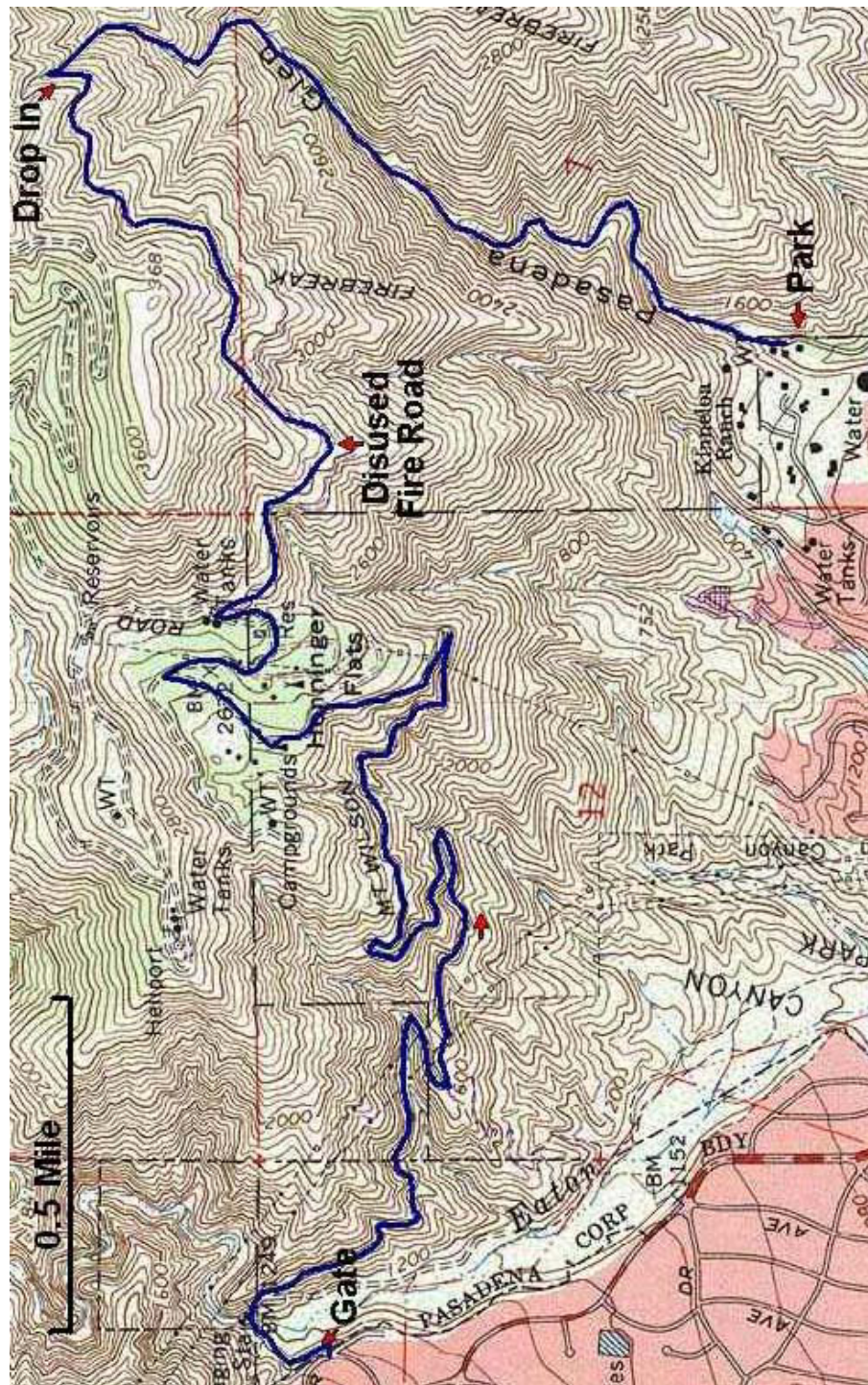
Up to this point you can still climb back up along the route you have come but the point of no return lies just ahead where you must rappel down a V-shaped slot about 35ft high. The anchor for this rappel is on a small tree about 10ft above and to the right of the entry to this slot. To reach it requires a short free climb that is sufficiently exposed to need a belay. Immediately below this slot are a series of small falls one or two of which may require some assistance from a rope or piece of webbing.

There follows a relatively flat section in the middle of which is a small 15ft waterfall with no obvious anchor. However, with the assistance of a belay it is relatively easy to downclimb just to the left of the water.

A short distance below this, the flat section ends with a sudden precipitous drop of about 80ft in several stages, namely a 15ft drop to a small rocky ledge followed by a 60ft vertical section and several small, additional falls at the bottom. The anchor for this descent is a large tree to the right above the first drop; this necessitates a single strand rappel. Below this is another brief flat section that contains one 20ft rappel that utilizes a large rock on the right as the anchor. Then you encounter a rocky crevasse waterfall that has a shelf one third of the way down and a very thick log propped against the bottom. The anchor for this rappel is a small but firm tree about 10ft up the cliff on the left some 30ft upstream of the lip. Another small rappel follows and a waterfall in a left hand turn that can be downclimbed on the left. Some distance downstream you encounter another small waterfall with the prominent rocky knob on the right. This can be circumvented by climbing around the upper, right side of the knob (incidentally a trail heads up the canyon side at this same knob and connects with the trail high up on the ridge to the right). You should reach this point about 9hrs from the start, assuming you have taken Option 1 just after the drop-in.

The canyon continues along a rough but fairly easy section for several hundred yards until it arrives at a memorable broad waterfall with water cascading down on either side of a central rocky slope. At the bottom water also emerges from a tunnel on the left. This is readily downclimbed along the central rocky slope but, below this, the canyon enters a narrow, dark section and you must rappel down a fifteen foot waterfall with a small 5ft section immediately following. The anchor for this is a large boulder in mid-stream just above the lip. Another rough section of over 100yds follows before you encounter a left turn with two awkward, small waterfalls that can be downclimbed but may also require a rappel (there is no anchor in between so you must rappel both). The next waterfall can be climbed around on the left and, after a small 6ft drop, you finally arrive at the last waterfall and rappel in the long adventure hike. Here the canyon again narrows to a slot and makes an abrupt left turn. There are several small trees just before the turn that make a good anchor. However, I recommend using (as we did) a long piece of webbing that reaches around the corner in order to make rope retrieval easier. The rappel itself is about 20ft down through the center; it is hard to avoid getting very wet here when the stream is flowing at normal levels.

Below this final rappel the canyon turns right and it is only about 50yds to the end of Pasadena Glen Road (34°10.92'N 118°4.74'W and elevation 1400ft). Hike down the road to your parked vehicle. The entire hike will take up a whole summer day, about 11hrs 30min (13hrs if you take Option 2) and therefore requires a very early start.



Map of Pasadena Glen Hike

## 2.12 Hastings Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 1930 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 12 rappels ranging in height from 20ft to 70ft, some bushwhacking.
- Special equipment: Full rappeling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 120ft rope, 150ft of webbing, 12 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Hastings Canyon is a rugged fissure in the front range of the San Gabriel mountains just north of Sierra Madre. Like its neighbors, Pasadena Glen and Bailey Canyon, this canyon contains a long series of substantial drops that require about a dozen rappels. It is very rarely visited because access at the bottom is restricted by the local water district. Moreover, it is not easy to access from the top either; here we describe an access route that requires some bushwhacking and some navigation. Despite these difficulties the canyon is a real gem and relatively brush free.

Though it should be avoided during or shortly after heavy rain, the canyon drains fairly quickly and, even in winter, it is mostly quite dry. Too hot in summer, this is a good trip for fall, winter or spring.

### Trailhead

This adventure requires a short car shuttle. First drive to the exit point at the end of Hastings Canyon. Drive north on Michillinda Avenue on the border between Pasadena and Sierra Madre. Veer left onto Startouch Drive at the end of Michillinda, and almost immediately fork right onto Carriage House Road and then turn left onto Ranch Top Road. Continue along Ranch Top Road and just about 100yds after crossing Hastings Ranch Drive the road crosses the culvert that exits Hastings Canyon (at  $34^{\circ}10.51'N$   $118^{\circ}4.37'W$  and elevation 1350ft). Park a recovery vehicle here and then drive back down Michillinda Avenue. Turn left onto Grandview Avenue and then left again onto Grove Street. Grove Street ends at the Bailey Canyon parking lot ( $34^{\circ}10.26'N$   $118^{\circ}3.67'W$  and elevation 1120ft). Park here.



## Hike

From the parking area ( $34^{\circ}10.26'N$   $118^{\circ}3.67'W$  and elevation 1120ft), walk WNW through the trees, go through a turnstile and proceed north on the closed asphalt road that skirts around the west side of Bailey Canyon debris basin. The asphalt changes to dirt as you enter the canyon and quickly becomes a trail. About 0.25mi from the parking area, the trail crosses the stream bed for the first time and, immediately thereafter, you come to a trail fork ( $34^{\circ}10.57'N$   $118^{\circ}3.68'W$  and elevation 1350ft). Follow the right fork that switchbacks up the right or east wall of the canyon to an elevation of about 2000ft and then contours north to drop into a lovely little glade perched in a pocket high above the cliffs and waterfalls of the lower canyon. Years ago, someone carried sufficient building materials up the steep trail to construct a small stone cabin. Now, only low stone walls remain to serve as a bench or table at this delightful picnic venue. You should reach this rest stop (at  $34^{\circ}11.10'N$   $118^{\circ}3.55'W$  and an elevation of 2400ft) about 1hr 15min from the start.

From the Stone Cabin drop down into the Bailey Canyon wash and hike upstream, almost immediately forking left. Continue up this left fork until you arrive at a 15ft waterfall that blocks easy passage. Go back down canyon about 50yds to about  $34^{\circ}11.16'N$   $118^{\circ}3.60'W$  and an elevation of 2550ft and follow a faint use-trail up the ridge on the left or southwest side of the canyon. Follow the slight and sometimes non-existent use-trail on the apex of this lateral ridge all the way up to the main ridgetop separating Bailey and Hastings Canyons. This 450ft cross-country climb requires some bushwhacking and the use-trail disappears in places. You should reach the ridgetop (elevation 3030ft) about



*Left: At Top of Hastings slot. Right: 60ft rappel in the Hastings slot.*

2hrs after starting out.

There is a good trail along the ridgetop (indeed an alternate route to this point would be to access the ridgetop just north of the mission or a few hundred yards north of the Bailey Canyon trailhead and to follow the ridge all the way up.) From the point where you reached the ridgetop, turn right and hike north along the ridge while surveying the topology on the Hastings Canyon side. Hike several hundred yards to a shallow saddle just before the ridgetop begins to climb steeply. At this point you should see a deep gully in the Hastings watershed just a short way down a steep brushy slope. This is the drop in point at  $34^{\circ}11.26'N$   $118^{\circ}3.78'W$  and an elevation of 3120ft. Leave the ridgetop here and head down the steep slope. By careful route finding and some bushwhacking you should be able to find a route down into the deep gully about 200ft below the ridgetop. Care is needed here to avoid cliffing out and/or sliding out of control down the steep, loose slope. You should reach the gully bottom (elevation 2890ft) about 2hr 40min from the start.

As you begin your descent of Hastings Canyon, this steep gully is relatively free of brush but you soon encounter a number of short downclimbs where some may need a belay line. There is a 20ft downclimb at 2640ft after which a large tributary comes in on the right. Two more 20ft downclimbs are encountered before you arrive at the first rappel at an elevation of 2460ft. You should reach this point about 4hrs after starting out. The first rappel is a 30ft descent from a tree anchor on the left and takes you down past two huge, canyon-blocking chockstones.



*Left: Eighth rappel in Hastings Canyon. Right: Ninth rappel in Hastings Canyon.*

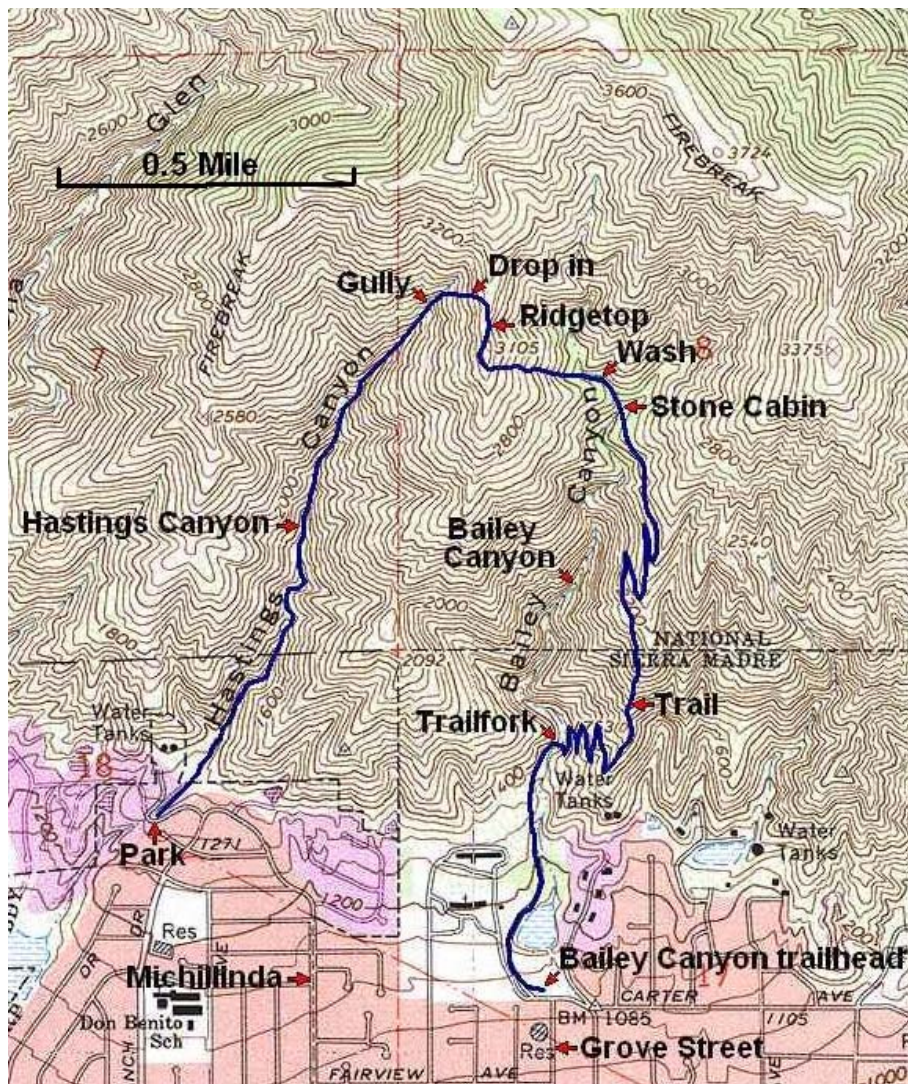


Shortly after this first rappel the canyon narrows almost to a slot and there are four rappels in rapid succession as you drop down through these narrows. The first of these rappels is a drop of about 50ft down a sloping slot using a small tree anchor up a steep gully on the left. This is immediately followed by a vertical 20ft drop that can be anchored by a tree on the left a little ways back from the lip. Then, after a short stretch of downclimbing (still in the slot) you arrive at the top of a spectacular 60ft vertical drop. This is anchored by a webbing wrap around a midstream boulder. The slot opens up below this rappel and a short distance downstream, at an elevation of 2190ft, there is a short but vertical 25ft rappel that we anchored from a small bush on the left (a better anchor needs to be found here). Just beyond this a large tributary canyon enters on the right at 2150ft.

Immediately below this junction there are two dryfalls that require rappels. The first of these is a 30ft multistep rappel from a tree on the right; some may choose to downclimb this. It is immediately followed by a 35ft rappel down a broad dryfall; the only obvious anchor is a tree on a sloping ledge off to the left of the lip; access to this tree is a little exposed; it requires a belay and a length of line to retrieve the rope after each descent. After this the gradient in the canyon begins to decrease and there is a short hike to the next rappel.

You should reach the next rappel (elevation 1880ft) about 6hrs after the morning start. Here the streambed flows through a narrow gate and drops vertically about 60ft. The rock here is white and hard. The only convenient anchor is a small tree high up on the left side of the canyon near the lip. It is not easy to reach this tree and a human ladder may be necessary. Shortly after this is a 40ft rappel from a tree high but accessible on the right side. It descends two big steps and has a very cute rock projection or seat sticking out of the second step that makes for a good photo opportunity. Here in the lower part of Hastings Canyon, the streambed in between rappels is often quite sandy and flat, making for easy hiking. Separated by sections of such sandy bottom you will next encounter two short 20ft rappels, each anchored by trees on the left. And then, finally you arrive at the last rappel, a very nice vertical 60ft drop with a smaller step at the top. This rappel, at an elevation of 1580ft, is anchored by a tree on the right side of the canyon.

More sandy bottom follows before the canyon narrows for the last time and in these narrows you quite unexpectedly encounter a gushing spring on the right side of the canyon. This water supply abruptly changes the character of the canyon that is verdant from here downstream. In the immediate vicinity of the spring there is a dense bamboo forest and further downstream, as the canyon broadens, you should follow the faint use-trail a short way up the right side in order to avoid the dense thicket around the small stream. Follow this use trail across grassy benches on the right until you see the concrete and stone embankment on the other, left side. Follow the use-trail that crosses to and climbs this embankment. Hike down the road and climb the fence in the far left corner to access Ranch Top Road and your parked vehicle (34°10.51'N 118°4.37'W and elevation 1350ft). The total hiking time should be around 7hrs during which you will travel about 3.5mi.



Map of Hastings Canyon Hike

## 2.13 Bailey Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3 miles
- Elevation gain: 1280 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 12 rappels ranging in height from 25ft to 110ft, several with free rappel due to overhang.
- Special equipment: Full rappeling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 120ft rope, a 120ft recovery cord, 150ft of webbing, 12 rappel rings and, as insurance, a bolt setting kit.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Bailey Canyon is a rugged fissure in the San Gabriel mountains just north of Sierra Madre. Like many of the front range canyons it has seen some changes since it was first homesteaded by R.J.Bailey in 1875 and then sold in 1881 to Palmer T. Reed, a clerk at the Sierra Madre Villa Hotel. Later in the 1880s, foxes and coyotes were trapped in this canyon, their fur shipped to Chicago. Bailey remains home to an active group of coyotes whom you may spot in the early evening as you exit the canyon. The canyon property was later divided, portions being sold to the Sierra Madre Municipal Water Company, the Passionist Fathers (who built the monastery) and the Carter family. In the 1930s, the WPA built an amphitheater just above the current debris basin but extensive flooding in 1938 damaged the amphitheater and other structures in the area. In 1965 the Carter family donated the land for the City Park and the trail up to the Stone Cabin was known for years as the Carter Trail.

As canyons go Bailey Canyon is not particularly special, indeed it is a rather short canyon that does not penetrate much more than a mile into the San Gabriel foothills. But it is a steep and rugged place and provides an exhilarating adventure hike with some 12 rappels, one over 80ft high and several with free rappels due to overhang. The distances involved are short so it is truly a concentrated rappeling experience. This adventure is only for the experienced rappeler since it may require the setting of additional anchors in several places. In recent years bolts have been placed at all the major rappels. All of these should be backed up with other anchors but this is difficult to do in a couple of places; I encourage other canyoneers to use their inventiveness and not to place bolts unless these are absolutely necessary.

As with all deep canyons, Bailey should be avoided during or shortly after rain. However, being short, the canyon drains fairly quickly and, even in winter, the stream is otherwise modest and long sections of the canyon are dry.

## Trailhead

To reach the trailhead, drive north through Sierra Madre (on Baldwin or Michillinda) to the east/west street, Grandview. Then drive east from Michillinda or west from Baldwin and turn north onto Grove. Grove runs directly into the small Bailey Canyon parking lot ( $34^{\circ}10.26'N$   $118^{\circ}3.67'W$  and elevation 1120ft). Park here.

## Hike

From the parking area ( $34^{\circ}10.26'N$   $118^{\circ}3.67'W$  and elevation 1120ft), walk WNW through the trees, go through a turnstile and proceed north on the closed asphalt road that skirts around the west side of Bailey Canyon debris basin. The asphalt changes to dirt as you enter the canyon and quickly becomes a trail. About 0.25mi from the parking area, the trail crosses the small stream for the first time and, immediately thereafter, it forks at about  $34^{\circ}10.57'N$   $118^{\circ}3.68'W$  and elevation 1350ft. The left fork proceeds up the canyon bottom and you will come down this way on the return leg of the hike. However, our ascent follows the right fork that switchbacks up the right or east wall of the canyon to an elevation of about 2000ft and then contours north to drop into a lovely little glade perched in a pocket high above the cliffs and waterfalls of the lower canyon. Here, water almost always runs in the streambed, and has allowed a



*Left: Starting the 110ft rappel. Right: Entering the free rappel.*

substantial grove of trees to flourish and fill the shadier depths of the pocket. Years ago, someone carried sufficient building materials up the steep trail to construct a small stone cabin. Now, only low stone walls remain to serve as a bench or table at this delightful picnic venue. You should reach this rest stop at 34°11.10'N 118°3.55'W and an elevation of 2400ft about 1hr 20min from the start. Here you harness up and prepare for a rugged and exciting descent down Bailey Canyon.

The descent begins immediately behind the stone cabin and there are a few small falls before the first, substantial and vertical 30ft waterfall that you will reach about 10min into the descent. No rappel is needed here; simply climb up the dirt slope on the left to the large tree and then descend the steep dirt slope to the bottom of the falls. Many convenient tree roots help control the descent. This is followed a short distance downstream by a small 12ft waterfall that is simpler than it first appears; just free climb down the left center. The only reason for mentioning it is that, just downstream on the right wall of the canyon, is a horizontal mine shaft about 4ft in diameter. You can crawl about 100ft to the end of this shaft if you wish.

Continuing on down the shady canyon, you will reach the first rappel about 40min below the stone cabin at an elevation of 2240ft. This is the first of five in a row within a horizontal distance of not much more than 100yds. The first is a modest 25ft drop with an excellent anchor in the form of a large tree about 10ft up the dirt slope on the right. Here you must rappel down through abundant weeds. The second follows immediately and is much higher, dropping about 40ft. There is a single bolt anchor on the left side of the lip that should be backed up with webbing to one of the nearby stout bushes. You may get a little wet here rappeling down the middle since water falls most of the year.

A very short section will bring you to a simple 15ft downclimb that you should reach about 1hr from the stone cabin. Below this the canyon narrows and the walls steepen to form a dramatic slot whose airy end can be seen directly ahead. A short distance into this slot there is a 25ft rappel down an inclined ledge to the right of a narrow and wet slot with a small pool at the bottom. This is anchored by a single bolt in the right wall but could be backed up with webbing to pitons on the left of the streamcourse.

Just a few yards beyond the small pool the slot opens up and there is a dramatic 110ft drop known as Slide Falls where the canyon makes an abrupt left turn. The main problem here is finding a sufficient number of secure anchor points for this long rappel. There is a good single bolt on the left side and some old pins on the right that provide some backup if a long section of webbing is deployed. The descent of Slide Falls is long but easy, down a broad sloping rock face. We reached this point (elevation 1900ft) about 1.5hrs from the stone cabin.

About 30yds beyond the base of Slide Falls is the last of five in this dense series. It is a small, 25ft dryfall known as Stairstep Falls that you can anchor using either one of the large rocks a short distance upstream of the lip or the big tree above the right side (it is tricky to get a rope around this tree). The canyon here has clearly been subjected to recent rockfalls and other catastrophic events



and the bottom is rougher going than elsewhere. However it is more open here than either above or below. It is possible to access this stretch from the trail high overhead using the steep gully on the left just below Stairstep Falls.

The series of five rappels described above is not separated from the next by more than a few hundred yards of canyon so I am not certain why I draw a line there, except perhaps to identify even more clearly the next few descents that are the jewels at the heart of Bailey Canyon. Walking along this flat and relatively open section it is a surprise to arrive at a point where the bottom suddenly drops about 50ft into a deep and narrow rock-ribbed gorge. This is known as Overhang Falls; three good bolts in a large rock at the top provide a good anchor for this exciting rappel. As you descend the first 25ft is over large boulders but the bottom 25ft is a free rappel because of the overhang created by those boulders. About 20yds beyond Overhang Falls is a small 20ft drop that can be free-climbed perhaps with a belay for those who need it.

Another 100yds or so will bring you to another attractive 50ft rappel down a sloping slot of solid rock, known as Needle Falls (years ago a large boulder was jammed in the slot creating a passage known as the Eye of the Needle and hence the name). Clearly Needle Falls has been the scene of much rock climbing for there are the remains of many bolts in the rock over the entire height of the slot. There is currently one good bolt at the left side of the lip but finding a backup is difficult here. The entry and the 50ft rappel are straightforward. However, at the bottom the canyon immediately turns right and falls another 20ft down a steep slot. It is possible to free climb down this slot but there is a single bolt in the right wall to use for a rappel or a belay.

The last essential rappel is just about 30yds below the slot and consists of a drop caused by a huge, canyon-filling boulder. The anchor here is a single bolt in the right wall just above the slot between the huge boulder and the canyon wall; there are nearby boulders that could be used for backup on this 20ft rappel.

An often overgrown section of canyon follows this last essential rappel and along this stretch there are a number of small waterfalls to negotiate. After several hundred yards, you arrive at another 30ft drop formed by a very similar canyon-filling boulder. While you may choose to rappel down this one also using a single bolt installed in the top of the boulder, it is also possible to scramble about 10ft up the rock of the canyon wall on the left. If you do so you will find that this leads to a small trail that descends about 20yds and takes you downstream of the waterfall. However, the trail ends at a small tree where you need to climb down about 12ft to the canyon bottom. The climb is much aided by the roots of the tree, by a piece of webbing wrapped around the tree and by a number of good footholds.

Almost immediately you encounter the last large waterfall in Bailey Canyon, a wet 35ft known as First Falls that I often avoid. It is easier to negotiate the rough trail around the right side of the falls and, to do so, you should climb the rough dirt slope on the right of the canyon just upstream of the lip. This leads to a ridge and you will see the rough trail down a steep slope in the canyon corner that leads to a narrow trail on a ledge that, in turn, provides an easy descent to



the canyon bottom. However, if you choose to rappel this last waterfall, there is a single bolt installed on the left side of the lip.

You are now in that part of Bailey Canyon that is often frequented by casual hikers and the return to the carpark (34°10.26'N 118°3.67'W and elevation 1120ft) takes only about 20min. The rest of the hike is a straightforward though the trail is still rough in places; on the way you pass the fork where, earlier in the day, you left the canyon bottom to switchback up the canyon wall. Since you may pass this way late in the day, you stand a good chance of spotting one of the coyotes who make Bailey Canyon their home.



Map of Bailey Canyon Hike

## 2.14 Little Santa Anita Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4 miles
- Elevation gain: 1000 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: About 8 rappels ranging in height from 15ft to 40ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with a 120ft rope, 100ft of webbing, 8 rappel rings and dry bags.
- ACA Rating: 3C III

This hike begins in the foothill community of Sierra Madre and proceeds up the historic Mount Wilson Trail to the point known as First Water. There the hiker first reaches the waters of the stream that runs, year long, down the beautiful Little Santa Anita Canyon. In ancient times, the Gabrieleno Indians used this trail to access the San Gabriel mountains and even the desert beyond. Later it was improved by Don Benito Wilson in a futile attempt to harvest the timber high up on the slopes of the mountain that now bears his name. Still later, the first telescope to explore the heavens from the summit of Mount Wilson was dragged up this trail, a task that took some thirty days. Since then countless thousands of hikers have followed the Mount Wilson trail into the verdant depths of Little Santa Anita Canyon and on up to Mount Wilson. Each year many runners participate in the annual trail race that begins in Sierra Madre and turns around at Orchard Camp. But few have ventured down the canyon itself to witness the many waterfalls that adorn the route you will take.

Indeed, the hike up to First Water is just the start of this challenging adventure in which you descend Little Santa Anita Canyon, along the way negotiating about a dozen waterfalls, at least eight of which require a rappel. The highest is only about 40ft tall but several are quite challenging because of the flowing water and their unusual geometry. It is a good hike for a summer day since you will be wet most of the way. However, it is an attractive, wooded canyon thanks to the year-long water and there is good shade from the summer sun.

This is one of the San Gabriel canyons in which bolts were installed at every rappel sometime during 2003-4 for their convenience by commercial guides. In this account I try to describe alternative natural anchors for those that prefer to use them.

## Trailhead

To reach the trailhead, drive north through Sierra Madre on Baldwin Avenue. Turn right on Mira Monte just before Baldwin ends and drive about 200yds to where the road labeled Mount Wilson Trail turns left. Park near this intersection ( $34^{\circ}10.17'N$   $118^{\circ}2.95'W$  and elevation 960ft) and walk about 100yds up the Mount Wilson Trail Road to where the trail itself branches off on the left.

## Hike

Follow the Mount Wilson Trail as it climbs up and into Little Santa Anita Canyon. After about a mile, the dam at the entrance to the canyon will become visible below you and, shortly thereafter at  $34^{\circ}10.61'N$   $118^{\circ}2.70'W$  and an elevation of 1550ft the trail crosses over the top of a prominent ridge that juts out to the east below the trail and clearly ends at a canyon bend just north of the dam. It is important to identify this ridge for this is the way that you will exit the canyon if you choose to take the first exit (see below). Specifically, this first exit involves climbing out of the canyon, up the side of this ridge at a point on the north side of the ridge about  $2/3$  of the way along it. It is a steep but safe climb provided you identify the correct route. Consequently you should try to pick out some landmarks that might be visible from the canyon bottom. At the time of writing, there is a prominent blackened and burnt stump of a tree evident on the north slope of the ridge. The climbing route is in a gully downstream of this stump.



*Left: Above the second rappel. Right: Clancy and fourth rappel.*

Having reconnoitered the exit ridge, you now proceed up the trail for about another mile. As it climbs, you will get several views of the canyon bottom below and its many waterfalls. The canyon wall is so steep that there are only a few places where it is possible to climb from the bottom up to the trail but you may wish to take note of these in case of emergencies.

Finally you will arrive at the trail fork that marks your imminent arrival at First Water. Taking the right fork, it is but a few yards down to the river at First Water (34°11.01'N 118°2.76'W and elevation 1920ft). Especially on a hot summer day you may wish to pause here in this shady grove and prepare yourself for the wet descent down the canyon for, almost immediately, you will need to wade.

From First Water, the canyon turns back and forth a few times and you must negotiate a series of small waterfalls, either by wading or by circumventing them on the left. Soon you arrive at the first large waterfall, the 40ft drop that can be seen from the old trail just before First Water. There is a bolt anchor in the left rock face at the top of these falls that may be used as the back-up anchor for this first rappel. It is best to try to rappel to the left of the waterfall.

The second, 35ft rappel follows almost immediately. There are several natural anchors including trees and some large boulders but the single bolt anchor is off to the right side. Descending from the natural anchors it is a little difficult to stay out of the water. Some 30yards downstream is a more interesting challenge, particularly when there is a substantial amount of water running in the canyon. Scrambling down a steep slope and wading a short distance through the stream you come to the top of a narrow and slippery chute about 20ft long. This is called "The Spout" because, at the bottom, the chute makes an abrupt right turn sending a jet of water flying off to hit the right wall of the canyon. At low water it may well be possible to proceed straight down the chute. The bolt anchor is on the left side of the lip and one can readily descend the upper section by straddling the stream. However, when you get down to the spout you must execute a lunge maneuver over to the left of the jet in order to avoid being caught in this maelstrom. Moreover, at the bottom the pool may represent a deep wade, in which you pass under a huge chockstone. In heavy water, the "Spout" is a substantial challenge that is only for the experienced canyoneer. However, in dry and hot conditions it can provide some fine fun.

Emerging from under the boulder, it is but a few yards to the top of the next waterfall, a flat vertical drop of about 45ft. There are several trees at the top that provide excellent anchors in addition to the bolt anchor on the left. It may appear as though you should rappel down on the left in order to avoid a shower but, in fact, it is better on the right and you should use the tree furthest to the right for your natural anchor. This rappel is simple but quite slippery.

Just a few yards downstream is a 45ft waterfall that is a steep and awkward chute. At times in the past it was difficult to find a satisfactory natural anchor for a rappel in the vicinity of the falls. Most recently, however, a number of fallen trees are available as well as the bolt anchor in the right wall.

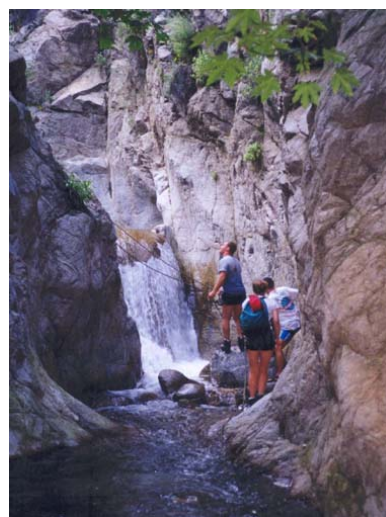
About 30yds further downstream is a cascade that is negotiated by an easy downclimb on the right, at least at low water. Shortly thereafter, as the canyon



narrows and makes a right turn, you reach the fifth (or sixth) rappel, a 25ft waterfall into a sculptured chasm. As you look further downstream you may anticipate another obstacle with little sign of an anchor but it will turn out to be easily downclimbed. Hence you need only worry about the immediate waterfall. If there is little water then you may choose to rappel down through the waterfall using the large tree that is in the upstream center or the bolt anchor on the right side. Otherwise, it is preferable to locate the rock projection under the right hand wall that can be used as an anchor to rappel down on the right hand side.

The small waterfall that follows immediately can be downclimbed most easily from the shelf on the left and, 30yds further on you arrive at the next rappel, a 25ft waterfall to the left of a very large boulder just behind which there is a substantial tree. As a natural anchor you can use either this tree or a large rock horn on the right side of the lip. These will take you down to a knee-deep pool; it is wise to continue your rappel through this pool and over the small 4ft drop below it.

A small waterfall just a few yards further on can be readily downclimbed on the right. There follows a broader and gentler stretch of canyon about 200yards long. This ends with a modest two step waterfall formed by several huge boulders with the falls along the right wall. The upper step is easily descended; the lower step can also be free climbed but, if you choose to rappel as I did, the medium-sized boulder in the middle of the stream at the top makes a convenient natural anchor. There is also a bolt anchor in the right wall. I call this Curtain Falls since, in high water, the flow covers the entire width of the lip and creates a broad curtain waterfall with a space behind it. Downstream



*Left: Exiting the spout and the wedged boulder. Right: Rappel before the first exit.*



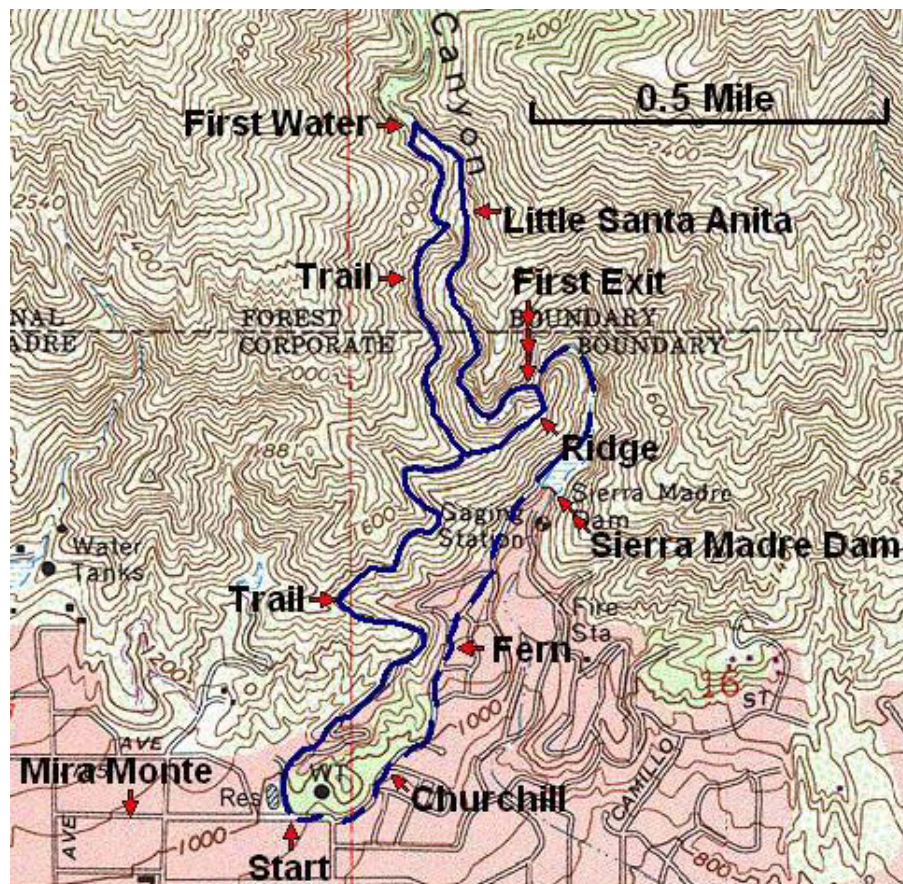
of Curtain Falls, the canyon is very narrow and, after several small waterfalls you will arrive at a rocky cascade consisting of a chute, a moderately deep pool and an awkward 10ft waterfall. The last requires a rappel for the waterfall is vertical and the rock is polished smooth. The only available natural anchor is a small but solid tree about 10ft above the lip of the falls on the right. The climb to this tree is a little exposed but quite straightforward and, once you reach it, the rappel is easy. Alternatively there is a bolt anchor on the right side

Downstream of this rappel the canyon remains narrow and the going is slow as you negotiate a series of minor chutes and cascades. About 30yards beyond the 10ft rappel, the canyon executes an abrupt left turn and, this signifies the fact that you are now on the north side of the exit ridge mentioned at the start of this hike. The first exit route is about 100yards beyond the abrupt left turn at about 34°10.69'N 118°2.59'W and an elevation of 1380ft. It is the first place on the right wall where climbing seems practical and safe. Extensive recent use has made this trail quite evident; you proceed up a small steep and earthy wash, moreover, it is currently marked by a round rock cairn. You climb a short way to your left and then proceed straight up a steep gully to the top of the ridge. From there, it is a straightforward matter to hike along the top of the bushy ridge to the point where it joins the Mount Wilson Trail. It is then all downhill as you retrace your steps back to the trailhead (34°10.17'N 118°2.95'W and elevation 960ft).

### **Alternative Exit:**

Alternatively you can proceed all the way down the canyon to Sierra Madre Dam. Just downstream of the first exit, there is a 10ft rappel from a bolt anchor in the right wall that drops you down into a deep pool. Here the canyon narrows even more and there are a series of deep pools some of which may require swimming. Several more pools follow before you arrive at the top of a 25ft rappel from a bolt in the left wall. This is perhaps the narrowest and most slot-like section of the whole canyon and the chute of this rappel drops down into a small but very deep pool surrounded by vertical rock walls where you must swim to the next lip about 15ft away. Pull the rope from this lip and then downclimb the 5ft drop on the far side of the lip. A few yards further down the slot the final 10ft rappel drops down into another swimming pool. Beyond this pool the canyon broadens and it is about 400yds of boulder hopping before you come to the back of the normally empty Sierra Madre dam. A dirt road on the right (34°10.60'N 118°2.56'W and elevation 1170ft) takes you up and over the dam to the back of a barbed-wire topped gate. There is a place on the right side of the gate where you can climb over with relative ease. Further down the dam access road is another bar gate that leads to a triple fork in the small canyon roads that wind through a residential section of hillside. Take the left fork and thereafter turn right as you make your way through the maze of small roads eventually meeting Churchill Road where you turn right and soon come to the intersection of Mountain Trail and Mira Monte. Your starting point,

namely Mount Wilson Trail Road is just a few yards up Mira Monte from this intersection. This alternative adds about one hour to the hike duration.



Map of Little Santa Anita Canyon Hike

## 2.15 East Fork of Santa Anita Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.9 miles
- Elevation gain: 2400 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Wilson
- Difficulties: One 70ft rappel, one steep 1500ft ridge climb with bushwhacking
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear, 200ft rope, 8ft webbing and one rappel ring
- ACA Rating: 3A III

One of the prettiest, untraveled canyons in the front range of the San Gabriels is the East Fork of Santa Anita. Though the bottom end is easily accessed from the popular and well-traveled trail from Chantry Flats to Sturtevant Falls, few hikers venture up the East Fork. This adventure hike begins at Chantry Flats, drops down into the main canyon via the established trails and then climbs a steep ridge up the east wall to access the remote Upper Clamshell dirt road. It then travels north on the Upper Clamshell to a point where you can drop down into the East Fork of the Santa Anita. You then descend the East Fork, a hike that involves much bouldering and one substantial rappel down a vertical 70ft waterfall.

This hike is probably best in the winter or spring when the climb up the ridge is not too hot. On the other hand there are many marvelous swimming holes in the East Fork that would be great in the summer. One drawback to this hike is the large quantity of poison oak in the East Fork; protection is recommended for those who may be sensitive.

### Trailhead

Drive north on Santa Anita Avenue in Arcadia, continue up the mountain road to Chantry Flats (34°11.77'N 118°1.35'W and elevation 2100ft) and park there.

### Hike

Beginning in the Chantry Flats parking lot (34°11.77'N 118°1.35'W and elevation 2100ft), follow the asphalt road descending into the canyon. After about 150yds take the trail leaving the right side of the road and follow this

down to the Santa Anita river. Crossing to the east side, continue downstream, following the canyon bottom trail to Hermit Falls ( $34^{\circ}11.49'N$   $118^{\circ}1.05'W$  and elevation 1460ft) that you should reach about 35min and 0.9mi from the start. Take a moment to explore and admire these lovely pools and waterfalls.

To proceed, climb the steep slope to the right of the falls area in order to access the trail that continues downstream. After just a short distance, you should fork left at the first house you encounter. Descend beside the house to a stream crossing. On the other, eastern side of the canyon bottom, locate a broad flat bench, the starting point for a steep climb up a ridge on the eastern wall of the main canyon ( $34^{\circ}11.36'N$   $118^{\circ}1.09'W$  and elevation 1420ft). Start up the steep, wooded but open slope to the left of the bench. Head straight up following the animal switchbacks and veering slightly to the right to approach the apex of the ridge. After several hundred feet you should be able to locate the apex of the ridge that you will roughly follow for the next couple of hours. In places you will be able to find a valuable use-trail that follows either the apex of the ridge or a line a little to the left of the apex (almost never to the right of the apex where the south-facing vegetation is less negotiable). In other places the trail disappears and some serious bushwhacking is required. Near the top there is a grassy area where deer graze and sleep; follow the readily negotiated grass slopes as far as possible. After a final bushwhack, another grassy slope will quite abruptly bring you to the dirt road known as the Upper Clamshell Road at  $34^{\circ}11.39'N$   $118^{\circ}0.49'W$  and an elevation of 2940ft. You should reach this point about 3hr (and only 1.8mi) from the start.

After the tough steep climb (and bushwhack) up the ridge, it is a relief to turn left and hike north along the Upper Clamshell. This is a very rarely traveled



*Left: East Fork Waterfall. Right: Lateral waterfall in chasm.*



dirt road that branches off from the Rincon/Red Box road at an elevation of 4720ft (where it is gated to prevent vehicular access) and descends for about six miles to a valley overlook at 2900ft where there is a watertank but little else. Perhaps the original intention was to build a road down to Arcadia but this never happened.

The road is in remarkably good condition considering how rarely it is traveled. The surface is smooth and I only noticed one place where fallen rocks would prevent vehicle passage. The gradient is also quite gradual. Coupled with the pleasant wooded surroundings, this makes for a most enjoyable hike. The road makes two large incursions into the hillside to contour around the head of two canyons and then rounds a headland with a great view of various forks of the Santa Anita. You then cross above a saddle some distance below the road to enter the East Fork of the Santa Anita, high on that canyon's south wall. Just beyond that saddle, it is important to identify a place where the road turns sharply east. That identification is made easier by the fact that just around the corner you enter a "tunnel" of woods on the heavily forested north-facing slope. The drop-in point for the descent into the East Fork is just 30yds beyond the corner at  $34^{\circ}12.31'N$   $118^{\circ}0.22'W$  and an elevation of 3800ft. It is currently marked by a duck beside a metal water chute on the left side of the road. If you miss this waypoint you will pass a much larger concrete water chute several hundreds of yards further on. Do not descend the gully with the concrete chute but return to the less conspicuous metal chute. You should reach the drop-in point about 4hr after leaving Chantry Flats. It is 2.2mi from the point where you accessed the road and 4mi from the start.

Leaving the road, the cross-country route lies down the steep but leafy and open slope in the forest. If you head straight down you will soon drop into a



*Pool in the lower canyon.*

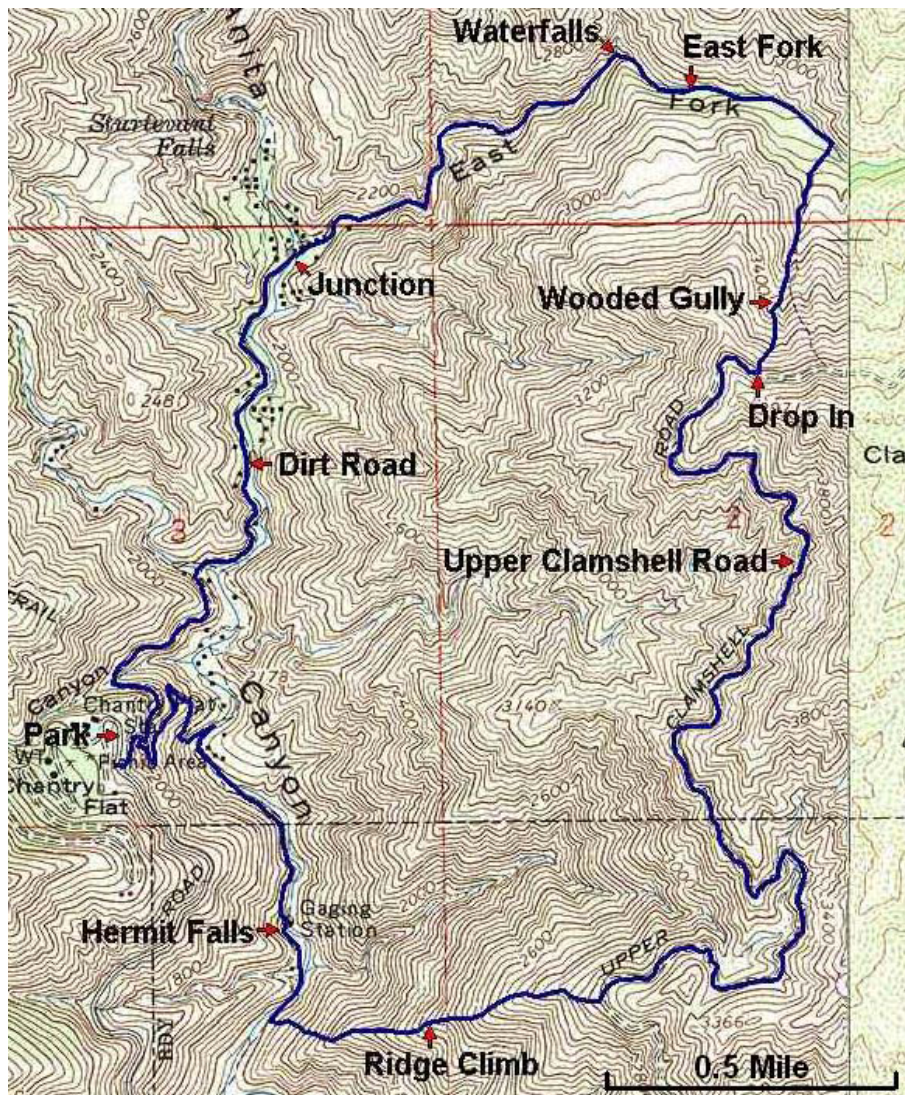


shallow gully that develops into a small canyon that eventually meets the East Fork. The descent takes just 40min and you reach the stream in the East Fork of the Santa Anita at  $34^{\circ}12.64'N$   $118^{\circ}0.09'W$  and elevation of 2820ft. Here the canyon is quite wide and heavily forested. As you start downstream, there is a broad bench on the south (left) side that makes for easy traveling. However about 0.3mi downstream, the canyon narrows, hard white rock appears and the canyon becomes much more rugged. This culminates in a 70ft waterfall that falls vertically into a deep and dramatic chasm that appears even deeper when viewed from above. Another waterfall a short distance away to the right also drops into this same chasm. It is an awesome place and the highlight of this adventure. You should reach this point (elevation 2570ft) roughly 5hr 20min from the start having traveled about 4.8mi.

There are three possible ways to descend into the chasm. Two involve rappeling about 70ft down the falls using as anchors trees that are a short way back from the lip. One tree some distance back leads to rappel down the falls and will usually result in a wet descent. Another tree off to the right that requires a contour across a steep earthen slope (a belay is advisable here) will lead to a rappel down a dry chute to the right of the main stream. In either case you must wade through a knee deep pool at the base of the waterfall. A third possibility is to climb around the falls by retreating a short way upstream to where you can climb the left (south) bank onto a shoulder above the falls and the chasm. A faint use-trail will lead to a place where a short rappel will allow you to descend to the top of a scree/dirt slope in a steep draw and thence into the bottom of the chasm. Whichever descent route you choose, take a moment to enjoy the surroundings from the bottom of the chasm. In the spring, with both waterfalls flowing freely it is a beautiful spot.

Downstream of the chasm there are many smaller waterfalls and lots of lovely, deep pools. The going is slow since you must find your way around and down through these many obstacles. But none require technical equipment. The descent through this lovely stretch of canyon takes about 1.5hr. You should reach the end of the East Fork about 7.5hr after the start having traveled about 5.6mi. Here the East Fork meets the main Santa Anita canyon and you access the popular and well-traveled dirt road from Chantry Flats to Sturtevant Falls at  $34^{\circ}12.78'N$   $118^{\circ}1.04'W$  and an elevation of 1940ft.

From here it only remains to hike that popular trail down the main canyon and then up the asphalt road back to Chantry Flats. The total hiking time should be about 8hr in which you cover about 6.9mi.



Map of East Fork of Santa Anita Canyon

## 2.16 Monrovia Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.9 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Asuza
- Difficulties: Very rough terrain with bushwhacking, rough climbing and about 11 rappels, several about 50ft in height
- Special equipment: Full rappeling equipment with a 160ft rope, 100ft of webbing and 10 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Monrovia Canyon drops rapidly down from the 5000ft ridge that rises precipitously above the foothill communities of Arcadia, Monrovia, Bradbury and Duarte in the San Gabriel Valley. Monrovia Canyon and its tributaries form a bowl that is home to much wildlife including several bears. Because of the steepness of the terrain, a descent of Monrovia Canyon involves about ten rappels and is a demanding day hike even for the experienced adventure hiker. In the summer most of canyon can be negotiated without getting wet above the knees but the situation may be quite different in winter or spring. The terrain is ruggedly beautiful from the wooded upper reaches, down through a narrow slot where the canyon turns south, to the bucolic lower reaches in the forest of Monrovia Canyon Park. It is a fun summer adventure hike for experienced hikers.

The canyon is accessible because it begins close to the Rincon/Red Box fire road that runs along the top of the aforementioned ridge. There are, however, two strategic difficulties with the hike. The first is unavoidable, namely that accessing the head of the canyon is time consuming and involves a very long car shuttle. The other is the foolishly limited opening hours of the Monrovia Canyon Park whose rangers neurotically lock the gates to the park outside the opening hours of 8.00am to 5.00pm. Since it is virtually impossible to complete the hike within this time frame, you must park outside the park, thus extending the hike by about a mile.

### Trailhead

To place the return vehicle drive north on Canyon Boulevard in Monrovia. Follow this as it turns right near the top and proceed a few hundred yards to the point where you fork right following the signs for Monrovia Canyon Park.

You should park at the roadside just south of this point (34°9.90'N 117°59.71'W and elevation 930ft). However, to ensure that you have found the right place continue up Canyon Boulevard following the signs for the park. At a point just west of the debris dam you will encounter the gate that opens at 8.00am. Since this may be closed when you arrive here in the evening you must turn around and drive back down to the nearest available parking location that is, as we mentioned, just south of the road fork.

In the other vehicle you should then proceed back down Canyon Boulevard, turn left onto Foothill, and then right onto Mountain. This will take you to the 210 Freeway. Drive east on the freeway to Azusa Avenue, Highway 39 and proceed north on 39 into the mountains to the Forest Service Station at Rincon. Just past the station on the left is the locked gate leading to the Rincon/Red Box fire road. To enter you need a free permit that you must obtain at one of the local Forest Service offices within a month prior to the hike. At that time they will provide you with the combination for the gate lock.

The fire road (usually kept in good condition) ascends to the east/west ridge that separates the valley of the West Fork of the San Gabriel from the LA Basin. There are two junctions where care may be needed for they often lack signposts. The first occurs at a broad clearing where the spur road to Pine Mountain (4539ft) branches off to the right while the main route proceeds to the left. The second can be quite deceiving and occurs about the nine-mile marker. The main road makes an abrupt right turn into a cutting while the route straight ahead is soon blocked by a gate; the fire road beyond the gate descends to meet the road that rises through Sawpit Canyon from Monrovia Canyon Park. Assuming you stay on the main road then, about 13mi beyond



*Left: Second rappel in upper canyon. Right: Monrovia Falls.*



Rincon you will arrive at the junction with the Upper Clamshell Road at an elevation of 4720ft. The gate blocking the Upper Clamshell is just a few yards to the left and readily visible from the main road. There is also a small parking spur at 34°13.01'N 117°58.52'W and an elevation of 4720ft. You should leave your vehicle there. All of this is almost underneath a large electricity pylon.

## Hike

Walking around the gate (34°13.01'N 117°58.52'W and elevation 4720ft) you gain the Upper Clamshell Road. Proceed downhill for about 100yds to where there is a fork in the dirt road beside the upper reaches of the East Fork of the Santa Anita river. Take the left fork and pass through another gate. The road levels out and winds through a pleasant pine forest with a steep drop on the right down into the East Fork of the Santa Anita. About 30min and 1.3mi from the start (at an elevation of 4700ft), the road emerges onto a ridge top that has a steep drop off on the left as well as the right. The drop in point for Monrovia Canyon is on your left at 34°12.35'N 117°58.79'W. As soon as you emerge onto the ridge top, cross over the firebreak and find a faint gap in the bushes where an animal trail proceeds straight down the dirt slope. Though steep the route is moderately easy going and there are relatively few bushes due to the tree coverage. Veer right a little with the trail as it transitions into slightly larger gullies.

As the steepness of the descent eases and the canyon begins to deepen, a gully of roughly equal size connects in on the left. This junction is roughly 1hr 15min from the start and at an elevation of 3800ft. A little further on at the end of a moderately easy section, you reach the first serious obstacles, a 30ft dryfall that can be bypassed on the right followed, a few yards down the canyon, by a simple 20ft rappel with a substantial tree anchor on the left lip. Some distance downstream at an elevation of about 3420ft and 2hr 10min from the start you will encounter a 40ft rappel through a broad slot into a bowl that makes the drop seem larger than it is. The anchor is a tree high at the top of a dirt slope on the right. Though it is not readily apparent this waterfall can, in fact, be downclimbed on the right by contouring up and over the rock ridge on that side.

As you reach an elevation of about 3300ft about 2hr 45min from the start, the canyon narrows to a short but dramatic gorge. Here you encounter perhaps the best rappel of this hike, a 50ft drop with some free rappel. The anchor is a large tree root system on the left. Then, about 15min beyond these narrows, you arrive at the top (elevation about 3000ft) of what looks like a very challenging, steep and narrow slot whose end cannot be discerned from the top. It is not however as difficult as one might fear from that first sight. The first section involves two small 15ft rappels using as anchors a boulder on the right and then a small tree on the right. The second is followed almost immediately by another 15ft drop that could be a continuation of the second rappel or could be downclimbed. Below this, a very new rockfall has altered the slot bottom. It should be downclimbed with care for some of the rocks are quite unstable. The slot then begins to widen somewhat and, near the bottom, there is a 30ft

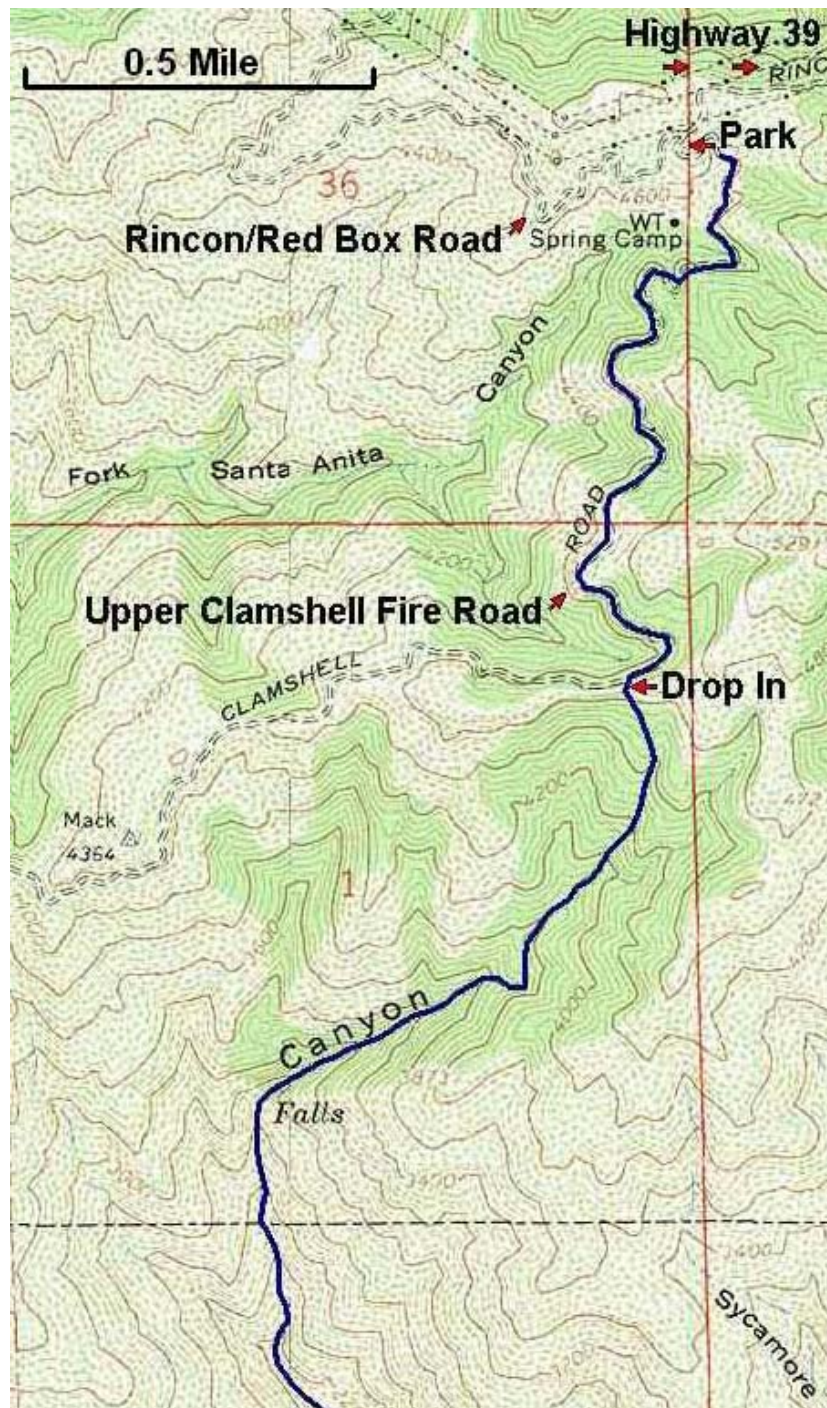


rappel using a large boulder anchor on the left. A short distance downstream the canyon makes a major turn to the left. As you make this turn (about 2.4mi from the start) the San Gabriel Valley becomes visible in the distance for the first time. Just at the turn there is another 30ft rappel using a rock anchor on the right followed by another smaller 20ft rappel again using a boulder anchor.

At this point you will have reached an elevation of 2800ft after almost 5hrs of hiking. You now enter a section of more open but still steep canyon with many small recent rockfalls and a series of moderate downclimbs. In several places, a belay would be wise for those less sure of their rockclimbing ability. In one place a passerby has left a small rope to assist in sliding down a 12ft incline. The valley seems just a short distance away but this is quite misleading; 3hrs of rough travel are still needed to reach it.

Just as it seems the going is getting easier, you arrive at the top of a major obstacle where a huge boulder has blocked the canyon. The waterfall is to the left side of this boulder; the right side has a slot with chockstones at the top that provide a good anchor. The rappel is about 40ft in two distinct steps, the first being awkward due to the narrowness of the slot. Just downstream is another substantial waterfall that can be downclimbed to the left of a boulder on the left, though with some difficulty. A series of easier downclimbs (mostly on the right) follow before the canyon narrows again. Here there is an easy 30ft rappel using a large boulder anchor on the right. This leads into a short narrow section that can be traversed using a ledge on the left as the canyon turns in that direction. Downstream of this is a relatively long wooded section in which the going is fairly easy. This ends where the canyon narrows again and, after a small but awkward downclimb on the right, you arrive at the top of Monrovia Canyon Falls, a distance of 3.2mi from the starting point.

Monrovia Canyon Falls are at the terminus of a popular, short trail hike up the canyon from Monrovia Canyon Park. The 50ft waterfall effectively blocks progress upstream by all but the experienced rock climber. The rappel down is best to the right of the waterfall using as anchor either a large boulder in the stream just above the falls or one of several anchors higher up on the right. The base of the waterfall (elevation 1760ft) should be reached about 7hr 30min into the hike and from this point it is simply a matter of following the maintained trail down into Monrovia Canyon Park, a distance of 0.75mi to the asphalt road (3.9mi from the start at 34°10.58'N 117°59.46'W and an elevation of 1260ft). Then comes the frustrating part; it is still another mile down the road to where you had to leave the return vehicle outside the park gates.



Map of northern part of Monrovia Canyon hike



Map of southern part of Monrovia Canyon hike



## 2.17 Wolfskill Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 1930 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Baldy, Glendora
- Difficulties: One large, waterfall rappel (100ft), one smaller rappel, some steep firebreak hiking, a little bushwhacking
- Special equipment: Rappelling gear, 150ft rope and recovery cord
- ACA Rating: 3A III

In my opinion, Wolfskill Falls are one of the prettiest and most spectacular waterfalls in the San Gabriel mountains. In the spring when they run more fully, the multiple strands cascading down the 100ft crag provide a spectacle well worth the hike up San Dimas and Wolfskill Canyons. This adventure, best undertaken in the summer or fall, climbs over the ridge separating the route of Wolfskill Creek from the San Gabriel Valley and then descends Wolfskill Canyon to emerge into San Dimas Canyon. In the process, it involves a dramatic rappel descent of those falls and a transit through this beautiful wooded canyon.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. From Foothill Boulevard in the city of San Dimas turn north on San Dimas Canyon Road and drive 1.9mi northeast to the stop sign at the intersection with Golden Hills Road. You will go east on Golden Hills Road once you have deposited the return vehicle. To do this continue north on San Dimas Canyon Road for another 2.1mi. The road climbs past the San Dimas Canyon Dam and proceeds around the east side of the reservoir to the locked gate at the end of the road (just past the fire station). Park the return vehicle here on the west side of the road (34°9.98'N 117°46.11'W and elevation 1580ft).

Then, in the other vehicle, drive back down San Dimas Canyon Road and turn left on Golden Hills Road. Drive 1.2mi to a stop sign where you turn left on Stephens Ranch Road. Drive north 0.6mi to a point just north of the Marshall Canyon Golf Course and 50yds south of the dirt road entrance to Stephens Ranch on the left. Here you should be able to see a broad firebreak trail climbing the hillside to your left. Turn around and park on the broad shoulder at the side of the road where this trail heads up the mountain (34°9.14'N 117°44.94'W and elevation 1840ft).

## Hike

The firebreak trail climbs steeply from an elevation of 1840ft all the way to the Sunset Ridge fireroad at 3350ft over a distance of just under one mile. Though steep it is broad and easy to follow and you should reach the road (at  $34^{\circ}9.91'N$   $117^{\circ}45.03'W$  and elevation 3350ft) about 1hr 30min from the start. At the top, turn right and follow the road that gently climbs and descends several times over the next couple of miles. It is smooth and easy hiking. After about 1.5mi you will pass fire hydrant box UW7 on your left. Continuing along the road, it switchbacks to the west for about 300yds and then switches back east. About 200yds beyond this second corner look for a flat section with a broad array of bushes and a gentle descent to the north. This is the drop in point at  $34^{\circ}10.20'N$   $117^{\circ}43.10'W$  and an elevation of 3770ft, 2.5mi from the point where you joined the Sunset Ridge Road. You should reach this point about 2.5hr from the start of the hike.

At the drop-in point there is no obvious gully descending north. Find a slight low point and locate an animal trail into the bushes. It should be close to several lone conifers that protrude above the bushes. Follow the slight animal trails in places and bushwhack in others as you progress down slope in a generally northerly direction. Though some bushwhacking is needed, you should soon find a small and relatively brush-free gully that allows easier progress. Following the gully and descending about 450ft, you will arrive in the bottom of Wolfskill Canyon ( $34^{\circ}10.33'N$   $117^{\circ}43.17'W$  and elevation 3330ft) about 30min from the drop-in point and 3hr from the start. A small stream flows here throughout most of the year.



*Left: Wolfskill Falls. Right: Descending the falls.*



Apart from the few obstacles noted below, Wolfskill Canyon is quite easy going. It is a generally open, wooded canyon with relatively little brush. Near the big falls, you will encounter a number of sections with brambles but these are fairly easily negotiated. Leather gloves and a stick are useful there. Notable waypoints in the upper part are a small, easily negotiated chute at 2950ft that you should encounter after about 30min of downcanyon travel, a large creek that comes in on the right about 15min later and a downclimb of a 10ft cascade (elevation 2700ft) that is necessary after about 65min of canyon hiking.

About 1hr 15min after reaching the canyon bottom and 4hr 15min from the start of the hike, you arrive at the top of the first major obstacle at an elevation of 2690ft. It is a three stage waterfall in a narrow slot. There is no convenient anchor other than the large and strangely distorted tree that bridges the slot high above the lip. To reach this tree and use it as the rappel anchor you need to back up, climb the dirt slope on the right and then descend to the tree down a steep slope. From this tree it is a 50ft rappel to the shallow pool at the bottom of the third cascade. Beyond this obstacle the easy going resumes and between here and the big falls there is only one minor problem, namely an awkward 6ft waterfall at 2210ft that needs careful climbing around to the right.

Finally, at an elevation of 2040ft, about 6.5hr after the start of the hike and about 2mi downstream from where you accessed Wolfskill Canyon, you will arrive at the top of the spectacular 100ft Wolfskill Falls. Multiple streams crash off protruding rocks and shoot down slots to the bottom of this awesome waterfall. Vertical cliffs surround the chasm into which the stream descends. The 100ft descent requires a single strand rappel so you should prepare the recovery cord for use. There are three possible routes of descent, on the left, in the center and on the right. On the left, the descent is dry but brushy; the tree anchor is some distance back from lip so rope retrieval might be difficult. In the center there are several large trees any of which would make a good anchor; but the descent involves rappelling in the water all the way down. Instead we chose a route on the right using a smaller tree off by the right wall as the anchor. This route is dry for first 40ft but wet thereafter as you descend a spray and water filled groove.

At the bottom of Wolfskill Falls, the technical gear can be stowed since there is at least a rough trail the rest of the way. First you bypass a 40ft vertical waterfall by means of a trail around to the left. At the bottom, the trail crosses to the right side to bypass another modest waterfall in a fern-filled recess. Just beyond this you pass the first, abandoned cabin. Then, about 15min below the big falls at 1700ft, you come to the end of Wolfskill Canyon where it merges with San Dimas Canyon. The latter comes in from the right through a gap with rock walls on both sides. Downstream from there, you follow the dirt road past many cabins. The road fords the stream in many places where it is difficult to avoid wading. Finally, 2mi and 45min below Wolfskill Falls, you come to the San Dimas Canyon entrance gate (34°9.98'N 117°46.11'W and elevation 1580ft) where you parked the return vehicle.



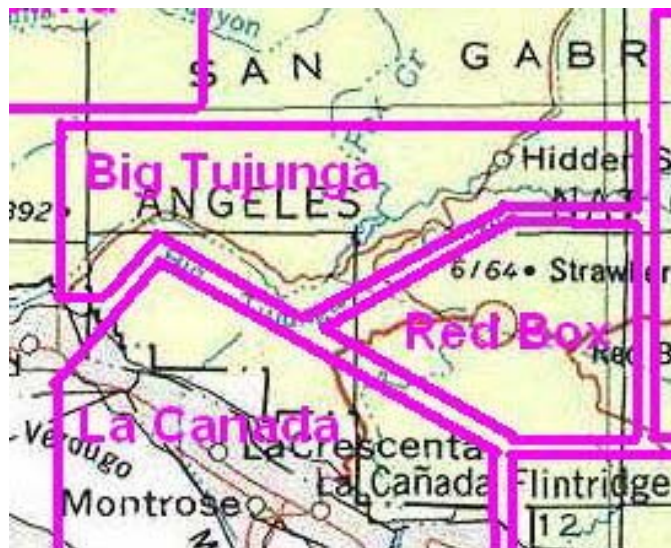
Map of Wolfskill Canyon hike



## Chapter 3

# BIG TUJUNGA

The Big Tujunga Canyons are those feeding into Big Tujunga, the most dramatic and challenging dropping down the north slopes of Mount Lukens. The canyons range from the spectacular Great Falls of the Fox , to the classic descents of the north face of Mount Lukens through Silver and Suicide Canyons to many smaller canyons on both sides of the Big Tujunga. In the winter, Mill Creek, the river that flows through the Big Tujunga, can be too full to cross except by way of the few bridges on Big Tujunga Canyon Road and the Angeles Forest Highway and hikers should plan accordingly.



Big Tujunga region.

## 3.1 Stone Plus One

### Characteristics

- Hiking time (upper drop-in): 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 1060 feet or 1470 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: About eleven rappels, the largest being about 80ft; some bushwhacking
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 100ft rope, 150ft of webbing, 7 rappel rings, and harnesses.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The precipitous north face of Mount Lukens forms the south wall of Big Tujunga and contains a number of rugged canyons. The only problem is that there are few trails that can be used to access these marvelous canyons. The unnamed canyon immediately east of Stone Canyon is a notable exception to this for, during its ascent to the summit of Mount Lukens, the Stone Canyon Trail contours into this neighbor at several points and provides access to this advanced and spectacular adventure. We came to call this canyon Stone Plus One; its descent involves many rappels including one two-stager with a total drop of about 150ft. This monster can be viewed from the Big Tujunga Road, first by locating Stone Plus One by noting the contouring of the Stone Canyon Trail and then locating a point along the road from where you can look up at the middle section of this canyon.

This hike is best for a warm fall day; at that time there is only a small water flow and you can stay quite dry.

### Trailhead

Drive up Big Tujunga Road, turn right onto Doske Road and then left on Stonyvale Road. Proceed to the parking lot next to the Wildwood Picnic Area at the end of the road (34°17.67'N 118°14.41'W and elevation 1780ft).

### Hike

From the parking area follow the Stone Canyon trail that crosses Mill Creek and then follows the south bank of the river upstream for a short way before turning south at 34°17.55'N 118°14.22'W and climbing up the rise just to east of the Stone Canyon Wash. Hike up the trail as it first climbs the east wall of



Stone Canyon and then contours around into the next canyon to the east that we call Stone Plus One. About 30min from the start as the trail contours up the west wall of Stone Plus One you will come to a point at  $34^{\circ}16.97'N$   $118^{\circ}14.26'W$  and an elevation of 2840ft where the trail switches back to the right to climb higher. You will notice a use-trail that proceeds straight on at this switchback. This use-trail contours down toward the canyon bottom. This is the lower of the two possible drop-in points on this hike. I recommend that you take this option on your first adventure in this canyon. While dropping in veer upstream to avoid the steeper slopes. We will resume the description of the hike from the lower drop-in point at the location noted later.

For the upper drop-in proceed on up the main trail to an elevation of about 3260ft. This can be reached about 40min from the trailhead. Just after passing a large conifer the trail rounds a corner and you arrive at another notable viewpoint above Stone Plus One. Here at  $34^{\circ}16.82'N$   $118^{\circ}14.38'W$  there are two drop-in routes close to one another. One route proceeds down the steep rocky ridge below the conifer. The other leaves the trail about 20yds further on and descends a steep gully. Depending on which particular route you follow you may or may not rappel down a 50ft waterfall (the anchor is a tree about 20ft upstream).

All of the upper drop-in routes bring you quickly to the second rappel, a 70ft waterfall with a good tree anchor. The face of this waterfall is quite mucky and so it is best to veer to right during the rappel and head for a large tree that is clearly seen from above. After reaching this tree resume hiking by contouring to the right and descending an earth and scree slope that brings you back to the stream. Just a few more yards and you come to the lip of the next rappel down into a shady glade. This is a nice simple 50ft rappel using the substantial



*Left: Large Falls, Upper Section. Right: Large Falls, Lower Section.*

tree off to the right. This is followed almost immediately by a small 15ft rappel using the big tree on left and then a 35ft waterfall that can be downclimbed using the dirt slope on the left.

You have now reached the point of the lower drop-in. Downstream of this there is a wooded section of canyon that ends in a very brushy and bramble-choked stretch. At the end of this stretch is a narrow slot waterfall that is quite awkward not only because of its configuration but also because of the brambles and the lack of an obvious anchor. Instead, we climbed up over the 6ft ridge just upstream of the lip on the right (elevation 2640ft). This leads to a very brushy slope that can be downclimbed to the base of the waterfall, in part by sliding under several bushes. Another unpleasant bush-filled section follows; it is best by-passed on the right and leads to a 30ft waterfall whose lip is covered in brush. However there is a clearing on the right where several big bushes provide good anchors for a 40ft rappel. Another short bush-filled section follows but ends abruptly and, quite unexpectedly, you find yourself at the top of an expansive overlook with a large, vertical drop immediately ahead of you. We reached this viewpoint about 3hrs 15min from the start.

This big drop is the one that you can see most obviously from several vantage points on the Big Tujunga Road. Here at the lip you look down into a large bowl ringed with cliffs of bright sandstone. And you can see the large rock on the shelf about 80ft below that provides the anchor for the second or lower stage of the coming 140ft descent. A large tree just behind the lip provides a reassuringly solid anchor for the 80ft first or upper stage. The rappel is relatively straightforward though I recommend staying as far to the right as you can while going over the lip in order to avoid the water and the slick rock near it. Note the hard granite rock that formed these falls. The 60ft second or lower stage is anchored by the large rock in midstream on the intermediate shelf.

Another short and brushy section of canyon brings you to a rocky chute about 5hrs from the start. This chute can be downclimbed fairly easily. However, you can see from the top that the chute makes a sharp right turn at the bottom. What you cannot see is that this leads immediately to a 35ft, vertical rappel for which there is no easy anchor in the rocky chute. This is the only really serious anchor problem encountered in this canyon. We set three pitons in a crack just above and to the right of the lip of the falls and, as backup, put a length of webbing around a rocky outcropping higher up the chute. The alternative is to climb up to a large bush on the left side and rappel from there. The bottom here is at an elevation of about 2240ft)

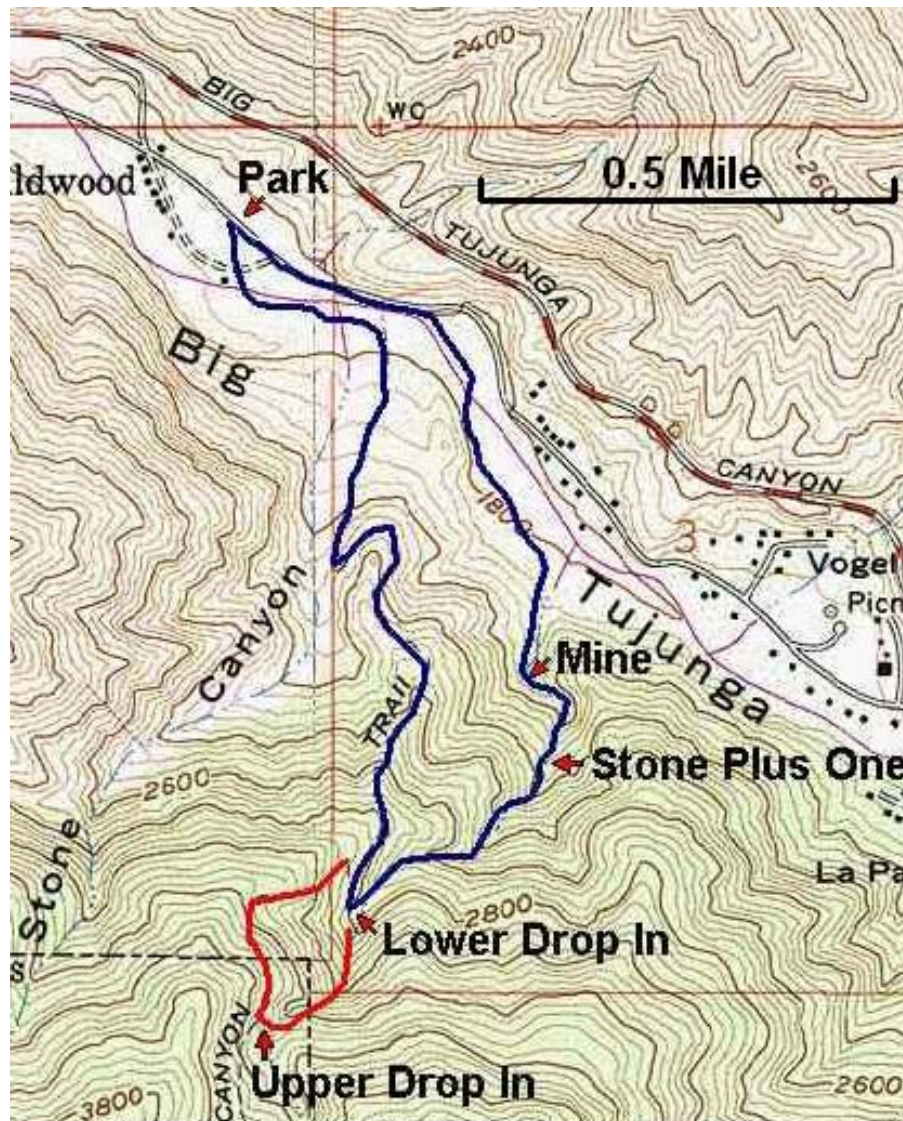
A short walk then brings you to the second impressive viewpoint encountered on this hike. Again it is a panoramic view of a large rocky descent. This time, however, the drop consists of five giant steps ranging in height from 10ft to 60ft. The first step requires a 50ft rappel and can be anchored by one or more of the solid bushes on the right. This is followed by two smaller steps that can be downclimbed on the right side. We reached this point 5hr 30min from the trailhead.

The fourth step is the largest and requires a 50ft rappel using as the anchor a large bush on the right with a very large base. The fifth and last step is about

35ft in height. The anchor is a tree about 15ft upstream of the lip on the left. It is almost inevitable that you will have to rappel down through some water here since the entire mossy face is dripping.

As well as the last step this is also the last rappel in this canyon. A few yards downstream, the canyon narrows to a slot through grey rock. The slot turns abruptly right and then 180 degrees back to the left. Fortunately the bottom is relatively flat. Then the bottom broadens into an easy wooded section that presages the end of the canyon. A few hundred yards downstream you may see a ladder on the left that leads to an old mine. And another hundred yards brings you to the canyon exit at  $34^{\circ}17.26'N$   $118^{\circ}14.01'W$ . We reached this point 6hr 40min into the hike.

To get back to the parking area, I recommend turning left once you reach flat ground and then crossing the flats close to the mountains to avoid intruding on the private property near the river. When these flats end, cross Mill Creek and go north to the old road close under the northern cliffs. Follow this back to the parking lot ( $34^{\circ}17.67'N$   $118^{\circ}14.41'W$ ).



Map of Stone Plus One Canyon Hike

## 3.2 Suicide Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 10 hours (6 hours by the Maxon Route)
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.5 miles (2.3 miles by the Maxon Route)
- Elevation gain: 2110 feet (1000 feet by the Maxon Route)
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak, Pasadena
- Difficulties: 8 rappels up to 190ft
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 200ft recovery cord, 70ft webbing, 8 quick-links, harnesses, helmets (plus a GPS for the Maxon Route)
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Suicide Canyon is not labeled on the topo maps but is the local name for the canyon just west of Silver Canyon in the lower Big Tujunga. From the ridgetop at Mount Lukens it drops steeply down the north face of that mountain, descending 3200ft in just over a mile. Like Silver Canyon, Suicide is a precipitous north-facing canyon and one of the most exciting canyoneering adventures in the San Gabriels. In its lower reaches it is also a very pretty canyon with lots of shady greenery and, during most of the year, a little trickle of water near the bottom. The descent requires 8 rappels, the largest being the first (known as “Lovers Leap”) at 190ft and several others greater than 100ft in height. Consequently, this adventure is only for the experienced canyoneer. In the winter or spring, the streamflow in the lower part of the canyon could make the hike much more challenging than described here.

Two alternate routes are described. The older route from the top, a descent from Mount Lukens, is a long and tough hike that requires a full day and is, therefore, best in the summer or early fall. In the summer be sure and take lots of water for the hike up to Mount Lukens is exposed and hot. More recently Matt Maxon developed a route up the ridge to the east that took advantage of an old access trail to the utility poles on that ridge. This allows much easier access to the lower, technical section of the canyon and is likely to become a favorite among canyoneers. It is also much shorter than the route from the top.

### Trailhead

The hike from the top is a one-way hike that requires a car shuttle. This involves leaving a return vehicle in the parking area at the Stonyvale Picnic Area in Big Tujunga Canyon. Drive up Big Tujunga Road and turn right onto the road to Vogel Flat. At the bottom of the hill, turn left and go to the Stonyvale parking lot at the end of the road (34°17.08'N 118°13.40'W and



elevation 1840ft). The Maxon Route begins and ends here so no car shuttle is needed.

To reach the trailhead for the hike from the top, drive the other vehicle up the Big Tujunga Road to the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway. Turn right and drive to the junction with the Angeles Crest Highway at the Clear Creek Forest Service Station. Turn right and drive about 3mi down the Angeles Crest Highway to a place where a fire road climbs up from the road (it is about 6mi north of La Canada). As you go downhill, the Angeles Crest Highway makes a sweeping left turn at this point and there is a large dirt parking area on the right ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$ ). The fire road that starts here is labeled 2N79.

Parenthetically we note that many of canyons that descend the slopes of Mount Lukens, including Silver, Suicide, Sutton and Hall Beckley, have three alternative approach routes, all of which provide access to the upper reaches of the Mount Lukens road. The first of these, included in the descriptions of the Silver and Suicide Canyon descents, starts on the Angeles Crest Highway at the 2N79 trailhead at  $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and an elevation of 2940ft. The second, included in the description of Hall Beckley Canyon, also begins on the Angeles Crest Highway but at the trailhead for the Dark Canyon trail at  $34^{\circ}15.35'N$   $118^{\circ}11.81'W$  and an elevation of 2730ft. The third, included in the description of Sutton Canyon, begins in Deukmejian Wilderness Park at  $34^{\circ}14.98'N$   $118^{\circ}15.18'W$  and an elevation of 2335ft. The elevation gains up to the intersection of 2N76B and the Mount Lukens road (at  $34^{\circ}15.81'N$   $118^{\circ}13.74'W$ , near the drop in for Silver Canyon) are respectively 1680ft, 1890ft and 2285ft; however the distances are respectively 5.4mi, 3.3mi and 2.8mi. The hiker can choose whether he or she would rather hike a longer distance or a greater elevation gain.



*Left: Lovers Leap - the first rappel (200ft). Right: The fourth rappel (105ft).*

## Hike via Mount Lukens

From the dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and elevation 2940ft), proceed past the locked gate and hike up fire road 2N79 that climbs toward the saddle you can see overhead. After 0.6mi (about 15min) you arrive at a junction at  $34^{\circ}15.72'N$   $118^{\circ}11.43'W$  marked by a water tank a little distance away on the right. Here you connect with the Grizzly Flats Road. Take the left fork that doubles back toward the saddle (elevation 3410ft) that you should reach about 5min later. Here you will get a broad view to the north; Grizzly Flats is the grove of pine trees some distance directly below you and you may be able to see the Stonyvale parking area where you left the recovery vehicle.

The fire road continues almost flat for a stretch as it passes a second saddle and, 40min from the start, arrives at a third saddle. Here, 1.7mi from the start at  $34^{\circ}15.68'N$   $118^{\circ}12.22'W$  and an elevation of 3300ft, the road divides again. The left fork descends to Grizzly Flats. Take the right fork that climbs gradually, performs one major switchback at 3510ft, and eventually, 3.6mi and 1hr 20 min from the start, arrives at another fire road junction at  $34^{\circ}15.09'N$   $118^{\circ}12.45'W$  and an elevation of 4010ft. The road you now join is the Mount Lukens Road that originates at the Forest Service station on the Angeles Crest Highway just a short distance above La Canada/Flintridge. It comes in from the left and continues on to the right toward Mount Lukens. You turn right and proceed along the road as it follows the ridge that eventually rises to the summit of Mount Lukens (elevation 5074ft). About 2hrs 40min and 6.5mi from the start you will arrive at the summit with its forest of communications towers. Between you and the Big Tujunga far below is a rugged and precipitous descent of about 3200ft.

Follow the dirt road that proceeds along the summit ridge to the north of all the towers. About halfway past the towers, look for a rough trail into the bushes on your right at  $34^{\circ}16.16'N$   $118^{\circ}14.29'W$  and 5050ft. This rough trail was clearly constructed to allow maintenance access to the line of telephone poles that drop down the steep north-facing slope from the summit. Follow this convenient trail (and the telephone lines overhead) for some ways as the trail winds through the brush past three or four poles. Several hundred yards down this trail, look for the telephone pole that is on a broad sloping ridge; over the preceding 50yds of the trail you will recognize fairly open brush sloping off to your left and down. Anywhere along this stretch at about  $34^{\circ}16.30'N$   $118^{\circ}13.86'W$ , leave the trail and begin descending through the brush taking the most open route while veering to the left where it is convenient. Here you will mostly be sliding down the dirt slope on your rear end (one of those tough plastic rear-end protectors would be useful here); some light bushwhacking is needed but the descent is quite fast and easy. Somewhere about the 4100ft elevation you should begin to discern a shallow gully off to your left. Continue your sliding descent paralleling this gully (not in it yet for it contains too much poison ivy). You should be able to see that you are approaching a substantial white canyon wall far off to your left.

About 1hr 10min after leaving Mount Lukens and at  $34^{\circ}16.42'N$   $118^{\circ}13.89'W$  and an elevation of about 3700ft you should finally arrive at an open gully with white bedrock; the large white canyon wall will not be too far off to the left. If you reach the 3700ft elevation without encountering such a gully, I suggest contouring left until you do so. Travel down the gully is steep and rocky but reasonably brush-free. At 3430ft the gully joins a larger one entering on the left and you will now have the large white wall on your immediate left. This wall is quite fractured and there appear to be frequent rockslides. At 3240ft you pass a particularly large and recent rockfall.

After almost 600ft of descent over fairly loose rock and talus, you finally arrive at some substantial bedrock, roughly 2hr 45min after leaving the summit of Mount Lukens. The 50ft long inclined bedrock chute at an elevation of 2770ft requires a little downclimbing. Shortly thereafter you will begin to discern that a very large drop-off is just ahead and, at an elevation of 2700ft (3hr 20min after leaving the summit and 6hrs from the morning start), you abruptly arrive at the top of a spectacular overlook with a 200ft abyss directly below you. It is an awesome sight and the start of an exciting rappel descent of the bottom section of Suicide Canyon. The rest of the descent is described below.

## Hike via the Maxon Route

From the Stonyvale Parking Area ( $34^{\circ}17.08'N$   $118^{\circ}13.40'W$  and elevation 1840ft) follow the trail (on the north side of the Big Tujunga) eastward for a little over half a mile. There, just after a river crossing, you should be able to discern a faint use-trail that forks right off the main trail at  $34^{\circ}16.76'N$   $118^{\circ}13.12'W$  (elevation 1870ft) and proceeds over to the steep south wall of Big



*The last rappel.*

Tujunga. Here the starting point of the very steep use-trail that climbs the ridge to the east of Suicide Canyon should be evident. It begins at 34°16.74'N 118°13.12'W and, though steep, it is well-cleared so not much bush-whacking is required. It is also marked by some faded orange flagging tape. Once you locate the trail it is easily followed, at least initially.

The trail climbs steeply for 500ft where, 50min from the morning start, you will come to a set of utility poles perched on a rocky promontory at 34°16.60'N 118°13.19'W and an elevation of 2390ft. This is a good place to pause, rest and enjoy the view of the Big Tujunga. Beyond the utility poles, the trail traverses along a narrow ridge before resuming the climb through the brush. Here, ropes have been installed in some places to make the climb easier though they are not essential. Finally, about 1hr 30min from the start, the gradient eases and the trail even descends briefly as you cross a brushy flat. It also becomes harder to follow the trail here so a GPS unit is recommended and you should watch for the occasional orange ribbon trail markers in the trees. At 34°16.46'N 118°13.36'W and 2790ft the trail proceeds through the remains of an old and long-abandoned marijuana farm. Here you veer left following the orange ribbon, and shortly after this you veer left again. It helps to keep a watch through the trees and bushes for the white rock wall that runs along the far side of Suicide Canyon off to your right.

You are headed for the place where the trail begins its descent into the canyon at 34°16.48'N 118°13.46'W and an elevation of 2830ft. If you find yourself cliffed out you have lost the trail and need to backtrack and find a trail further upslope. However, once you reach the place where the trail begins to descend it is easy to follow the route down into the Suicide Canyon drainage. You should reach the canyon bottom at 34°16.50'N 118°13.49'W and an elevation of 2780ft about 2hrs after the morning start having traveled just 1.4mi. Just about 30yds downstream from this you arrive at the top of a spectacular overlook with a 200ft abyss directly below you. It is an awesome sight and the start of an exciting rappel descent of the lower section of Suicide Canyon.

## **Technical Descent on both routes**

The dryfall immediately before you is known as Lover's Leap. It consists of hard white rock thankfully free of loose material. It requires a 200ft rope for a rappel from a solid tree on the left side. This descent deposits you in a narrow canyon that is normally dry.

It is only a few yards from the bottom of this big dryfall to the top of the next rappel, a 40ft drop through a V-shaped notch using a convenient tree anchor on the left at the top. A short hike of about 200yds brings you to two more dryfalls, one after the other. The first (elevation 2360ft) is a 25ft rappel from a tree anchor on the left of the lip to a large flat platform with a number of trees. This platform ends in a 90ft rappel (using one of those trees as anchor). Here you may begin to encounter some small pools of water, perhaps enough to filter water if you need it.

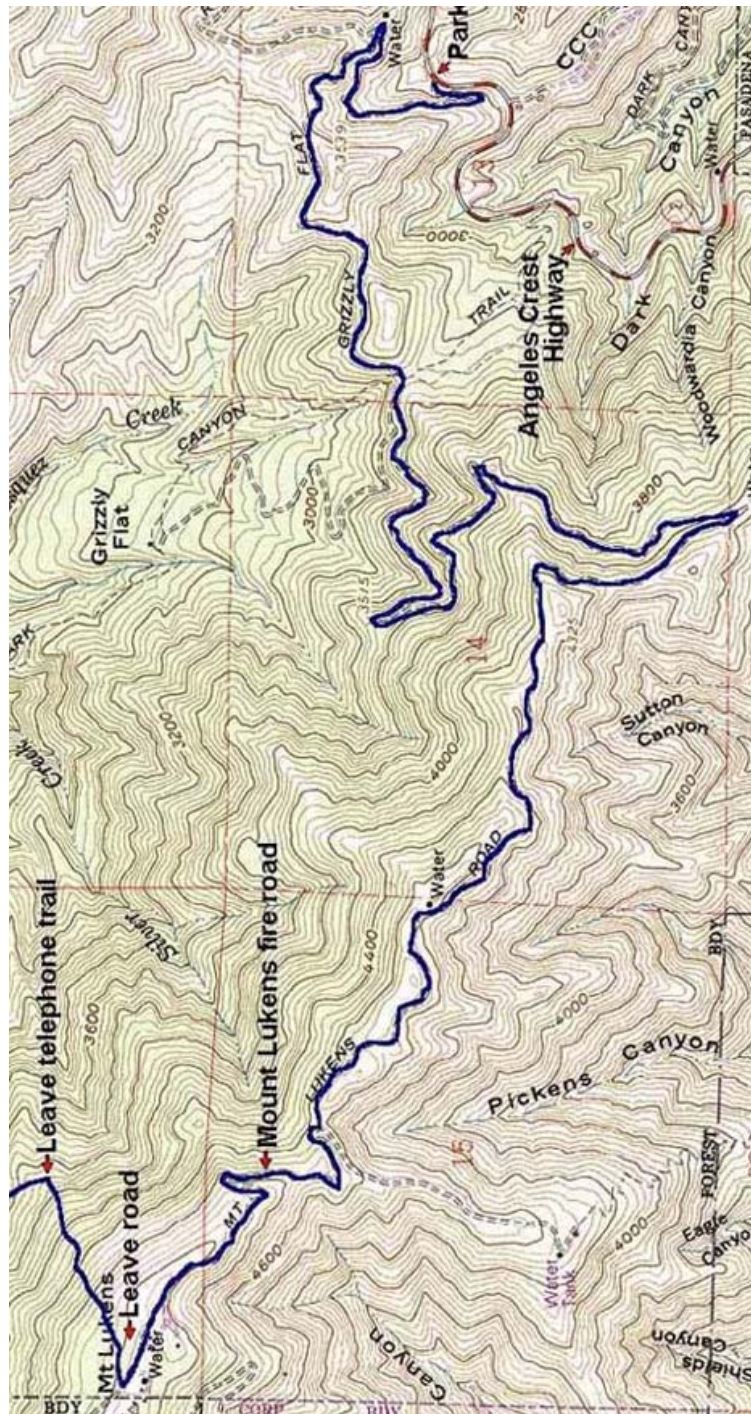
Below this big rappel, it is a short hike of about 60yds to a small 25ft drop that had several logs propped up at the bottom. There is a big dead tree stump up on the left of the lip but this did not look like a safe anchor. We used a tree high on the left that needed a short climb to reach it. Another short hike brings you to a 40ft rappel from a tree anchor on the right side of the lip. You should reach this 2150ft elevation about 5hr 40min after leaving the summit of Mount Lukens or, on the Maxon Route, about 2hr from the top of Lover's Leap.

The canyon is now very deep and narrow and at least a trickle of water persists all year long, nourishing the trees and mosses that grow in this lovely part of the canyon. You are now approaching the end of the descent. After a very brief walk, you arrive at a short 20ft rappel from a tree anchor on the left wall of the canyon (elevation 2060ft). Here there was a substantial water drip that provided us with a delightful though limited cold shower. You are now in a narrow defile, perhaps 10ft wide. About 20yds along this passage you come to the top of the last rappel, though it does not look that way from the top. What you see is a 15ft vertical drop to a narrow horizontal platform with another unknown drop beyond that platform. At the top of the 15ft drop there is a solid tree on the left of the narrow lip. Since there are no anchors down on the platform, you should set up a single strand rappel from this tree. Then descend the 15ft to the platform and continue 80ft down to the bottom of the final rappel. You should reach this point (elevation 1930ft) about 6hr 50min after leaving the summit of Mount Lukens or 2hr 20min after arriving at Lover's Leap.

It is just a short 10min hike from the bottom of the final rappel to the exit from Suicide Canyon into the Big Tujunga at 34°16.72'N 118°13.26'W. Turn downstream (left) but quickly make your way across Mill Creek and up the benches on the other side to the main through-canyon trail. It is another 10min hike along that trail (traveling west) to the Stonyvale parking area (34°17.08'N 118°13.40'W and elevation 1840ft) and your vehicle.

The total duration of the route via the summit of Mount Lukens is about 10hr during which you will cover about 8.5mi. The total duration of the hike via the Maxon route is about 6hr during which you will cover about 2.3mi.





Map of first part of Suicide Canyon Hike



Map of second part of Suicide Canyon Hike



### 3.3 Silver-on-the-Side

#### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.1 miles
- Elevation gain: 1850 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Pasadena, Condor Peak
- Difficulties: About 11 rappels including three vertical drops of 100ft, 120ft and 180ft and some downclimbing.
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 200ft rope, 200ft recovery cord, 50ft webbing and 8 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Silver Canyon whose descent is described elsewhere in this chapter has a big western tributary that runs in parallel to the main canyon for almost the entire north face descent of Mount Lukens, only joining the main canyon at the very end of that drop. Called “Silver-on-the-Side”, this western fork provides an excellent and exciting canyoneering adventure with big rappels near the end. It is relatively dry so take all the water you will need. Best for the winter, spring or fall, it could be too hot in the summer months, especially on the approach hike.

#### Trailhead

For this hike it is necessary to leave a return vehicle in the parking area at the Stonyvale Picnic Area in Big Tujunga Canyon. Drive up Big Tujunga Road and turn right onto the road to Vogel Flat. At the bottom of the hill, turn left and go to the parking lot at the end of the road (34°17.08'N 118°13.40'W and elevation 1890ft).

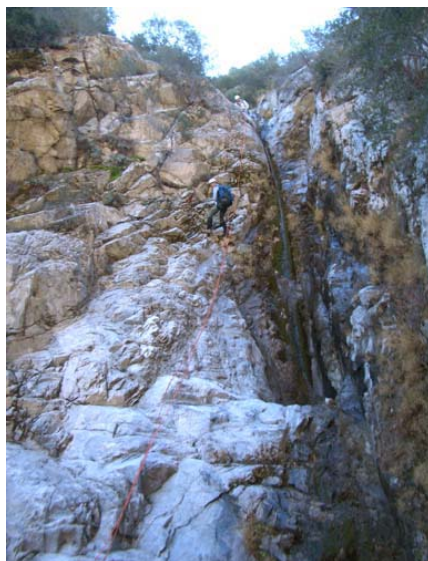
Then, to reach the trailhead, drive the other vehicle(s) up the Big Tujunga Canyon Road to the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway. Turn right and drive to the junction with the Angeles Crest Highway at the Clear Creek Forest Service Station. Turn right and drive about 3mi down the Angeles Crest Highway to a place where a fire road climbs up from the road (it is about 6mi north of La Canada). As you go downhill, the Angeles Crest Highway makes a sweeping left turn at this point and there is a large dirt parking area on the right (34°15.62'N 118°11.54'W). The fire road that starts here is labeled 2N79.

Parenthetically we note that many of canyons that descend the slopes of Mount Lukens, including Silver, Suicide, Sutton and Hall Beckley, have three alternative approach routes, all of which provide access to the upper reaches

of the Mount Lukens road. The first of these, included in the descriptions of the Silver and Suicide Canyon descents, starts on the Angeles Crest Highway at the 2N79 trailhead at  $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and an elevation of 2940ft. The second, included in the description of Hall Beckley Canyon, also begins on the Angeles Crest Highway but at the trailhead for the Dark Canyon trail at  $34^{\circ}15.35'N$   $118^{\circ}11.81'W$  and an elevation of 2730ft. The third, included in the description of Sutton Canyon, begins in Deukmejian Wilderness Park at  $34^{\circ}14.98'N$   $118^{\circ}15.18'W$  and an elevation of 2335ft. The elevation gains up to the intersection of 2N76B and the Mount Lukens road (at  $34^{\circ}15.81'N$   $118^{\circ}13.74'W$ , near the drop in for Silver Canyon) are respectively 1680ft, 1890ft and 2285ft; however the distances are respectively 5.4mi, 3.3mi and 2.8mi. The hiker can choose whether he or she would rather hike a longer distance or a greater elevation gain.

## Hike

From the dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and elevation 2940ft), proceed past the locked gate and hike up fire road 2N79 that climbs toward the saddle you can see overhead. After 0.6mi (about 15min) you arrive at a junction at  $34^{\circ}15.72'N$   $118^{\circ}11.43'W$  marked by a water tank a little distance away on the right. Here you connect with the Grizzly Flats Road. Take the left fork that doubles back toward the saddle (elevation 3410ft) that you should reach about 5min later. Here you will get a broad view to the north; Grizzly Flats is the grove of pine trees some distance directly below you and you may be able to see the Stonyvale parking area where you left the recovery vehicle.



*Left: 100ft rappel. Right: Two-step rappel (photo by Ken King).*

The fire road continues almost flat for a stretch as it passes a second saddle and, 40min from the start, arrives at a third saddle. Here, 1.7mi from the start at  $34^{\circ}15.68'N$   $118^{\circ}12.22'W$  and an elevation of 3300ft, the road divides again. The left fork descends to Grizzly Flats. Take the right fork that climbs gradually, performs one major switchback at 3510ft, and eventually, 3.6mi and 1hr 20 min from the start, arrives at another fire road junction at  $34^{\circ}15.09'N$   $118^{\circ}12.45'W$  and an elevation of 4010ft. The road you now join is the Mount Lukens Road that originates at the Forest Service station on the Angeles Crest Highway just a short distance above La Canada/Flintridge. It comes in from the left and continues on to the right toward Mount Lukens. You turn right and proceed along the road as it follows the ridge that eventually rises to the summit of Mount Lukens (elevation 5074ft). About 2hrs and 5.4mi from the start you will pass the junction with the spur road 2N79B at 4620ft. Beyond this junction the Mount Lukens road contours around to the south past a small summit before turning north to an abrupt switchback at  $34^{\circ}15.98'N$   $118^{\circ}13.85'W$ , 4790ft, 0.4mi from the preceding road junction and 5.8mi from the start. This is the drop-in point and you should reach it 2hrs 20min into the hike. Between you and the Big Tujunga far below is a rugged and precipitous descent of about 3000ft.

Begin the descent by following a rough use trail that contours off to the left from the drop-in switchback. After about 100yds you should be able to find a branch of the use-trail that begins a steep descent just to the east of a developing gully. Though steep, the descent through this wooded area is easy, earthy and brush-free. Soon you will find yourself in an open gully that gradually deepens and is the beginning of Silver-on-the-side. After descending 700ft you first encounter bedrock and, shortly thereafter at 3970ft elevation and 50min



*180ft rappel.*



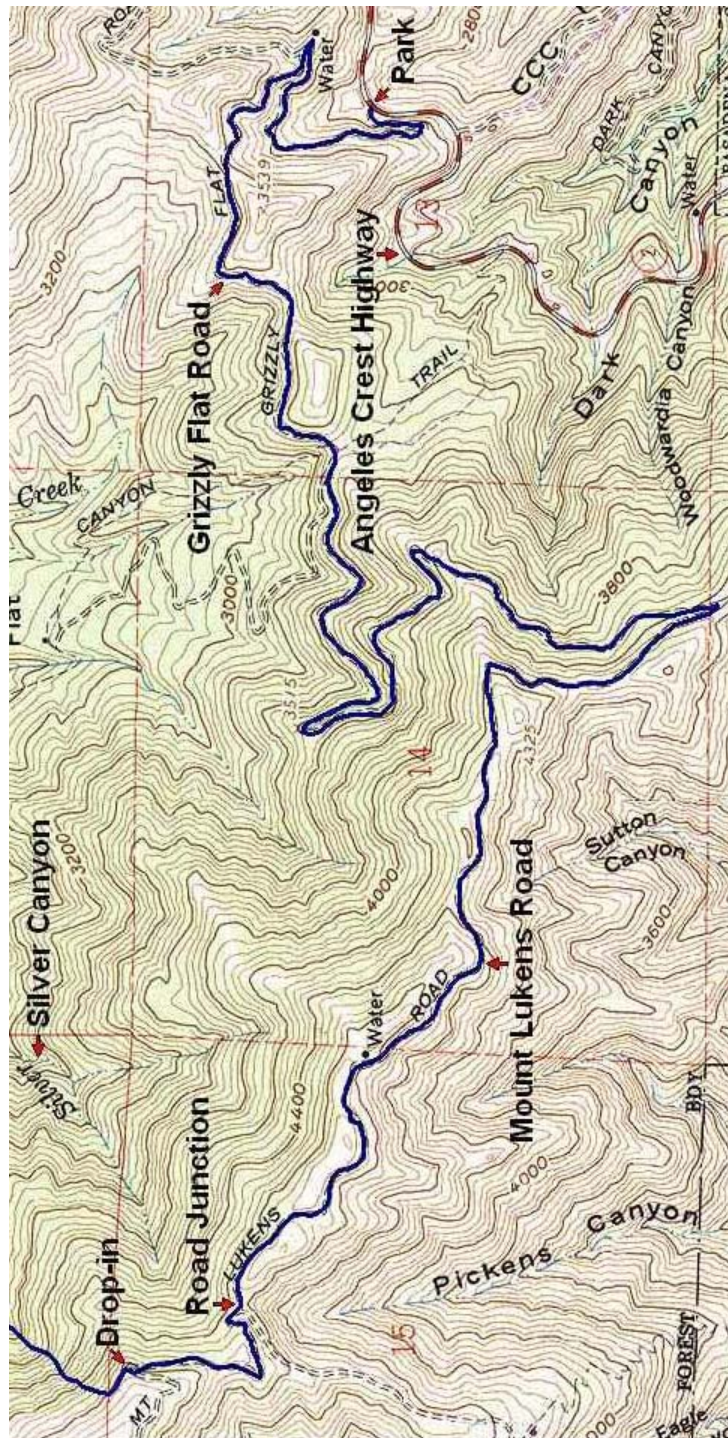
from the drop-in, you arrive at the top of the first technical obstacle, a small 20ft rappel from a tree anchor on the right. This is almost immediately followed by a larger, 40ft rappel from another tree anchor on the right. A number of easy downclimbs follow before you arrive at 3690ft at a larger, 50ft boulder descent where many may choose to rappel from a tree on the left. This is immediately followed by another drop of about 15ft where, again, some may choose a belay line or a rappel anchored from a tree high up on the right.

Beyond these obstacles, the gradient lessens and the going is easy for a lengthy section as you descend through 3300ft. This ends at 3210ft and about 2hrs from the drop-in (4hrs 20min from the start) when you suddenly arrive at a big drop-off. The first step is a 100ft vertical rappel from a tree anchor high on the right. This descends to a narrow slot with a small 15ft rappel from a bush anchor on the left, and, after some more downclimbs, leads to the top of a broad-lipped, 50ft rappel at 2930ft that is anchored by a bush on the right. This descends into a right-going slot that contains another 50ft rappel, a two-step drop that requires an anchor remake. The canyon then broadens out and over the next several hundred yards you pass through the extensive works of an operational marijuana farm at 34°16.39'N 118°13.04'W and an elevation of 2700ft.

Downstream there is a little bushwhacking to do until at 2530ft and 4hrs from the drop-in (6hrs 20min from the start) you come to a sloping and slippery slot that might be downclimbed under dry conditions but is better rappelled from a bush anchor on the right. From there it is a short way to the top of an awesome two-step drop through a hard bedrock layer at 2270ft. The first step is a 120ft vertical rappel from a manzanita bush high on the right. This descends to a broad cliff-ringed platform, the narrow edge of which leads to a huge 180ft vertical rappel down into a wooded glade. The anchor for this 180ft descent is a solid bush high up on the lefthand cliff though you might choose to back this up with a tie-in to another of the bushes near the lip. If water were flowing in the canyon these two big rappels could be very challenging indeed so caution should be exercised in this circumstance. There is a bypass route on the right that can be accessed by climbing up to the ridge and following a rough and steep trail from there down to the junction with Silver Canyon.

Immediately below the 180ft descent at 2100ft there is a straightforward two-step rappel consisting of a 15ft drop followed by a 20ft drop that can be anchored from a tree at the lip. From the bottom of this last rappel it is only 50yds to the junction with Silver Canyon and another 100yds to the exit into the Big Tujunga. You should reach this exit at 34°16.54'N 118°12.90'W about 5hrs 30min from the drop-in and 7hrs 50min from the morning start having covered a total of 7.2mi.

From the exit, cross the Big Tujunga river and find the trail on the far north side of the canyon. Turn left and follow the trail back to the parking area at Stonyvale where you left the return vehicle(s) at 34°17.08'N 118°13.39'W and an elevation of 1890ft. It should take about 8.5hrs to complete this 8.1mi hike.



Map of first part of Silver-on-the-side Hike





Map of second part of Silver-on-the-side Hike

## 3.4 Silver Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 9.2 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7.2 miles
- Elevation gain: 1680 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak, Pasadena
- Difficulties: 7 rappels including 2 over 100ft, much bouldering and down-climbing
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 150ft recovery cord, 60ft webbing, 6 rappel rings, harnesses
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Silver Canyon is one of those marvelous north-facing canyons in the San Gabriels that provides an exciting canyoneering adventure with a minimum of brush. It is a very pleasant wooded canyon for most of the way. From the ridgetop close to the summit of Mount Lukens it drops 2700ft into the Big Tujunga in just 1.3mi, and is therefore one of the most precipitous canyons in the San Gabriels. The descent requires 7 rappels including two over 120ft in height. Consequently, this adventure is only for the experienced canyoneer. It is also a long and tough hike that requires a full day and is, therefore, best in the summer or early fall. In the winter or spring, the streamflow could make the hike difficult and dangerous.

### Trailhead

For this one-way hike it is necessary to leave a return vehicle in the parking area at the Stonyvale Picnic Area in Big Tujunga Canyon. Drive up Big Tujunga Road and turn right onto the road to Vogel Flat. At the bottom of the hill, turn left and go to the parking lot at the end of the road ( $34^{\circ}17.08'N$   $118^{\circ}13.40'W$  and elevation 1840ft).

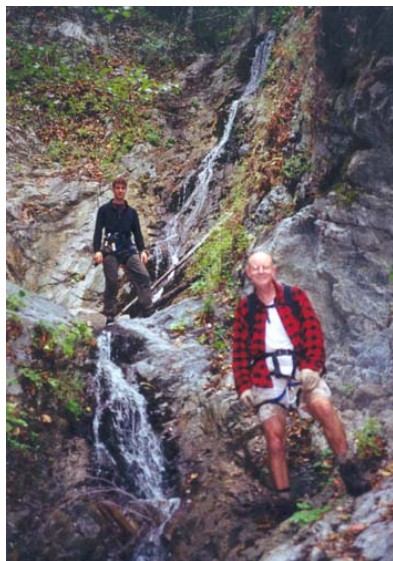
Then, to reach the trailhead, drive the other vehicle up the Big Tujunga Road to the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway. Turn right and drive to the junction with the Angeles Crest Highway at the Clear Creek Forest Service Station. Turn right and drive about 3mi down the Angeles Crest Highway to a place where a fire road climbs up from the road (it is about 6mi north of La Canada). As you go downhill, the Angeles Crest Highway makes a sweeping left turn at this point and there is a large dirt parking area on the right ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$ ). The fire road that starts here is labeled 2N79.

Parenthetically we note that many of canyons that descend the slopes of Mount Lukens, including Silver, Suicide, Sutton and Hall Beckley, have three

alternative approach routes, all of which provide access to the upper reaches of the Mount Lukens road. The first of these, included in the descriptions of the Silver and Suicide Canyon descents, starts on the Angeles Crest Highway at the 2N79 trailhead at  $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and an elevation of 2940ft. The second, included in the description of Hall Beckley Canyon, also begins on the Angeles Crest Highway but at the trailhead for the Dark Canyon trail at  $34^{\circ}15.35'N$   $118^{\circ}11.81'W$  and an elevation of 2730ft. The third, included in the description of Sutton Canyon, begins in Deukmejian Wilderness Park at  $34^{\circ}14.98'N$   $118^{\circ}15.18'W$  and an elevation of 2335ft. The elevation gains up to the intersection of 2N76B and the Mount Lukens road (at  $34^{\circ}15.81'N$   $118^{\circ}13.74'W$ , near the drop in for Silver Canyon) are respectively 1680ft, 1890ft and 2285ft; however the distances are respectively 5.4mi, 3.3mi and 2.8mi. The hiker can choose whether he or she would rather hike a longer distance or a greater elevation gain.

## Hike

From the dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and elevation 2940ft), proceed past the locked gate and hike up fire road 2N79 that climbs toward the saddle you can see overhead. After 0.6mi (about 15min) you arrive at a junction at  $34^{\circ}15.72'N$   $118^{\circ}11.43'W$  marked by a water tank a little distance away on the right. Here you connect with the Grizzly Flats Road. Take the left fork that doubles back toward the saddle (elevation 3410ft) that you should reach about 5min later. Here you will get a broad view to the north; Grizzly Flats is the grove of pine trees some distance directly below you and you may be able



*Left: The fifth rappel. Right: The sixth rappel.*



to see the Stonyvale parking area where you left the recovery vehicle.

The fire road continues almost flat for a stretch as it passes a second saddle and, 40min from the start, arrives at a third saddle. Here, 1.7mi from the start at 34°15.68'N 118°12.22'W and an elevation of 3300ft, the road divides again. The left fork descends to Grizzly Flats. Take the right fork that climbs gradually, performs one major switchback at 3510ft, and eventually, 3.6mi and 1hr 20 min from the start, arrives at another fire road junction at 34°15.09'N 118°12.45'W and an elevation of 4010ft. The road you now join is the Mount Lukens Road that originates at the Forest Service station on the Angeles Crest Highway just a short distance above La Canada/Flintridge. It comes in from the left and continues on to the right toward Mount Lukens. You turn right and proceed along the road as it follows the ridge that eventually rises to the summit of Mount Lukens. About 2hrs from the start you will arrive at a saddle at 4600ft with a small water tank. This tank is not easy to spot; it is above you on the right. The drop-in to Silver Canyon (34°15.65'N 118°13.35'W) is at an obvious saddle at 4620ft about 100yds beyond the water tank and 4.9mi from the start. The road turns left here and the Silver Canyon gully drops down steeply from the edge of the road.

Between you and the Big Tujunga far below is a rugged and precipitous descent totaling 2680ft. This begins as soon as you leave the saddle. Though there are signs of passage by people or animals, you must push through the bushes in places. However, if you stay close to the developing gully, you will soon find brush-free passage and begin a long and steep descent in the rocky but normally dry streambed. About 1hr 15min from the drop-in at an elevation of 3440ft a substantial gully that is not indicated on the map enters from the right. Shortly thereafter, at 34°16.07'N 118°13.33'W and an elevation of 3160ft, you come to a junction that does show on the topo map. Here you join a large gully entering on the left. In fact, that gully is the main branch of Silver Creek and usually has some flowing water. From there you continue on down the wooded canyon and at 3040ft (about 3hr from the drop-in saddle) you arrive at the first rappel. Here the stream drops through two vertical steps, the upper one being about 20ft and the lower about 60ft. There are signs of a trail contouring over to a large gully on the left where there may be a downclimbing route but we did not explore that option. The rappel itself has a solid tree anchor in midstream at the lip and is an easy descent to the wooded canyon below.

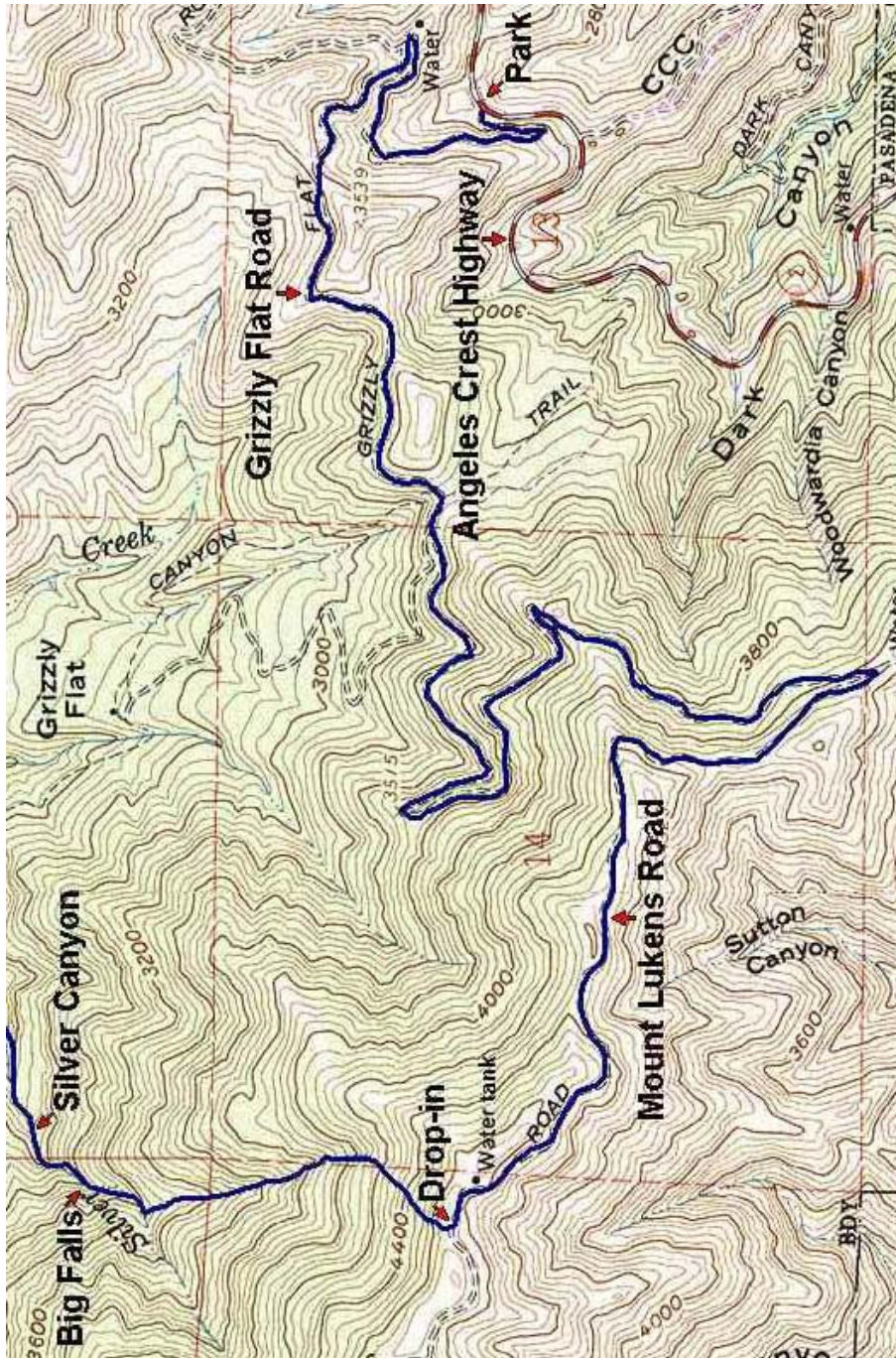
It is only a short way from this first rappel to the second and third. Together these allow passage of one of the two major obstacles in Silver Canyon. The second rappel is a 70ft vertical drop for which we used a downed tree near the lip as the anchor. This lands you on a flat platform between the second and third rappels. The third rappel drops down about 120ft through an inclined rocky gorge. This requires a single rappel that is best anchored from a tree a short way up the slope on the left. The advantage of this over other possible tree anchors is that you can then see the anchor from the bottom during rope recovery. That recovery might otherwise prove tricky. We reached the bottom of the third rappel (elevation 2760ft) about 4hr after leaving the drop-in saddle.

After this major obstacle, there is a long section in which the canyon narrows considerably, in places to a water-filled slot. However, there are no difficult obstacles until you come to small, 30ft waterfall (at 2400ft) that can be down-climbed just to the right of the stream but is probably best rappeled along the same route (there are many small tree anchors). Not far beyond this at 2340ft is a 45ft waterfall that definitely requires a rappel (the fifth) and, as with almost all the rappels in this canyon, has a convenient tree anchor at the lip.

Another short section of canyon brings you to the top (at 2220ft elevation) of the sixth and penultimate waterfall in Silver Canyon. This is a very pretty 75ft vertical cascade covered in moss particularly near the top. It is anchored by a stout tree close to the lip. Just beyond the bottom of that waterfall is the top of the last and most difficult rappel in this adventure. It is a 120ft single rappel in two stages. First you drop about 20ft onto a substantial but anchorless platform. Viewed from above the stream then disappears over a narrow lip and turns left so that you cannot see the bottom. What you don't see is that the second drop is a vertical 100ft to the canyon floor. Since the rope recovery at the bottom must negotiate this left turn it is important to set up the single rappel carefully and for the last rappeler to ensure that the ropes are not twisted.

You should reach the base of this last waterfall (elevation 2080ft) about 6.5hr after leaving the drop-in saddle. From here it is an easy 15min hike to the exit from Silver Canyon (34°16.51'N 118°12.88'W and elevation 1920ft). At that point you will have descended 2680ft from the drop-in saddle over a distance of 1.3mi in a little under 7hrs. It is one of the most precipitous descents in all of the San Gabriels.

As you come to the end of Silver Canyon and emerge into Big Tujunga, veer right and you will immediately encounter the developed trail that climbs up behind your right shoulder to Grizzly Flats. You follow the trail in the opposite direction. Though the route to the car park is downstream to the left, it is easier to follow the trail as it goes around to the right. After about 50yds you then fork left, cross the river (Mill Creek) and proceed downstream along the broad trail on the north side of the canyon bottom. It is a 0.9mi hike back to the Stonyvale parking area.



Map of first part of Silver Canyon Hike





Map of second part of Silver Canyon Hike

## 3.5 Vasquez Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5 miles
- Elevation gain: 860 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Some small but challenging rappels, one 60ft rappel and much wading
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 120ft rope, two rappel rings and 20ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Legend has it that the famous bandit, Tiburcio Vasquez, and his gang, after a 1874 raid on a ranch in the San Gabriel valley, attempted to evade the sheriff and his posse by riding up the Arroyo Seco, up Dark Canyon to a saddle and then descending Vasquez Creek to Big Tujunga Canyon. They then rode down the Big Tujunga and escaped. However, as this adventure will demonstrate, there are some minor difficulties with this story for it is impossible to negotiate the canyon of Vasquez Creek aboard a horse due to the waterfalls that bar the way. In fact, it seems likely that Vasquez probably followed an old Indian trail that may be the same as the trail we will hike during the first part of this adventure.

This attractive, intermediate adventure hike introduces you to a canyon on the precipitous north-facing slope of Mount Lukens. Steep north-running canyons are relatively rare in the San Gabriels and the adventurer will notice several features that distinguish them. The slopes (and to a lesser degree the canyons) are more heavily wooded leading to shadier streamsides. This, in turn, leads to a different canyon foliage, in the present case to abundant ferns. These make Vasquez Canyon more like a rain-forest canyon than a desert canyon. The hike involves about five rappels, mostly in the 20ft range. These are generally close to or in the stream and so are not straightforward. However, the one large rappel (about 60ft) is dry and very enjoyable. It is inevitable that you will get very wet in this canyon and so the hike is best undertaken on a warm summer day.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the parking area at Stonyvale Picnic Area in Big Tujunga Canyon. Drive up Big Tujunga Road and turn right onto the road



to Vogel Flat. At the bottom of the hill, turn left and go to the parking lot at the end of the road (at 34°17.08'N 118°13.40'W and elevation 1840ft).

## Hike

The first part of this adventure is an easy hike along the canyon bottom, traveling upstream. You must cross the river in several places and therefore you should be warned that this can be difficult and dangerous at times of high water. You cross to the south side of the river just east (upstream) of the parking lot and then proceed across a broad gravel flat. Near the end of this gravel flat there is a trail fork and you should go left, recrossing the stream and soon accessing a broad, well-worn trail that generally proceeds upstream on the north side of the river. If, in error, you take the right fork at the end of the gravel flat you will be led to a much slower trail on the south side of the river; then traverse across to the trail on the north side.

As you walk, try and distinguish the large and precipitous canyons that cascade down the north slope of Mount Lukens and enter Big Tujunga on its south side. About 0.35mi from the parking lot Big Tujunga makes a big left turn (as you walk upstream) and Suicide Canyon enters in the recess formed on the south side by this turn. In a very similar maneuver about 0.65mi from the start, Big Tujunga makes another big left turn and Silver Canyon enters in this recess. The trail becomes indistinct here but you should cross to the south side of the river and come to a substantial trail on a bench south of the river and just east of Silver Canyon. To reach the maintained trail to Grizzly Flat you will probably have to backtrack along this south side trail for about 100yds to



*Junction falls.*

find (about 30min from the trailhead) the Grizzly Flat trail immediately west of the Silver Canyon opening (at 34°16.56'N 118°12.84'W and elevation 1940ft).

Follow the Grizzly Flat trail as it climbs the ridge separating Silver Canyon and Vasquez Creek. At about 2440ft (and 1hr from the start) you arrive at a small saddle with a dramatic view into the precipitous Silver Canyon. Then the trail contours to the east into Vasquez Canyon, or more precisely an unnamed tributary that we will encounter later in this hike. Soon the pine forest on Grizzly Flat will be visible on the other side of this gully and the trail contours around the head of the gully and along to a point (elevation 2700ft) where it meets the end of the fire road that comes down to Grizzly Flat from the ridge above. The fire road leads to the Angeles Crest Highway that lies just on the other side of the ridge. You should reach Grizzly Flat about 1hr 15min from the start.

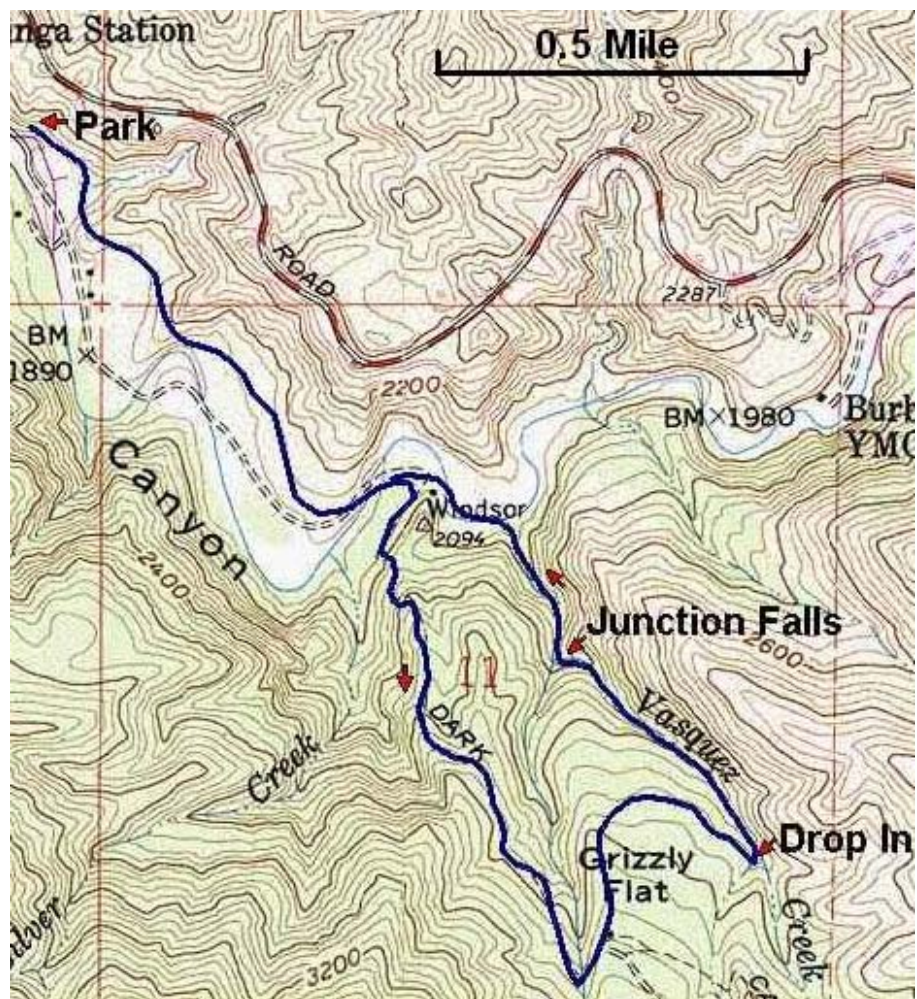
Grizzly Flat is a large plantation of fir trees on a sloping bench on the west side of Vasquez Creek. It is criss-crossed with old fire and maintenance roads that run roughly NE-SW. From the point where the trail emerges to meet the main fire-road (at 34°16.09'N 118°12.53'W), it is best to head north, following a faint use-trail along a small ridge on the western edge of the Flats. From here you should see the trail you climbed up on the other side of the unnamed gully. Shortly you will then descend along the end of this ridge onto the flatter part of the forest. Continue in a northerly direction, perhaps veering slightly to the east until you can see the steep slope on the other side of Vasquez Creek directly ahead of you. The edge of the canyon within which the Creek runs is fairly distinct and when you reach this edge you will recognize that slope between you and the stream is steep and becomes vertical some distance below you. Then you need to walk east until the canyon wall decreases in height and steepness and allows you to drop down to the stream. You should reach the drop in point (at 34°16.19'N 118°12.31'W and elevation 2440ft) about 1hr 30min into the hike.

The canyon in the vicinity of the drop in point is very narrow and progress downstream requires the negotiation of numerous small chutes and waterfalls. Soon, you will arrive at a more substantial 20ft waterfall that necessitates a rappel using a small tree on the right as the anchor. Another 15ft rappel follows immediately and, again, there is a convenient tree growing out of the cliff on the right that provides a convenient anchor. About 30yds further and you come to the third of this series of small rappels. This is a longer chute dropping about 20ft with a number of downed trees lining its sides. The roots of one of these large trees provides an anchor.

After this upper section, the canyon broadens a little and flattens out and the going is easier for several hundred yards before you suddenly arrive at the junction of Vasquez Creek and the previously mentioned, unnamed gully (at 34°16.43'N 118°12.59'W and elevation 2210ft). Here both streams cascade down impressive waterfalls just before they merge creating an attractive and interesting junction. We called these Junction Falls. The descent along Vasquez Creek requires two rappels. The first utilizes a large tree a little upstream of the lip on the left bank of the stream and allows you to descend two small cascades (15ft

and 5ft) to the top of the main waterfall. Be warned that the small pool between the 15ft and the 5ft is, unexpectedly, chest deep though you can avoid excessive submergence by straddling the pool. Having negotiated this preliminary rappel, you arrive at the lip of the 60ft rappel. For this there are two small trees on the left that provide excellent anchors for a dry rappel down the rock face several yards to the left of the water. You should reach the bottom (elevation 2100ft) about 5hrs after you started out.

Between the bottom of Junction Falls and the point where the canyon joins the Big Tujunga (at  $34^{\circ}16.58'N$   $118^{\circ}12.65'W$ ), there are no substantial obstacles and this section can be covered in 20min. Turn left as you exit Vasquez Creek and follow the water (or waterbed) in the Big Tujunga for about 100yds until the stream turns right. The nice pool at this point makes for a relaxing rest stop. When you resume hiking, follow the left wall of the canyon as it turns left and you will soon rejoin the bench from which you accessed the Grizzly Flats trail earlier in the day. From here you retrace your steps back to the parking lot ( $34^{\circ}17.08'N$   $118^{\circ}13.40'W$ ).



Map of Vasquez Creek Hike

## 3.6 Ganja Gulch

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.8 miles
- Elevation gain: 730 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Bushwhacking and 4 or 5 rappels up to 100ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 200ft rope, 3 rappel rings and 20ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Ganja Gulch, like its neighbors Mary Jane and Vasquez, is a north-facing canyon in the Big Tujunga region that provides an modest canyoneering adventure with some rappels. Access to the canyon requires some bushwhacking effort. However, once that challenge is surmounted, the canyon itself is relatively brush-free and provides a pleasant wooded canyoneering experience with 4 or 5 straight-forward rappels only one of which is of any substantial size (100ft).

At the conclusion of the descent you must cross the Big Tujunga River several times in order to get back to your return vehicle and this might be problematic in the winter or spring after heavy rains (though the flow is controlled by the dam just upstream and can be unpredictable). It would therefore be wise to check the river when you deposit the return vehicle prior to setting out in the morning. Other than this constraint, the hike could be undertaken almost any time during the year.

### Trailhead

For this one-way hike it is necessary to leave a return vehicle in the parking area at the Stonyvale Picnic Area in Big Tujunga Canyon. Drive up Big Tujunga Road and turn right onto the road to Vogel Flat. At the bottom of the hill, turn left and go to the parking lot at the end of the road (34°17.08'N 118°13.40'W and elevation 1840ft). Park the return vehicle(s) here.

Then drive 5.7mi east on Big Tujunga Canyon Road to its junction with the Angeles Forest Highway where you should turn right and proceed 3.8mi to the Clear Creek junction with the Angeles Crest Highway. Turn right here and proceed down the Angeles Crest Highway for 3.2mi to a place where a fire road climbs up from the road (it is about 6mi north of La Canada). As you go downhill, the Angeles Crest Highway makes a sweeping left turn at this point



and there is a large dirt parking area on the right ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$ ). The fire road that starts here is labeled 2N79.

## Hike

From the dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and elevation 2940ft), proceed past the locked gate and hike up fire road 2N79. After 0.6mi (about 15min) you arrive at a fireroad junction at  $34^{\circ}15.72'N$   $118^{\circ}11.43'W$  marked by a water tank a little distance away on the right. Take the right fork and proceed about 0.3mi up the road to a point where you can see a low saddle above you on the left. Leave the road here by way of a rough trail through the brush and climb up to the saddle at  $34^{\circ}15.95'N$   $118^{\circ}11.50'W$  and an elevation of 3480ft. A fairly brush-free firebreak runs north up the mountain from this saddle and you should hike a short way up this firebreak while watching for a trail that leaves the firebreak and contours left along the remains of an old, overgrown fireroad. This trail branches off the firebreak at  $34^{\circ}16.05'N$   $118^{\circ}11.47'W$  and an elevation of 3620ft and may be marked by an orange ribbon. Contouring northwest this trail intersects another steep ridge with another firebreak at  $34^{\circ}16.16'N$   $118^{\circ}11.64'W$  and an elevation of 3670ft. From this point there is a spectacular view of Mount Lukens to the south and of the lower Big Tujunga off to the west.

At this view point, take a good look around and assess two options only one of which we have explored. The unexplored but probably preferable option is to follow a use-trail that contours almost due east into the head of the canyon; a grove of pine trees there should provide a route down into the canyon. The



*Left: 30ft rappel in Ganja Gulch. Right: Last rappel in Ganja Gulch (photo by Ken King).*

alternative that we followed was to hike down the open firebreak for about 170ft of descent from which point (marked by a cairn) we followed an animal trail that dropped down through thick brush into the canyon. This route required some substantial bushwhacking though the trail we cut should last for some years. That descent placed us in the open canyon at about  $34^{\circ}16.25'N$   $118^{\circ}11.76'W$  and an elevation of 3050ft. You should reach this point about 1.5hrs and 1.5mi after the start. Note that the first option is preferable since it encounters a 25ft rappel in the canyon at an elevation of about 3250ft.

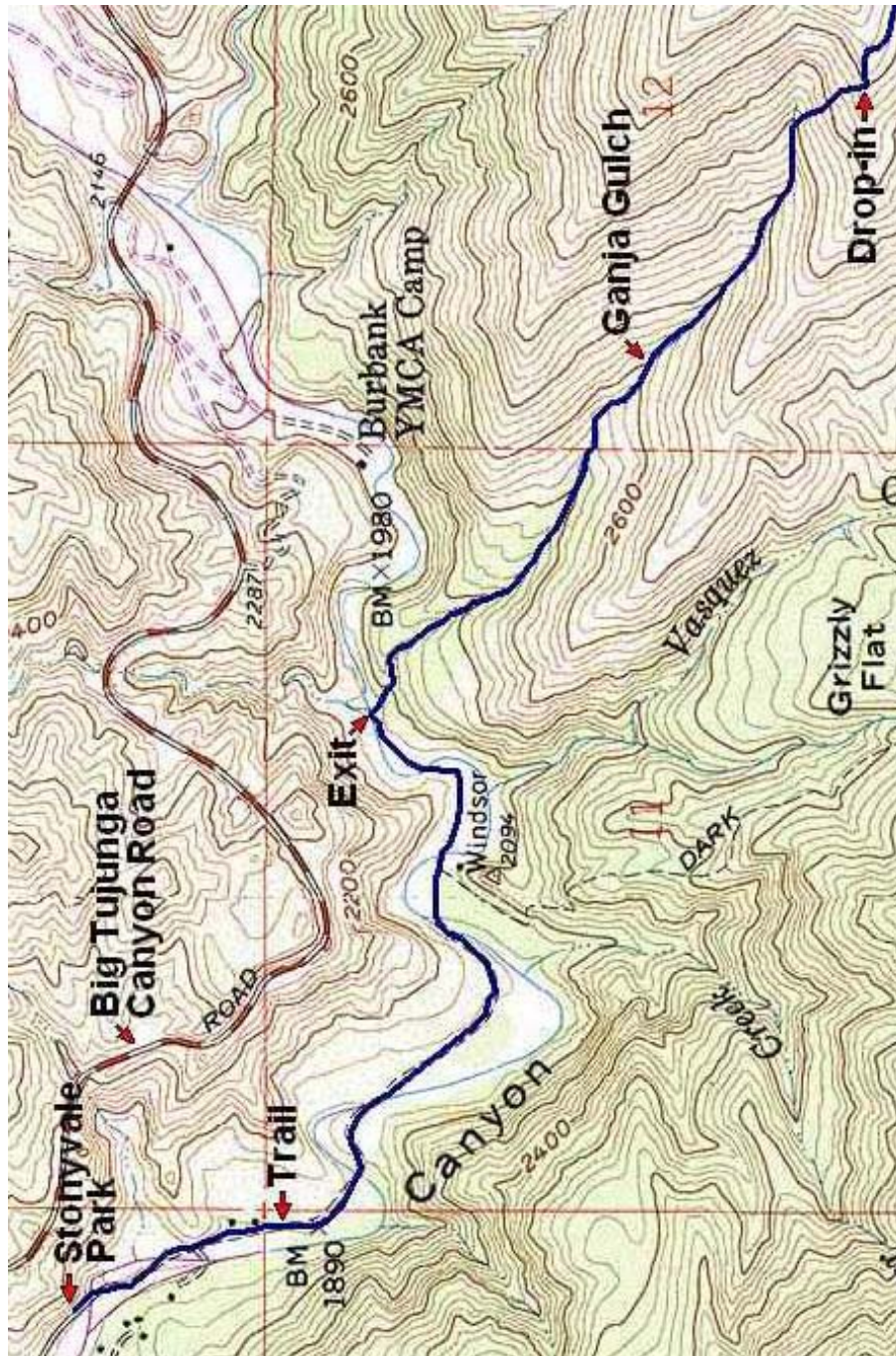
Resuming the descent of the canyon, the going is straightforward, brush-free and with only a few downclimbs. After a few minutes, at 2990ft you will encounter a small, 20ft rappel anchored by a tree on the left. A similar obstacle occurs at 2930ft anchored this time by a tree high on the left. Thereafter there is a long stretch of wooded, open canyon with few obstacles. Finally, about 3hrs 15min from the start at 2280ft you come to a sloping 30ft rappel that can be anchored from a tree high on the right. About 50min later at an elevation of 2000ft you will arrive at the top of the last rappel. This blind drop is anchored by a stout bush on the right and consists of a small 15ft drop down into a slot ledge followed by a vertical 60ft drop into a 3ft deep pothole and then by a further 10ft drop. This would be a good place for a guided rappel so that most of the party could avoid the pothole; some large trees are well-placed for the lower anchor of the guided rappel.

The exit from Ganja Gulch is just a few yards downstream from this last rappel and you should arrive in the Big Tujunga at  $34^{\circ}16.73'N$   $118^{\circ}12.55'W$  and an elevation of 1940ft about 4hrs 40min from the start having traveled 2.5mi. Turn left here and start downstream alongside the river. Initially there is not much of a trail but once past Vasquez Creek the trail on the north side of the river is well developed. You should come to the Stonyvale parking area at  $34^{\circ}17.07'N$   $118^{\circ}13.37'W$  and an elevation of 1840ft about 5.5hrs from the start having traveled 3.8mi.



Map of first part of Ganja Gulch Hike





Map of second part of Ganja Gulch Hike

## 3.7 Left Fork of Fusier Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.4 miles
- Elevation gain: 1010 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Two moderate rappels of about 50ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 160ft rope, two rappel rings, 20ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A II

This pleasant, short canyoneering adventure descends the left fork of Fusier Canyon from the Condor Peak Trail down to Big Tujunga Canyon Road. It is a short hike with just two rappels of about 50ft and could be done anytime of the year. Though hot and waterless in the summer there is sufficient shade to make it tolerable.

Note that this hike could be conveniently combined with a descent of the lower section of Fusier Canyon and thus make for a comfortable day of canyoneering.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a short car shuttle or the placement of a bicycle for return to the start. First drive up Big Tujunga Canyon Road to the marked trailhead that is 0.9mi south of the bridge over the Big Tujunga just below the reservoir. This trailhead is at 34°16.96'N 118°12.61'W and an elevation of 2310ft. Leave either a return vehicle there or stash a bicycle for the return along the road after completion of the hike.

Then drive 1.3mi west along Big Tujunga Canyon Road to a point about 100yds east of the junction with the Vogel Flats Road. Park in a turnout out on the south side of the road at 34°17.23'N 118°13.47'W and an elevation of 2080ft.

### Hike

For such a substantial route, the start of the trail (known as the Vogel Flat Trail) is quite obscure. It is not marked on the topo map though other trail maps do feature it. But it is also hard to find where it starts. From the parked vehicle(s) just about 100yds east of the junction with the Vogel Flats Road (at



34°17.23'N 118°13.47'W and an elevation of 2080ft) cross to the north side of Big Tujunga Canyon Road and look for an entrance in the bushes via a shallow depression. This opening is close to a mile marker that reads 4.5. Once on the trail it is well-maintained and easy to follow. It climbs steeply to a junction 0.4mi from the start at 2250ft. Here the Vogel Flat Trail meets the Condor Peak Trail that begins where you parked the return vehicle. Turn left at the junction and continue up the Condor Peak Trail as it switchbacks up the ridge between Vogel and Fusier Canyons. Eventually, the trail reaches a notable and dramatic saddle overlooking the head of the left fork of Fusier Canyon at 34°17.89'N 118°12.79'W, an elevation of 3060ft and 2.2mi from the start. You should reach this drop-in point about 1hr after setting out.

The drop-in to the Left Fork of Fusier Canyon represents the first of two rappels in this hike. For an anchor we used webbing around a bush on the far side of the saddle and descended about 45ft down a loose sandy slope into a steep wash. From there it is a steep and loose descent into the depths of the Left Fork with a little bushwhacking in places. After about 40min you will arrive at the top of the second rappel at an elevation of 2800ft. This is a clean, vertical 50ft drop that may have water flow in the winter but is dry in the summer. There are several small bush anchors on the right side but they need a human backup.

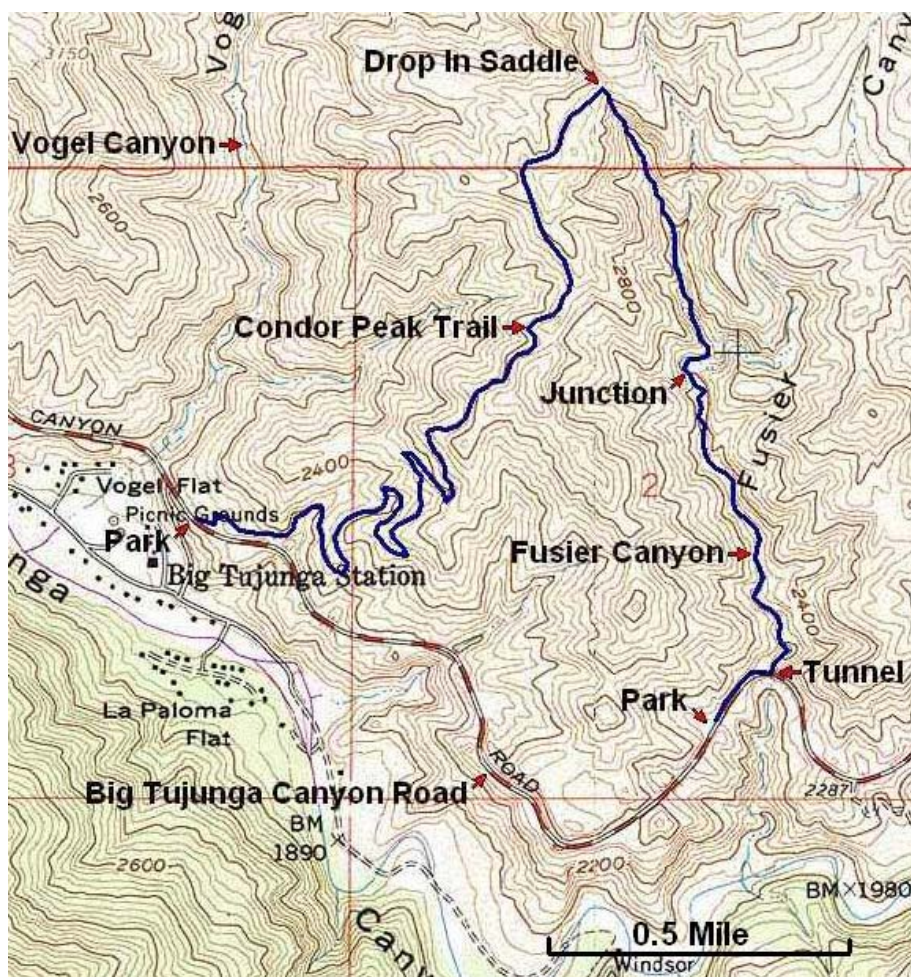
Downstream of this second rappel, the canyon flattens out and there is more shady foliage. At 2380ft and 2hr 45min from the start you should come to two small 10ft downclimbs one after the other, followed immediately by the confluence with the main fork of Fusier Canyon that comes in on the left. This confluence at 34°17.49'N 118°12.62'W is about 2.6mi and 2hr 50min from the start. Note that there is a 18ft dryfall just a few yards up the main fork from



*Left: Dropping into the Left Fork. Right: Second rappel.*

the confluence.

Downstream of the confluence the canyon is broader and shadier with a little water in places and some very pretty groves. A large branch enters on the left at 2310ft and there is a nice dryfall on the right at 2240ft. Finally after several sharp canyon turns you will encounter the steel structure that is all that remains of an old road bridge and just beyond it the tunnel that carries the runoff in Fusier under the Big Tujunga Canyon Road. Turn right before the entrance and the use trail will take you up to the road. You should reach this point at 34°17.04'N 118°12.50'W and an elevation of 2230ft about 3.5hrs and 3.4mi from the start. The trailhead where you left the return vehicle (or stashed the bicycle) is just about 100yds up the road to the west.



Map of Left Fork of Fusier Canyon Hike

## 3.8 Lower Fusier Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 2 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.9 miles
- Elevation gain: 220 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Two moderate rappels of about 70ft, some swimming
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 180ft rope, two rappel rings, 20ft webbing and drybags
- ACA Rating: 3A I

This pleasant, short canyoneering adventure descends the lower section of Fusier Canyon into the Big Tujunga and then returns to the road by hiking up the Big Tujunga to the road bridge just downstream of Big Tujunga Dam. It is a lovely shaded little canyon and well-suited for almost anytime in the year though it could be more challenging in swiftwater after winter rains. Even in the summer the shade and the cool pools make for a pleasant outing. The hike up the lovely Big Tujunga beside Mill Creek is also very pleasant. However there are times after winter rains when crossing Mill Creek could be very dangerous. Thus it would be wise to check out the state of Mill Creek from the bridge just downstream of the Big Tujunga Dam before embarking on this adventure.

At other times when Mill Creek is fordable, this is a good canyon for the beginner though there may be times when the pool at the bottom of the second rappel may be deep enough to require a swimming disconnect.

Note that this hike could be conveniently combined with a descent of the lower section of Mary Jane Canyon and thus make for a comfortable day of canyoneering.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the parking area at the southwest end of the bridge along Big Tujunga Canyon Road just downstream of Big Tujunga Dam. The coordinates are 34°17.02'N 118°11.87'W and the elevation is 2100ft. This is where you should leave the return vehicles. Then drive west on Big Tujunga Canyon Road for 0.85mi to one of either two small turnouts just west of where the road crosses Fusier Canyon and near mile marker 590. Park here at 34°17.03'N 118°12.52'W and an elevation of 2240ft.



## Hike

From the parked vehicle(s) ( $34^{\circ}17.03'N$   $118^{\circ}12.52'W$  and an elevation of 2240ft), hike down the use trail into the canyon bottom just upstream (north) of the road crossing embankment and proceed through the drainage tunnel under the road to the south side. The first rappel is just beyond the exit from the drainage tunnel. It descends a near vertical 70ft using a webbing anchor in the streambed around two small trees. Watch for loose rock on the descent.

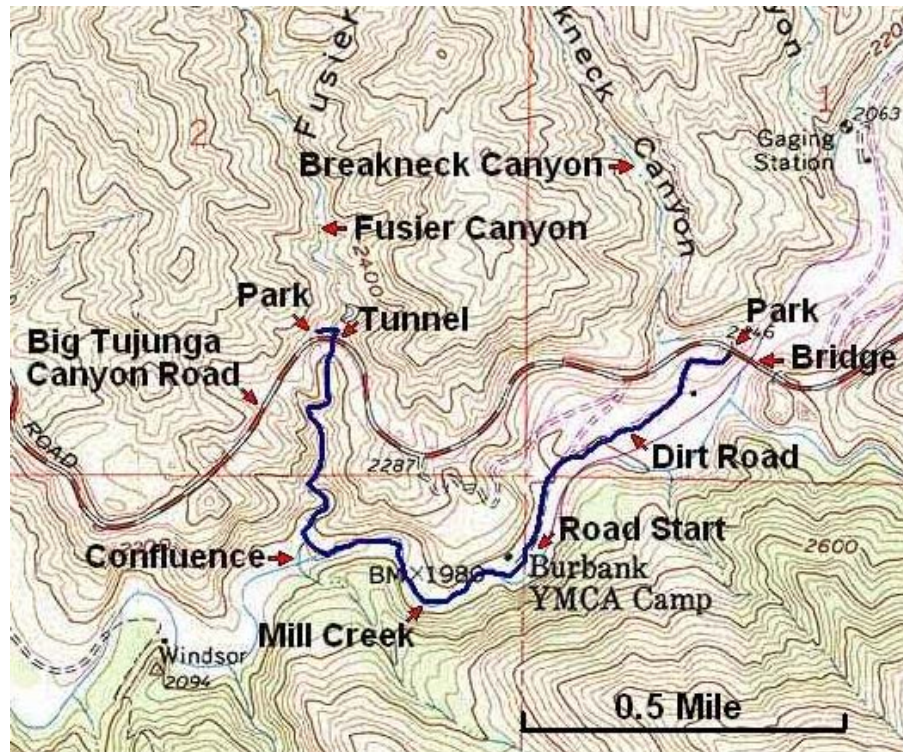
You descend into a verdant little canyon with lots of shade. The going is fairly easy for about 600yds after which, quite abruptly, you come to the top of the second rappel, a 60ft drop into a cliff-lined pothole with year-round water. You should reach this point about 1hr from the start. The anchor is a stout bush off to the right and you descend into the pool that is usually sandy-bottomed and 3-4ft deep. Another, deeper pool just around the corner usually requires swimming and there are other pools downstream that may also require swimming.

It is not far from the second rappel to the point where the canyon emerges into the Big Tujunga at  $34^{\circ}16.73'N$   $118^{\circ}12.55'W$  and elevation of 1940ft; here you should be about 1.5hr and 0.46mi from the start of the hike. At this confluence, the Big Tujunga and Mill Creek make a lovely, shaded spot for a rest especially on a hot summer day. Resuming your hike, turn upstream and follow the use trail (usually found on the benches on either side of the river) for about 0.4mi and you will come to a large (optional) swimming hole and, just beyond it, the beginning of the dirt roads built in this area during the construction of Big Tujunga Dam. The dirt road starts at  $34^{\circ}16.73'N$   $118^{\circ}12.19'W$  and elevation of 1980ft and climbs the left wall of the canyon to meet the Big Tujunga Canyon



*Left: First rappel. Right: Second rappel.*

Road just to the north of the road bridge. This is where you should have left the return vehicle at 34°17.02'N 118°11.87'W and an elevation of 2100ft. You should reach the end 1.35mi and 2hrs from the start.



Map of Lower Fusier Canyon Hike



## 3.9 Mary Jane Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 1200 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Navigation, bushwhacking and 10 rappels up to 120ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 200ft rope, 100ft rope, 10 rappel rings and 150ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Mary Jane Canyon, like its neighbors Vasquez, Silver and Suicide Canyon, is a north-facing canyon in the Big Tujunga region that provides an exciting canyoneering adventure with many rappels. Unlike those neighbors access to the top presents a navigational challenge as well as a serious bushwhacking effort. However, once those challenges are surmounted, the canyon itself is relatively brush-free and provides a very pleasant wooded canyoneering environment with about ten straightforward rappels with one inclined 120ft drop and one vertical 80ft drop.



*View from the ridge.*

At the conclusion of the descent you must cross the Big Tujunga River in order to get back to your return vehicle and this might be problematic in the winter or spring after heavy rains (though the flow is controlled by the dam just upstream and can be unpredictable). It would therefore be wise to check the river when you deposit the return vehicle prior to setting out in the morning. Other than this constraint, the hike could be undertaken almost any time during the year though it might be too hot in the summer.

## Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. First drive to the parking area at the southwest end of the bridge on Big Tujunga Canyon Road just downstream of Big Tujunga Dam. The coordinates are 34°17.02'N 118°11.85'W and the elevation is 2150ft. This is where you should leave the return vehicle(s). Then drive 3.1mi east on Big Tujunga Canyon Road to its junction with the Angeles Forest Highway where you should turn right and proceed 3.8mi to the Clear Creek junction with the Angeles Crest Highway. Turn right here and proceed down the Angeles Crest Highway for 3.2mi to a place where a fire road climbs up from the road (it is about 6mi north of La Canada). As you go downhill, the Angeles Crest Highway makes a sweeping left turn at this point and there is a large dirt parking area on the right (34°15.62'N 118°11.54'W). The fire road that starts here is labeled 2N79.

## Hike

From the dirt parking area (34°15.62'N 118°11.54'W and elevation 2940ft), proceed past the locked gate and hike up fire road 2N79. After 0.6mi (about 15min) you arrive at a fireroad junction at 34°15.72'N 118°11.43'W marked by a water tank a little distance away on the right. Take the right fork and proceed about 0.3mi up the road to a point where you can see a low saddle above you on the left. Leave the road here by way of a rough trail through the brush and climb up to the saddle at 34°15.95'N 118°11.50'W and an elevation of 3480ft. A fairly brush-free firebreak runs north up the mountain from this saddle and you should hike a short way up this firebreak while watching for a trail that leaves the firebreak and contours left along the remains of an old, overgrown fireroad. This trail branches off the firebreak at 34°16.05'N 118°11.47'W and an elevation of 3620ft and may be marked by an orange ribbon. Contouring northwest this trail intersects another steep ridge with another firebreak at 34°16.16'N 118°11.64'W and an elevation of 3670ft. From this point there is a spectacular view of Mount Lukens to the south and of the lower Big Tujunga off to the west. From here, hike the rough use-trail up this steep firebreak all the way to the ridge top at 34°16.26'N 118°11.45'W and an elevation of 4140ft.

You should arrive at the ridge top about 1.5mi and 1hr 20min from the morning start. This is where the primary challenge of this adventure begins for one must negotiate thick brush ahead and navigate down into the head of Mary Jane Canyon. A good GPS is of value in this effort for it is hard to maintain

your direction in the thick brush. As far as possible, it is advisable to try to follow the trail that our group cut in Dec. 2006. The trail begins by following the ridge top down for about 100yds where the really thick brush begins and then gradually veers right down the east side of the ridge. Fortunately the brush thins as you descend and the going becomes much easier as you enter a forested area. If you managed to follow our trail then it will lead directly into the gully at the start of Mary Jane Canyon. This gully is earthy and brush-free, making for a rapid and unimpeded descent in marked contrast to conditions on the ridge just a brief time before. This easy going continues as you descend through 3500ft and then 3000ft. Finally at an elevation of 2950ft and 3hrs from the morning start you rather abruptly arrive at the top of the first series of rappels.

This first technical challenge in Mary Jane Canyon consists of a long series of steps that can be descended in two or three rappels. The first short drop is a 10ft rappel from a tree anchor on the left side a little way back from the lip. This leads to a shelf with a tree on the right that can be used to anchor a 50ft rappel down to another shelf where another tree on the right anchors another 50ft rappel to the bottom of this series of steps. This is followed by a short section of hiking during which a small gully comes in on the left at 2770ft. Then at 2740ft there is a series of slide/downclimbs where some may need a reassuring belay and, a short time later, a single 15ft rappel from a tree anchor high on the left. Another short hike down to 2470ft will bring you to the top of an inclined 50ft climbdown/rappel that is probably best rappeled using the tree anchor on the right. Just downstream you arrive at the top of the last rappel before the major Mary Jane confluence. This is a 30ft rappel from a tree anchor on the right and it drops you down to the confluence where a major tributary of Mary Jane Canyon enters from the left. You should reach this confluence at



*Left: Second rappel. Right: Penultimate rappel.*

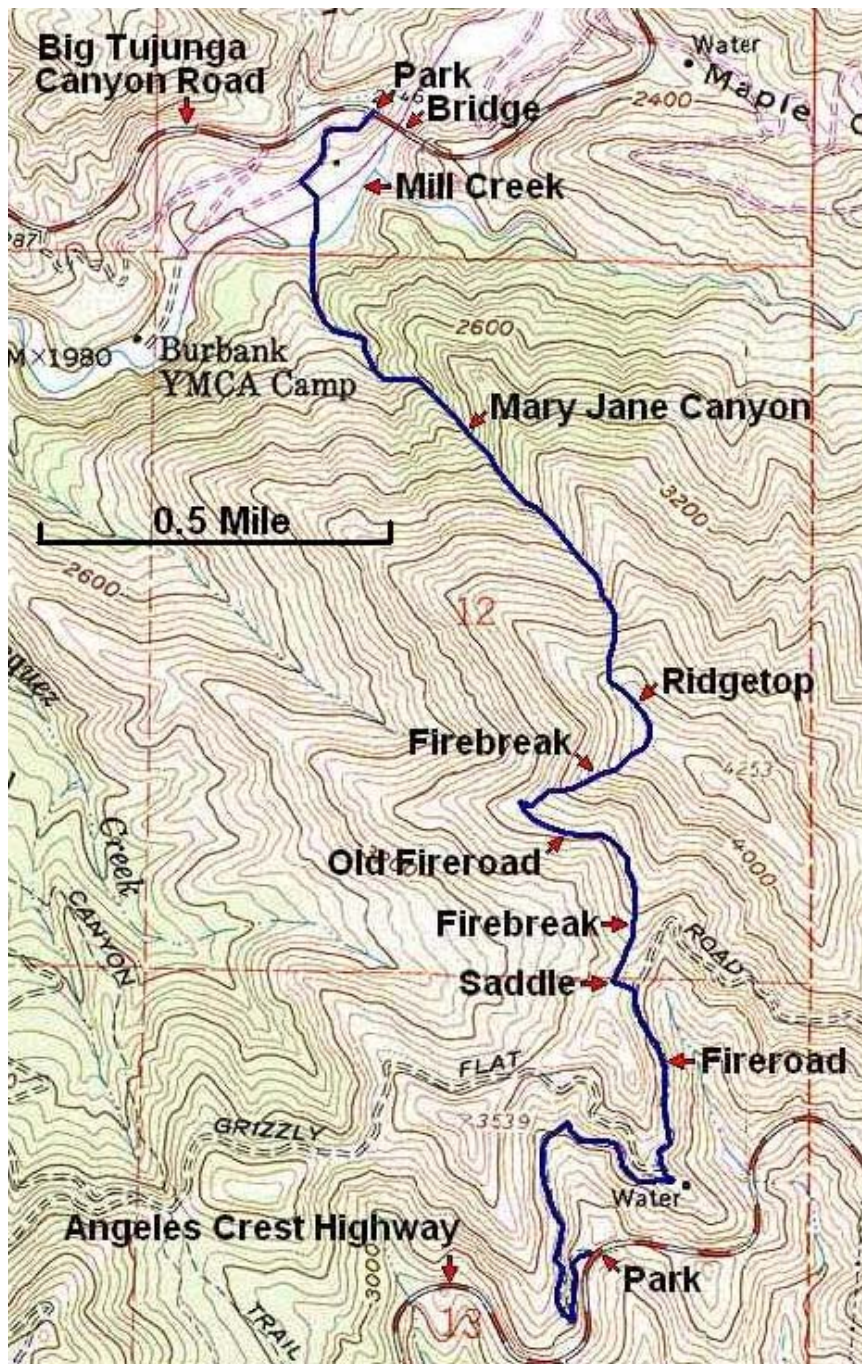
2370ft about 4.5hrs from the morning start.

The confluence has two large canyon-spanning logs that are worthy of note and, perhaps, of closer inspection. One huge log spans the canyon just downstream of the confluence while another spans the adjoining canyon just above the junction. Continuing downstream, you will come to a small 25ft rappel at 2310ft that is anchored by a tree on the left and, shortly thereafter, another 20ft step that is rappeled from a tree on the left. Finally, about 5hrs from the morning start at an elevation of 2250ft you will come to the top of the final series of rappels in Mary Jane Canyon. The first of these is a series of inclined steps that require a 120ft rappel from a tree anchor on the left. This leads immediately to the top of the last rappel, an 80ft vertical drop anchored by a large tree at the lip. This last rappel deposits you in a cliff-ringed enclosure with the Big Tujunga drainage just a short 10ft drop away but you will need to climb up on the left side and then use the trees and roots to get down there. You should reach the Big Tujunga at  $34^{\circ}16.85'N$   $118^{\circ}11.95'W$  and an elevation of 2030ft having traveled about 2.5mi from the morning start.

The next challenge is to cross the Big Tujunga River in order to make it back to your return vehicle at the far end of the bridge that is now visible off to your left. This crossing is readily accomplished in the summer or fall (though you may get wet) but could be quite problematic in the winter or spring after heavy rains. It would be wise to check the river from the bridge when you leave the return vehicle there prior to the hike.

Having crossed the Big Tujunga, you then hike up the fireroad that leads to the west end of the bridge and to your return vehicle at  $34^{\circ}17.02'N$   $118^{\circ}11.85'W$  and an elevation of 2150ft. During the adventure, you will have covered a distance of about 2.7mi in about 6hrs.





Map of Mary Jane Canyon Hike



## 3.10 White Oak Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7 miles
- Elevation gain: 2350 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Three rappels of 40ft, 150ft and 150ft, some bushwhacking and downclimbing, possible exit swim of 25yds
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 160ft rope, 160ft recovery cord or rope, three rappel rings, 80ft webbing, drybags
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

White Oak Canyon drops precipitously off the southeast side of Fox Peak and is almost hidden behind the Big Tujunga Reservoir. The well-maintained Condor Peak Trail allows one to approach the upper reaches of White Oak but the drop-in is long and initially very steep and loose. Once accessed, the canyon itself is short and sweet, ending in two glorious rappels down vertical moss-covered faces. A small stream flows most of the year in the main canyon and creates a lovely shaded refuge in the lower part of the canyon. Like the approach, the hike out from the canyon exit has its challenges and may involve a 25yd swim across the upper reaches of the Big Tujunga Reservoir. However, most of the time it just requires hiking across some muddy flats.

Because of the exposure on the hike in and the drop in, this hike is best on a cooler summer, spring or fall day. In the winter after rain, the required crossing of the Big Tujunga may make the hike inadvisable if not dangerous.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a short car shuttle. First drive up Big Tujunga Canyon Road past the bridge just below the dam. Stop at the dirt pullout on the north side of the road 1.7mi northeast of the bridge and just a few hundred yards beyond the signed dam overlook. (If you reach the junction with the Angeles Forest highway you have gone 1.3mi too far.) Leave the return vehicle at this dirt pullout at 34°17.83'N 118°10.63'W and an elevation of 2810ft.

Before leaving this spot, you may wish to take a distant look at the drop-in to White Oak Canyon. This lies on the horizon ridge at a 291o compass heading (roughly ENE) from where you parked the return vehicle. It can be identified as the sharp step in the ridge profile from which a steep gully descends into White Oak Canyon. From other vantage points along this stretch of road you

can also see the exit from White Oak Canyon and thus be able to determine whether the exit will require a swim across the top of the reservoir.

After depositing the return vehicle, drive 3.9mi down along Big Tujunga Canyon Road to a point about 100yds east of the junction with the Vogel Flats Road. Park in a turnout on the south side of the road at  $34^{\circ}17.23'N$   $118^{\circ}13.47'W$  and an elevation of 2080ft.

## Hike

For such a substantial route, the start of the Condor Peak Trail is remarkably difficult to find. First it is not marked on the topo map though other trail maps do feature it. But it is also hard to find where it starts. From the parked vehicle(s) just about 100yds east of the junction with the Vogel Flats Road (at  $34^{\circ}17.23'N$   $118^{\circ}13.47'W$  and an elevation of 2080ft) cross to the north side of Big Tujunga Canyon Road and look for an entrance in the bushes via a shallow depression. Once on the trail it is well-maintained and easy to follow. It climbs steeply to a trail junction at 2270ft where it joins a longer trail that begins at a trailhead closer to the dam. Turn left at the junction and continue up the Condor Peak Trail as it switchbacks up the ridge between Vogel and Fusier Canyons.

About 1hr and 2.0mi from the start, you will come to a notable and dramatic saddle at  $34^{\circ}17.89'N$   $118^{\circ}12.79'W$  and an elevation of 3060ft. On one side this saddle overlooks the head of the left fork of Fusier Canyon and, on the other, a branch of Vogel Canyon. As the trail continues to climb it contours in and out of a series of canyons some of which may have some running water. There is a particularly lovely shaded glade with a little waterfall at 3420ft that you will pass about 1.5hr from the start.



*Left: 40ft rappel in White Oak Canyon. Right: The penultimate 150ft rappel.*

The trail contours through a deep recess and then rounds a promontory. As it does so you get your first overhead view of the Big Tujunga Reservoir and of White Oak Canyon. It continues climbing along the east side of the ridge and soon arrives at the drop-in point at  $34^{\circ}18.26'N$   $118^{\circ}11.92'W$  and an elevation of 3890ft. This drop-in point is at the first obvious saddle where the trail switches from the east side of the ridge to the west side. There is an obvious cliff to the north of the saddle and a rough, steep, and fairly brush-free gully that drops down from this saddle into White Oak Canyon. You should reach this drop-in point about 2hr 20min and 3.8mi from the start. It would be wise to gear up here on the trail in preparation for the rough descent ahead.

From the drop-in point you descend a steep, broad gully that is relatively free of brush but is slow going because of the loose rock and gravel. Gradually the slope eases and there are sections of bedrock with occasional downclimbs including a couple of places where you may choose to set up short, 15ft rappels (or rope-assisted downclimbs) using the omnipotent bushes for anchor. As you near the junction with the main canyon there is one section of dense brush bushwhacking where you might make better progress a little way up on the left side of the gully. This thick brush ends where the gully deepens and travel in the gully bottom becomes easier. From the drop-in point, it takes about 2hrs to reach the junction with the main canyon at  $34^{\circ}18.19'N$   $118^{\circ}11.60'W$  and elevation of 2980ft. Thus you should reach the confluence about 4hr 20min from the start having covered 4.2mi. An easy 10ft downclimb is needed at the junction in order to descend into the main canyon bottom.



*The final 130ft rappel.*

White Oak Canyon itself is relatively brush free and has some water flow (at least for most of the year) with many nice small pools in the bedrock. There are some good lunch spots just downstream of the confluence. All the rappels are in the bottom part of the canyon and you will arrive at the first substantial drop about 30min below the confluence at an elevation of 2820ft. This is a broad bedrock step that could be downclimbed but is better descended by a 30ft sloping rappel from a bush just above the left lip. This is immediately followed by the first obligatory rappel, a vertical 40ft drop from a bush anchor on the left side of the lip. This is a pretty water-dripping, moss-covered drop. It is immediately followed by a 20ft assisted downclimb using a bush to the left side of the lip.

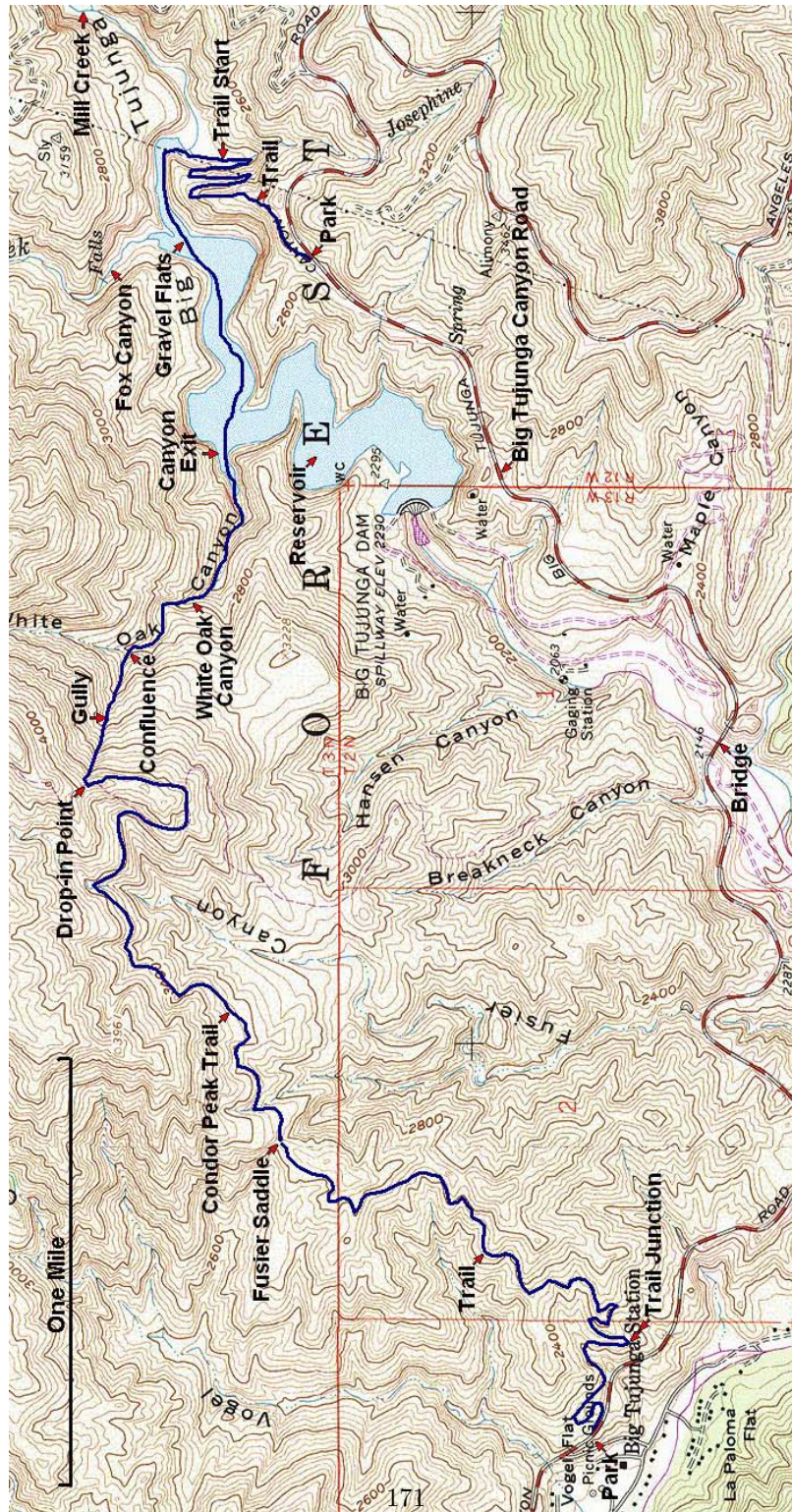
Just a few yards below this assisted downclimb you will arrive at the top of the first of the two big rappels. You should reach this point at an elevation of 2700ft about 5hrs 20min after the morning start. You cannot see the bottom of the rappel because you first descend about 30ft over sloping bedrock into a hanging pool and then drop down a steep, wet, moss and slime covered rockface for another 120ft for a total rope length of 150ft. The anchor is a large tree just a little back from the lip. With the two intervening lips the rope pull can be a little difficult here. The rappel sets you down in a leafy glade with a small pool.

The section of canyon below this rappel is the prettiest in this hike, a tree-shaded refuge with a stream and many lovely pools. About 300yds downstream you arrive at the dramatic top of the last rappel. Here you peer through a narrow slot at a huge cliff-ringed bowl. Again the landing area cannot be seen from the top but the total drop is about 130ft. The rappel is anchored by a huge tree just a few yards upstream of the lip and provides for one of the most glorious descents in the San Gabriels as it drops down a dripping, moss-covered face with a 70ft section of exciting free rappel in the dripping water. The landing area is a pretty wooded glade where you could rest and prepare for the exit hike.

Below this last rappel, the canyon gradually dries up as the water soaks into the canyon bottom gravel and the last section of White Oak Canyon is a dry, bouldery hike down to the junction with the Big Tujunga. You should reach this obvious canyon exit at 34°18.00'N 118°11.12'W and an elevation of 2270ft about 7hrs after the morning start having traveled about 4.8mi. At this exit one of several challenges could face you. Though the nominal Big Tujunga Reservoir level on the topo map is shown at the dam spillway level of 2290ft, in recent years the level has been maintained significantly lower so that the shore of the reservoir has been a short distance downstream of the White Oak Canyon exit. This means that hiking access upstream to the gravel flats of the Big Tujunga has been a simple matter of crossing, at worst, a muddy flat. However, there have been times when the reservoir has extended upstream of the White Oak Canyon exit and, during such times, it is necessary to swim and wade about 25yds across the reservoir to access the route up the Big Tujunga. Before beginning this hike you may be able to determine the prevailing conditions from the Big Tujunga Canyon Road during the morning car shuttle. Otherwise you might bring a drybag for this crossing.

Whether swimming or hiking across the mud flats, the crossing of the Big Tujunga is a little confusing because of the large rock island in the middle of the Big Tujunga just opposite the White Oak Canyon exit. Though it is possible to turn left at the exit and proceed around the left side of this island (along this route there is a pretty waterfall on the canyon sidewall) it is much easier to proceed straight across the Big Tujunga around the right side of the island. Once around the island and on the sand and gravel flats of the Big Tujunga, you should hike upstream for about 1mi, past the exit of Fox Canyon in order to access the Josephine trail for the trail hike up to the Big Tujunga Canyon Road. For a description of this trail location, see choice two of the exit trails described in the Lower Fox Canyon hike. The start of this exit trail is at 34°18.03'N 118°10.41'W and 2310ft and you should reach the top and your return vehicle at 34°17.83'N 118°10.63'W and 2810ft about 8.5hrs from the morning start having traveled about 7mi.





Map of White Oak Canyon Hike

## 3.11 Great Falls of the Fox

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 11 hours (plus 2 hours with hike in)
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.5 miles (plus 5.7 miles with hike in)
- Elevation gain: 580 feet (and 1600 feet with hike in)
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: One 100ft, four 30-65ft and three 12-20ft rappels, many into water over 6ft deep; much bushwhacking, bouldering and wading
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear with two 150ft ropes, 150ft cord, 150ft webbing, 8 rappel rings and dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3BR IV

This difficult but spectacular adventure takes you down the Great Falls of the Fox, the most awesome in the San Gabriel mountains. If you completed an easier hike in this same series, Lower Fox Canyon, you will have looked up at the Great Falls from below and will have tasted this adventure. In my opinion, the Great Falls of the Fox provide the most exciting adventure hike in this book.



*Left: First and second rappel. Right: Third rappel.*

Fox Creek collects itself on the slopes of Mount Gleason and, from there, flows south and east to enter Big Tujunga Canyon just a little distance upstream of the Big Tujunga reservoir. About a mile upstream of this junction just as it rounds the base of Fox Peak, the creek hits a mass of hard granite and has cut a deep and narrow passage through that rock. As it does so it falls dramatically through the series of seven waterfalls that we call the Great Falls of the Fox. All are contained within a short section of gorge with towering cliffs on all sides. Once you enter this gorge there is virtually no option but to rappel on down to the bottom, and that includes an awesome descent of the 100ft Great Falls.

This hike should really be a two-day affair and is recommended as such. However, this necessitates carrying a heavy pack through some very rugged terrain. On the other hand it is possible, traveling light, to complete the adventure in one long day. To do so, it would be wise to start down the trail at dawn. In fact, when we did the hike described here, we were very fortunate to be able to arrange vehicular transport along the fire road from the trailhead to the water tank saddle, a distance of 5.7mi. Not only did this mean a savings in time of nearly two hours but it also yielded a substantial savings of energy. This truck ride is reflected in the first estimates of time and distance given in the list above.

Clearly this adventure is only for the highly experienced rappeler. Moreover, it should only be attempted when the water flow is at its minimum. After any significant rainfall, it would be almost impossible (and very dangerous) to attempt to negotiate the central section that includes the Great Falls. Moreover, I strongly recommend you choose a hot summer day for you will be soaking wet for a large fraction of the time and, in the shade of the deep central canyon, you can get very cold (unless you wear a wetsuit). For the same reason another, almost essential, piece of equipment for this hike is a large, tough waterproof bag in which to stow your pack.

But any who do complete this hike will be treated to a spectacular gorge and will remember it as a truly great adventure.

## **Trailhead**

The trailhead for this hike is the same as for the Lower Fox Canyon hike, namely the dirt parking area (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft) by a locked gate on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, 0.5mi southwest of the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway.

## **Hike**

The first part of the hike is identical to that of the Lower Fox Canyon adventure, namely a walk down into Big Tujunga along the Fall Creek Fire Road, across the river (at 34°18.31'N 118°9.61'W) and up the road as it climbs the other side of the canyon. In this main section we describe the longer route to the head of the gorge because this is the route that is most easily found and most easily described. However, there is a shortcut to the head of the gorge that we will describe as an addendum. It cuts almost two hours off the time given



in the main section but is not recommended because it is a difficult, overland route that is not easy to follow.

The longer route proceeds up the fire road past the point where you left the road on the Lower Fox Canyon hike. Indeed, you must hike another 2.2mi up the road to a prominent saddle (at  $34^{\circ}19.66'N$   $118^{\circ}10.23'W$  and elevation 4000ft) on which there is a large water tank. This large, round structure with a flat concrete roof is typical of the many water tanks in the San Gabriels and is readily identified. However, some distance before the water tank, you will pass another prominent saddle (about 4.1mi from the start and at an elevation of 3280ft) with a marvelous but distant view of the Great Falls of the Fox. For this reason we call it Falls View Saddle. Here, on a winter's day with the river flowing full you can hear the roar of the falls from about half a mile away. This should spur you on to cover the remaining rather dull 1.6mi to the water tank saddle, that you should reach about 2hr from the start.

At the water tank saddle it would be wise to dress in long sleeves and pants (or gaiters) for the next part of the hike requires much bushwhacking. First you must drop down a small, steep gully into the canyon to the west of the saddle. We chose the gully immediately below the road. After a drop of about 250ft you reach the bottom of this unnamed canyon that, for good reason, we called Bramble Canyon. It proceeds in a generally southwest direction; the bottom alternates between relatively open going and stretches that are quite overgrown with brush. Thin, skin-tearing brambles make some sections particularly unpleasant; we also noted clear signs of bear.

After about 45min of travel in Bramble Canyon (and at an elevation of about 3600ft), you will reach the only substantial obstacle in Bramble, namely a large



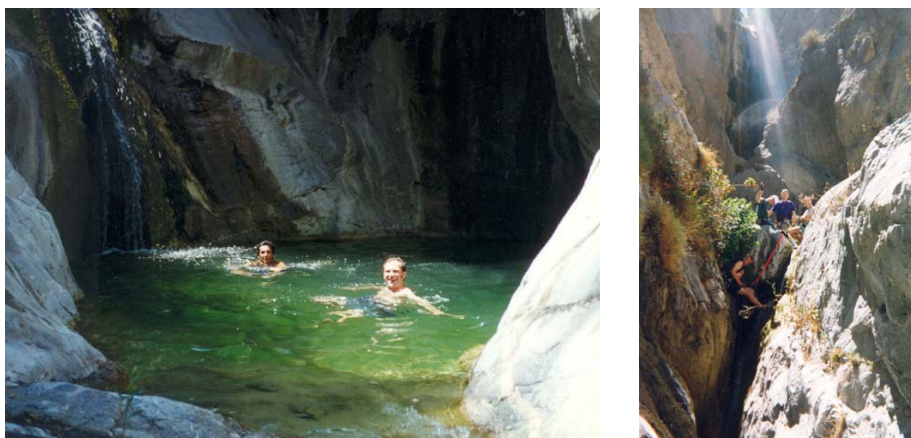
*Left: Great Falls of the Fox. Right: Great Falls in the spring.*

dryfall after which the canyon turns sharply right. A use-trail seems to climb to the left and your first inclination is to proceed in this direction. But it is much better to follow the use-trail on the right that surmounts a small bluff, turns the corner and then encounters a steep but readily negotiable draw that you can descend all the way to the canyon bottom below the falls.

About 2hrs 15min after leaving the water tank saddle, the junction of Bramble Canyon and Fox Canyon (at  $34^{\circ}19.11'N$   $118^{\circ}10.97'W$  and elevation 3160ft) is finally reached. I recommend you leave a duck here to use in recognizing the junction should you need to return this way. Then turn right and proceed down Fox Canyon. Here the stream flows year-round and therefore the canyon is heavily wooded. The going is much better than in Bramble Canyon but still not fast; much boulder hopping and lots of fallen trees and branches. Finally, 3hrs 15min from water tank saddle (5hrs 15min from the trailhead if you hiked the fire road) you reach the feature you came to see, the gorge of the Great Falls of the Fox.

A small precursor tells you that you are almost there. This is a short chute through some solid rock into several sculpted pools about 5ft deep. It is a simple matter to wedge your way down this chute and wade through the pools. About 50yds downstream, at an elevation of 2960ft, you arrive at the top of the gorge of the Great Falls of the Fox ( $34^{\circ}18.72'N$   $118^{\circ}10.77'W$ ). The canyon suddenly drops about 40ft into a chasm with solid, vertical walls of granite. The lip of the canyon bottom consists of huge boulders and, from this viewpoint, you can see a second, small 12ft waterfall downstream of the first. However, the canyon then turns to the left and what lies beyond cannot be seen.

The large boulders at the top of the first falls provide excellent and numerous anchors. There is a convenient platform on the right where the boulder forming the lip allows a convenient rappel entry next to the canyon wall. There is also a foothold on the far side of this boulder that is helpful. The rappel entry is



*Left: Pool below sixth falls. Right: Gathering above seventh falls.*



nevertheless a little awkward because of the underhang of this rock just below the foothold. However, after the first 10ft or so, the remainder of the 40ft rappel is straightforward. You will descend into a deep pool from which you may need to swim ashore. The second, small waterfall, about 12ft high, also requires rappeling. There is a large rock on the left that makes for a good anchor and a convenient entry.

The third falls are immediately downstream of the second and involve a vertical drop of about 30ft. A large rock in midstream a short distance upstream of the lip provides a good anchor with a convenient rappel entry down a small slot on the right. Care is however necessary to prevent the rope from becoming wedged in this slot and causing a difficult rope retrieval. Again you descend into a deep pool that may require swimming.

The canyon opens up a little at this point and so it is a good place to catch some sun, to warm up and to get one's breath back. The gorge you have descended is an awesome sight above you so you should take time to enjoy it before the major challenge ahead.

The fourth falls are a short distance from the third. They consist of a small 10ft vertical drop after a short, easily walked chute. Unfortunately there is no easy anchor here. Some might choose to jump the 10ft into a pool that is sometimes deep enough, though at other times only thigh deep. On one transit, the two young people I was with held the rope around the rock while I rappelled. Then they threw down the rope and jumped. On another occasion, the pool was too shallow and we devised a makeshift anchor using a piton in a crack in the rock wall on the right side. There is a large boulder in the middle of the pool below these fourth falls and allowed us to identify this location in some aerial photographs.

This first series of four waterfalls will take about 2hrs and should be completed about 5hrs 15min after leaving the water tank saddle (7hrs 15min from the trailhead if you hiked the fire road). Note, however, that the time taken for each rappel will vary greatly with the number and experience of the people in your party.

Downstream of the fourth falls there are two small pools and then a short flat section with trees and bushes. These terminate in a jumble of large rocks, logs and branches that mark the top of the big, 100ft waterfall. The lip curves gradually over and so it is not easy to get a view over the falls and down into the grotto and pool that lie at the bottom. However, just a glimpse is enough to set the heart pounding. Moreover, other factors conspire to add to the feeling of adversity. Perhaps because of the natural funnel in the topography at this point, there is often a stiff wind that blows over the top of the Great Falls and nowhere else. Moreover, this wind tends to blow spray up the falls and over those who would dare to approach. On the plus side there are plenty of large rocks to use as anchors and it is best to set up the rope on the right hand side that provides a relatively dry descent at least at low flows.

Aside from the awe-inspiring height and the magnified problems of rope retrieval, this is a straightforward rappel during low stream flow. It has a gradual and easy entry with a flat but fairly rough vertical surface for most

of the way. And the pool at the bottom can be waded. But, having seen it from below during higher flow rates, I know it is very different when the water is bouncing off all the walls and you must descend through that liquid environment. Even at low flows, the rappel is a spectacular experience so take time to look around and enjoy the surroundings as you descend between vertical granite walls. The grotto at the bottom adds much to the aura of the place. With awesome towering cliffs on all sides and only a narrow opening to the sky, the bottom is almost all pool (mostly quite shallow). On one side the falls have eroded away the wall so that there is a substantial undercut or cave that enhances the enclosed feeling.

Rope retrieval after the descent of the Great Falls can be a problem for it is hindered by two factors. First, the sheer weight of 100ft of rope makes it difficult to pull it down; and, second, the curved lip at the top adds significantly to the frictional resistance. When setting up the rope you should try and place the rappel ring as far over this lip as you feel comfortable with during rappel entry. We used two climbing ropes tied together at the top so that we could employ a double-strand rappel. The alternative is to use a retrieval cord and a single-strand rappel but this could make the retrieval harder. If you are having difficulty, a potentially useful trick is to have one member of the party send waves up the main, up-going rope while all the others pull on the retrieval cord or rope. It would also be wise to keep one rope in reserve for the rappels further downstream just in case you cannot retrieve the rope at the Great Falls.

Immediately downstream of the Great Falls and deep within this narrow defile is a beautiful little waterfall about 20ft high that cascades into a magnificent pool again partly covered by overhang. One one passage this pool was deep enough to allow several of our party to jump the falls into the pool. On another transit the pool was too shallow.

In either case I recommend descending by rappeling to the right of the waterfalls. There is no natural anchor, but fortunately three anchor bolts have been placed on the rock shelf just above this route. We replaced the webbing and used these bolts. I recommend you do the same though the anchor bolts could become unsafe at any time in the future and should be carefully tested. An alternative here would be to arrange a hook for the slot in the rock just over the edge of the shelf. This seems a good point at which to emphasize that anchors may change significantly as a result of winter storm floods. For this reason, it might be wise to carry a bolt kit with you on this hike.

You should arrive at this point about 6hrs 30min after leaving the water tank saddle (8hrs 30min from the trailhead if you hiked the fire road). On a warm day, this pool is worth pausing for - and swimming in. There is a low shelf just beside the waterfall that is readily accessible from below and allows a much less frightening jump than that from above. And the sun often penetrates an area just downstream of the pool if you need to warm up.

The seventh and last of the waterfalls in the central gorge is straightforward but somewhat blind. Those who completed the lower Fox Canyon hike will benefit from having seen it from below. The anchor is a webbing wrap around a large rock wedged in the V-shaped canyon just downstream of the sixth falls.

The webbing should be replaced, an awkward task since you must reach down over the rock. The anchor rock is about 30ft back from the lip of the falls. Between it and the lip is a narrow V-shaped slot with a mostly horizontal, water-filled bottom. The best strategy is to set up the anchor, rappel ring and rope (a double-stranded rappel with a 180ft rope or a single-stranded rappel with 100ft rope and retrieval cord) while above the anchor rock. Then one member of the party should climb down into the slot and supervise the rappel from the lip. The rappel below the lip is an easy 35ft descent with a shelf about midway; it ends in a broad, shallow pool.

Here, 7hr from the water tank saddle at 34°18.78'N 118°10.69'W and an elevation of 2650ft, you have emerged from the gorge into a broad canyon that the sun reaches more readily. It is good place to rest, warm up and change to a hiking mode. And the view of the Great Falls from below presents an awesome spectacle that engenders a real feeling of accomplishment.

The rest of the hike was described in detail in the Lower Fox Canyon adventure. There are a few minor obstacles to overcome just downstream of the exit pool but otherwise the going is fairly easy though it requires much wading and a little scrambling. This is a quiet, bucolic and attractive stretch of canyon. It takes about 1.5hr to reach the large exit falls, the eighth and final rappel in this adventure.

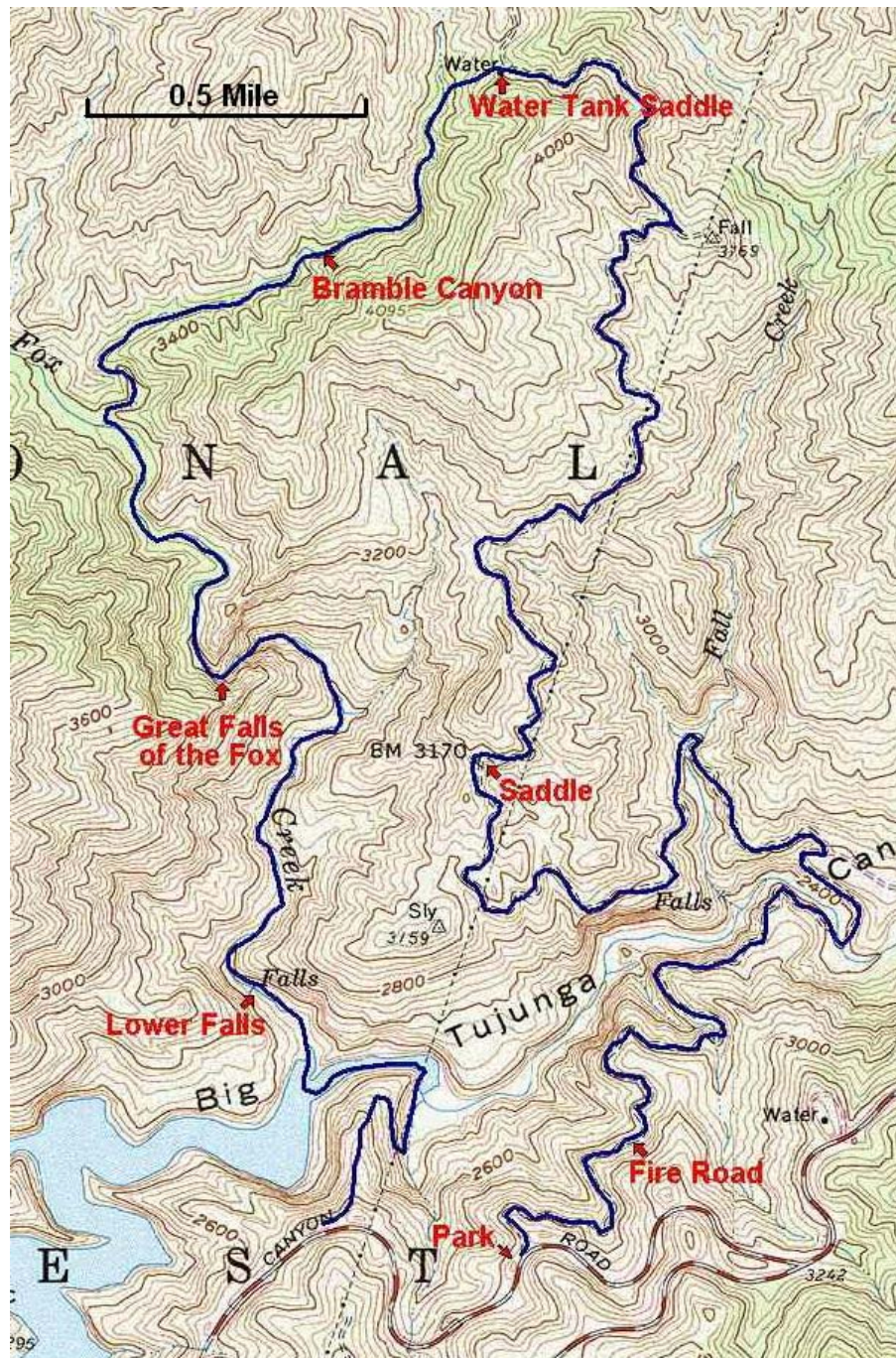
The Lower Fox Falls at the exit of Fox Canyon (34°18.24'N 118°10.70'W and elevation 2300ft) come upon you quite abruptly just as it seems you are about to reach the junction with Big Tujunga Canyon. From above they are an impressive sight as they plunge 65ft down a vertical cliff into a deep pool. There is virtually no way to travel up canyon past this obstacle unless you are an expert rock climber. Fortunately for those descending, there are two large trees about 15ft back from the edge that are ideally placed to serve as anchors. The rappel down the vertical cliff to the left of the falls is straightforward and has a moderately easy entry. You descend into a large pool that can vary greatly in depth from year to year. When we first did the easier Lower Fox Canyon hike it was well over 6ft deep and we had to swim about 15yds before we could wade. On the other hand, a couple of years later when we first did the Great Falls hike it was only necessary to swim about 2yds back from the wall before you could stand on a sand bank.

Downstream of the Lower Falls, you should follow the use-trail along the large benches on either side of the canyon. The trail switches sides several times and it only takes about 10min to reach the junction with Big Tujunga Canyon (34°18.11'N 118°10.60'W), recognizable by its broad gravel-flat bottom. The two options for the hike back from this junction to Big Tujunga Canyon Road are fully described in the Lower Fox Canyon hike and will not be repeated here. You should reach your vehicle (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft) about 11hr after leaving the water tank saddle (or 13hr after leaving the trailhead if you hiked the fire road).

## Difficult Cross-Country Approach:

We also describe here a difficult cross-country shortcut that accesses the head of the gorge of the Great Falls of the Fox. This shortcut cuts about two hours off the duration of the hike but is not easy to find. We note, however, that increased use in recent years has made this route easier to follow than in the past.

You begin the cross-country route by following the route of the Lower Fox Canyon hike down to the Fox river below the gorge. At the point where you reach the Fox ( $34^{\circ}18.67'N$   $118^{\circ}10.53'W$ ) turn left and travel downstream for about 100yds while taking note of the terrain above the canyon on your right. You need to locate a small, brush-filled gully (with lots of poison oak) that climbs out of the canyon on the right at about  $34^{\circ}18.63'N$   $118^{\circ}10.62'W$ ; it occurs just before the canyon makes a sharp left turn. You should also be able to discern a rock and scree slope up on the left just downstream of the sought-after gully. Head up the gully through the poison oak and after a short way you will see a use-trail that leaves the gully on the left and emerges at the bottom of a steep but fairly open slope. Follow the use-trail up this steep slope heading directly for the bottom of cliffs immediately overhead. At the bottom of the cliffs you should be able to find the use-trail that proceeds around to the right following a ledge that allows you to negotiate a steep bluff. On the other side of the bluff climb the steep slope veering right and you soon access the ridge-top that overlooks the gorge. Follow the ridgetop up to a point where the trail drops down to the right. This use-trail contours around above the gorge, and after some bushwhacking near the end accesses a narrow, earthy gully (if you descend too soon you will be cliffed above the gorge). Descend this gully and you will arrive in Fox Canyon at a point just upstream of the first rappel.



Map of Great Falls of the Fox Hike



## 3.12 Lower Fox Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 9 miles
- Elevation gains: 770 feet and 580 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: One 60ft rappel into a pool over 6ft deep; some bushwhacking, bouldering and wading
- Special equipment: Rappelling gear with 120ft rope, 30ft of webbing, 1 rappel ring, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3B III

Fox Canyon is a tributary of Big Tujunga Canyon and joins the latter a little distance upstream of the reservoir behind Big Tujunga Dam. It contains the most spectacular series of waterfalls in the San Gabriels, one of which is about 100ft high. These waterfalls are little known because of the difficulty of reaching them. The route up Fox Canyon is blocked by a 60ft waterfall near the canyon entrance and access further up the canyon involves some cross-country bushwhacking.

This hike in lower Fox Canyon is the easier of the two Fox Canyon hikes described in this book and it is recommended that you complete this difficult adventure before undertaking the very difficult Great Falls of the Fox hike. Even



*Left: Lower falls in Fox Canyon. Right: Enigmatic sign in Big Tujunga.*

the present hike is a strenuous and demanding adventure that is only for the experienced adventure hiker with substantial rappeling experience.

The middle part of the hike, during which you descend two small side canyons in order to access the middle section of Fox Canyon, involves some bushwhacking. But the reward is a marvelous close-up view of the Great Falls of the Fox and an exciting rappel down the 60ft Lower Fox Falls in order to exit the canyon.

## Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is a dirt parking area (at  $34^{\circ}17.82'N$   $118^{\circ}10.20'W$  and elevation 3090ft) by a locked gate on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, 0.5mi southwest of the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway.

## Hike

Proceed through the locked gate ( $34^{\circ}17.82'N$   $118^{\circ}10.20'W$ ) and start down the dirt road (5N27). Pause at the overlook about 100yds from the gate in order to get your bearings. Looking straight down into the canyon bottom you will see the gravel flats that occupy the canyon floor upstream of the reservoir itself. If there is standing water below this point you should review and perhaps revise your plan for you will later be crossing these flats.

Next, you should identify the large mountain that dominates the skyline to the northwest on the far side of the canyon. This is Fox Peak with Condor Peak behind it. Now look down into the canyon slightly to the right of this peak and you will see a fairly large tributary canyon joining the Big Tujunga. This is Fox Canyon and you can look directly into it from this viewpoint at least as far as the point where it makes an abrupt turn to the right. Just before this turn you should be able to see Lower Fox Creek Falls that you will rappel down later on in the day.

It is an easy 1.7mi hike down the fire road to the floor of the canyon that is reached in about 30min. Near the bottom you will be treated to an excellent view of the Fall Creek Falls on the opposite wall of the canyon. Fall Creek is a small tributary joining Big Tujunga from the northwest and it makes the final plunge in a spectacular series of four waterfalls respectively 25ft, 35ft, 20ft and 70ft high reading from the top down. This series of falls provides an excellent short adventure that is described in a later chapter. There is a rudimentary concrete bridge (at  $34^{\circ}18.31'N$   $118^{\circ}9.61'W$  and elevation 2380ft) where the fire road crosses Mill Creek in the Big Tujunga and later in the day you may choose to return to this point by hiking up the Big Tujunga Canyon. For now you continue up the road as it climbs the other side of the canyon. A little way up you pass to the left of the Fall Creek Campground on a high shelf overlooking the river. Turning left at the campground entrance ( $34^{\circ}18.45'N$   $118^{\circ}9.63'W$ ), the road climbs higher and soon turns into the valley of Fall Creek. Here you look down on the small brushy meadow (elevation 2560ft) that lies above the series of waterfalls described earlier. If you intend to rappel down those falls it is a simple matter to drop down from the road into Fall Creek.

Our hike continues on up the road; you soon pass close to several power pylons with a road leading back to the right to one of them. About 150yds beyond this junction and 30min from the Big Tujunga (3.5mi and 1hr from the start), you must identify a place where there is a saddle just about 20ft above the road to the left (at  $34^{\circ}18.57'N$   $118^{\circ}10.29'W$  and an elevation of 3170ft). This occurs just before the road makes a left turn to begin to go around a significant hill up ahead. You should be able to locate a use-trail by which to climb up through the bushes to this saddle. Here you need to pause to take in the topography and landmarks below you, for the next short section of this hike requires some bushwhacking and careful navigation. The gully below you leads off in a WSW direction and eventually descends into Fox Canyon just upstream of the Lower Falls. However, this is not a recommended route. Instead, I recommend that you identify a small ridge and saddle almost due west and below you; you should be able to discern a small clearing on this saddle and this is the next destination. To get there, descend down the gully directly below you to a point where you can bushwhack across to the right to the base of a short slope immediately below the saddle. Over many trips we have cut a use-trail through here that you may be able to follow. This section may take 1hr or so and will place you on the small saddle ( $34^{\circ}18.58'N$   $118^{\circ}10.46'W$ ) about 2hr from the start. To continue head straight down the slope on the other side of the saddle. For a few yards you will still be pushing through bushes but very soon you encounter a gully that is relatively brush-free. You can follow this all the way down to where it joins a much larger gully flowing from right to left. Turn left and in a few yards and 2hr 30min from the start you emerge into the middle section of Fox Canyon at  $34^{\circ}18.67'N$   $118^{\circ}10.53'W$  and an elevation of 2800ft.

[Aside: There is at least one other way to effect this descent from the fire road into the middle section of Fox Canyon but it is much more difficult and takes much longer. It is probably not worth mentioning except that it was recommended to me and the reader should be advised against it. This route is accessed by walking further up the fire road to the next and very prominent saddle (elevation 3280ft) just around the other side of a peak from the 3170ft saddle. It may well be worth the hike up to this second saddle just for the marvelous view to the west. Here you are looking down into the middle section of Fox Canyon, that runs approximately southwest. The most dramatic feature is directly to the west of you where Fox Canyon negotiates several abrupt turns through truly precipitous narrows. From this saddle you can see into the lower end of this gorge where there is an awesome waterfall, the lower part of the Great Falls of the Fox, about 100ft in height. Though 0.5mi mile away, the roar of this monster on a winter day is clearly audible at the saddle and, if you hike up here, you should take the opportunity to inspect it closely using binoculars. What you cannot see from this vantage point is that there are other spectacular waterfalls in the gully both upstream and downstream of the falls you can see. Turning attention from these spectacular features, one can also see that Fox Canyon runs roughly southwest from the point where it leaves the narrows to another point where it makes an abrupt left turn and disappears from sight.

This left turn is, in fact, just upstream of the Lower Fox Creek Falls that you saw from near the trailhead just after starting out.

Though it appears from the road to be easy to drop down into the middle section of Fox Canyon from this second saddle, it took us about 3hr 30min of quite arduous bushwhacking and rappeling to make the descent that, incidentally, leads to the same side canyon that the last part of the preferred route involves.]

Returning to the preferred route, you soon realize that all the travails up to this point were worth it, for this is truly a beautiful canyon. The substantial stream flows through a series of crystal pools that invite refreshment. The going in the main canyon is much easier than in the side canyons but still involves a good deal of bouldering. At the place where you entered Fox Canyon ( $34^{\circ}18.67'N$   $118^{\circ}10.53'W$ ), turn right to hike upstream to the Great Falls. On the way the going gets tougher and there are several places where you must either wade or climb around a pool. Suddenly, you turn the corner and there, at the end of a short reach, you can see the last cascade of the Great Falls. This is about a 25min hike from the junction where you entered Fox Canyon and 3hr from the trailhead. The roar of the upper falls resonates through the canyon and moments later you are standing by the bottom pool ( $34^{\circ}18.78'N$   $118^{\circ}10.69'W$ ) looking up over the last cascade and through a narrow gap at the 100ft monster at the heart of the Great Falls of the Fox. We first came this way one winter day not long after rain and the falls were a truly magnificent sight as they roared down through the narrow defile that they had worn through the rock over hundreds of thousands of years. It is the most awesome sight in all of the San Gabriels and made all the more precious by the difficulty of reaching this vantage point.

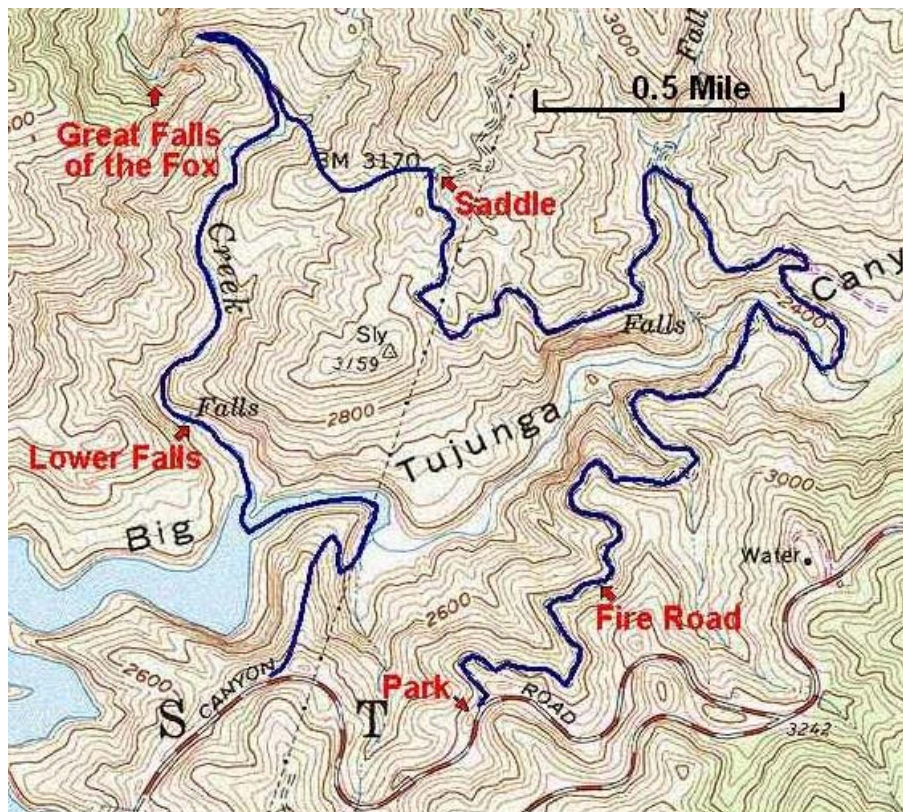
Eventually, you must start downstream again. About 3hrs 30min from the start you will again reach the junction where you entered Fox Canyon and the going remains fairly easy beyond this point all the way to the Lower Falls, reached about 1hr from the junction. The Lower Fox Falls (at  $34^{\circ}18.24'N$   $118^{\circ}10.70'W$  and elevation 2300ft) come upon you quite abruptly just as it seems you are about to emerge into Big Tujunga Canyon. From above they are an impressive, intimidating sight as they plunge 60ft down a vertical cliff into a deep pool. There is virtually no other way around this obstacle but to rappel down the cliff to the left of the falls and into the pool. It seems almost impossible to surmount this obstacle when traveling up from below unless you are an expert rock climber. Fortunately for those descending, there are two large trees about 10ft back from the edge that are ideally placed to serve as anchors. It is a very exciting rappel down the vertical cliff just a few feet from the plunging falls. However, it is necessary to pre-plan your strategy to negotiate the pool at the bottom. When we came this way the pool was well over 6ft deep and we had to swim about 15yds before we could wade. Basically, the first people down unhooked themselves and dropped into the water from a few feet up. I was the last person to descend and, when almost at the water level, I undid the knot at the end of the double rope, tied one end loosely to my harness, and then let the other end slip free, dragging the rope down as I swam and waded. Here it really

pays to have all the contents of your pack in watertight bags. You will reach the bottom of the Lower Fox Falls about 5hrs after the start. From the bottom of Lower Fox Falls to the junction with Big Tujunga Canyon ( $34^{\circ}18.11'N$   $118^{\circ}10.60'W$ ) takes only about 10min. Here you are near the upstream limit of the lake behind the dam and the floor of the big canyon consists of gravel flats. You also have a choice at this point.

Choice one, the longer but easier route, is to turn left and hike up the canyon. Round one long right hand curve you reach the part of the canyon bottom that you looked down upon at the start of the day. You also encounter a most enigmatic sign, black paint on a white board that reads "Promise Land. Gate 1." Is it a joke or a celestial warning? I will admit I checked to see whether my feet were still on the ground before I continued. However, you really have no alternative but to press on past this ominous sign. Just beyond is the end of the gravel flats. Here is an interesting feature on the right wall of the canyon, a large pool in an overhang or cave where the river appears to be cutting a tunnel through the rockface. A 50min hike upstream from this point will take you back to the point where the fire road crosses the river. This is a pleasant hike through an attractive canyon with a substantial stream. There are many large pools and streamside meadows but also a number of places where there is little alternative but to wade. About 10min before you reach the road you will pass below the 50ft waterfall by which Fall Creek enters the Big Tujunga. The hike back up the road to the parking area takes about 50min or about 2hrs from the bottom of Lower Fox Falls. Take a few moments as you go to look back again at the rugged country of the Fox Canyon watershed for it is truly one of the jewels of the San Gabriels.

Choice two after exiting Fox Canyon is to find a steep use-trail that climbs from the gravel flats up to the road above. Turn left after leaving Fox Canyon and proceed about 300yds up Big Tujunga Canyon. As the canyon makes a right turn you, stay beside the right wall and find a place in the entrance to a side canyon (at  $34^{\circ}18.02'N$   $118^{\circ}10.41'W$ ) where a rough trail climbs up a steep outcropping. A short way up this becomes a good trail that switchbacks up the canyon wall to the Big Tujunga Canyon Road. This trail is variously known at the Big Tujunga Canyon Trail or, in more recent times as the Josephine Trail. It is then an easy 0.5mi walk up the road to the parking lot where you started. By this route, it takes about 1hr to climb from the gravel flats to the parking lot, a saving of about 1hr in time.





Map of Lower Fox Canyon Hike

## 3.13 Josephine Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.1 miles
- Elevation gain: 670 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Two rappels of 60ft and 180ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear with 200ft rope, 200ft pull cord, 20ft of webbing, 3 rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Josephine Creek is a pretty, short canyon with one awesome 180ft rappel and a smaller 60ft rappel. It is a verdant north-facing canyon with lots of shade for a warm summer day and decorated with ferns and other foliage. Frequently there is a small water flow that can be most refreshing. The hike back up to the highway follows a fairly well-traveled trail. The entire hike should only take about 3hrs and could be suitable for any time of the year. It might be a good choice for intermediate canyoneers wanting to try a big drop.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is a dirt parking area (at 34°17.84'N 118°10.44'W and elevation 2910ft) on the inside of a long curve on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, 1.0mi west of the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway. This is a big long dirt area with room for many vehicles.

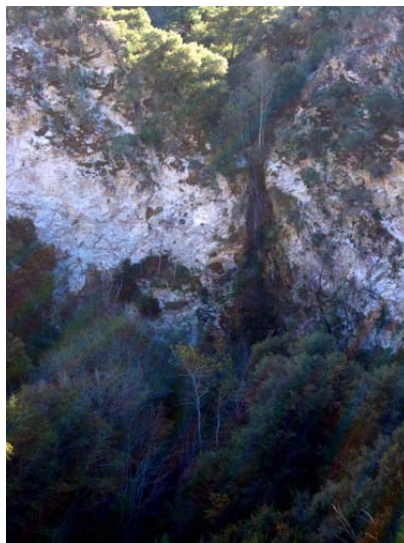
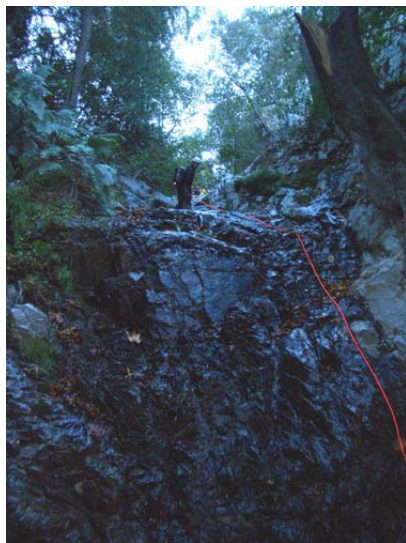
### Hike

From the parking area (34°17.84'N 118°10.44'W) hike south along the road to where the road crosses the creek (at 34°17.70'N 118°10.42'W), and drop down into the canyon by descending the overgrown scree slope. You quickly reach the wooded canyon bottom and it is easy going for a few hundred yards until, at 2720ft and 25min from the start you come to the top of the first significant obstacle, a vertical drop of 25ft. You can either rappel this drop using a bush in midstream as anchor or you can negotiate a somewhat slippery downclimb around to the right hand side. Climb over the bluff on the right and then choose one of several slippery descent routes.

More easy canyon follows before you arrive at the first required rappel (elevation about 2640ft), a 60ft sloping waterfall using a solid tree anchor in mid-canyon. You should reach this point about 50min from the start. The canyon here is a beautiful shady glen replete with ferns and foliage. Water is frequently flowing here. Just a few minutes below this rappel you will come upon a steep side-gully on the left where several vehicles have been dumped from the parking lot where you left your vehicle. Thus the canyon bottom is littered with tires and other automobile parts. Below this point the canyon becomes a little more challenging with narrow places where you may have a thigh-deep wade or two.

Then, suddenly, the canyon explodes and, at an elevation of 2480ft and 1hr 40min from the start, you are standing at the top of a 200ft cliff that forms the edge of the Big Tujunga. Here the big canyon makes a sweeping right hand turn that Josephine Creek enters on the outside apex. Thus the Big Tujunga forms a great amphitheater below you. It is an exhilarating 180ft vertical rappel descent to the base of this cliff. There is a solid tree anchor toward the right side of the lip that leads to a rappel down alongside the dribbling stream (if there is one). Then it is an easy hike following the streambed down to the Big Tujunga and the edge of Mill Creek (the river that runs through Big Tujunga). You should reach Mill Creek (at 34°18.02'N 118°10.41'W and elevation 2230ft) about 2hr 20min from the start.

Immediately upon encountering Mill Creek, look to the left and you should see the steep, sloping start to the trail that takes you back up to the road. The lower section of this trail is badly eroded and a little hard to find in places. However, as you ascend, it becomes more established (though somewhat over-



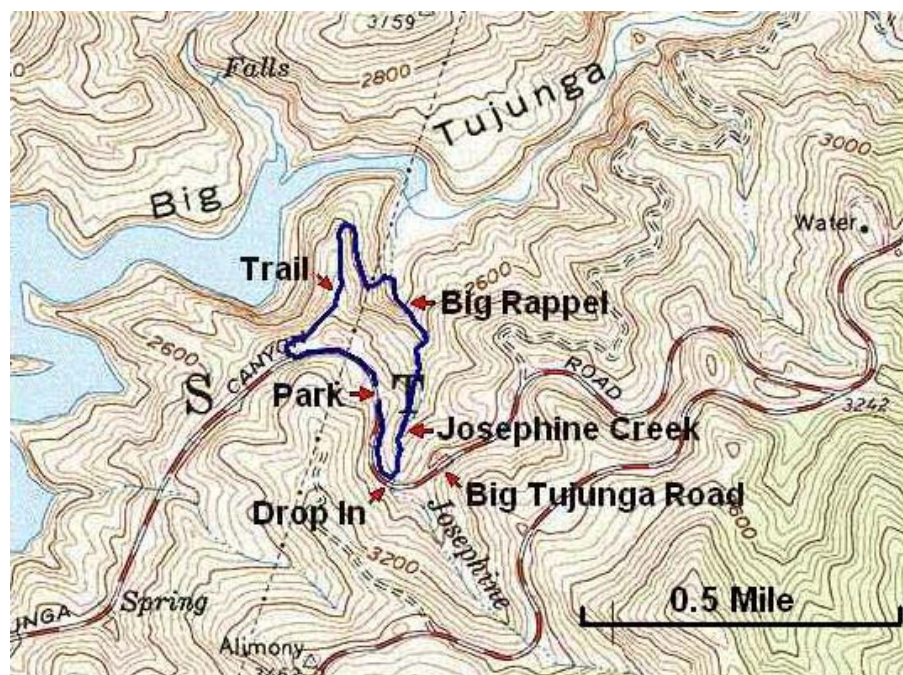
*Left: Josephine Creek 60ft rappel. Right: Josephine Creek 180ft rappel (photo by Ira Lewis).*

grown) and switchbacks up to the top of a ridge that protrudes out into the Big Tujunga. Once you reach the ridgetop you contour back to a point just below the highway. At the highway turn left and hike eastwards back to your vehicle, a distance of just a few hundred yards. The whole hike should only take about 3hrs.



*Big rappel from exit trail.*





Map of Josephine Creek Hike



## 3.14 Classic Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.3 miles
- Elevation gain: 760 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Three rappels down dryfalls, one 160ft high; some wading
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear with one 200ft rope, one 200ft pull cord, 30ft of webbing, 3 rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Classic Canyon is a small lateral ravine that tumbles down the cliff wall of Big Tujunga Canyon a short distance downstream of the point where the Fall Creek fire road crosses the river. It is readily accessed from that fire road just a few hundred yards above the Big Tujunga. This is a short adventure hike that rappels down three dryfalls the last one being about 160ft high. It is a good intermediate descent for those advanced beginners wishing to move up to larger drops. Though it may contain flowing water after periods of rain, the canyon is usually dry except for a few pools. It is good for almost any time of year though should be avoided when the Big Tujunga is too full to cross.

More experienced groups could combine this with a descent of Fall Creek for a good day of canyoneering.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the dirt parking area (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft) by a locked gate on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, 0.5mi southwest of the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway.

### Hike

This adventure begins in the same way as several others we have described. You proceed through the locked gate (34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W) and hike down the Fall Creek fire road until, at an elevation of about 2730ft and roughly 1.0mi from the start, you are contouring around the last big lateral canyon prior to the fire road crossing of the Big Tujunga. This is Classic Canyon and you could drop in where the fire road crosses the streamcourse but, to avoid an unproductive bushwhack, it is better to continue down the fire road for about 200yds to where there is a shallow low point in the road. About 50yds before this low point you

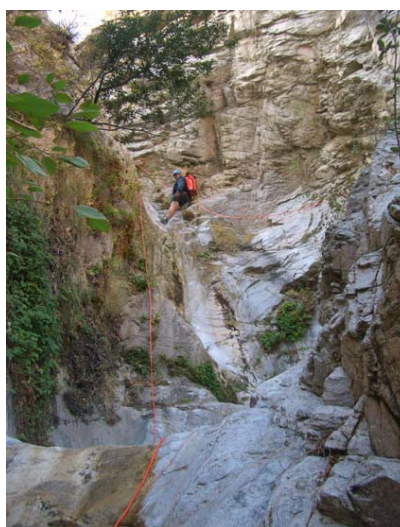
will recognize a rock slide/scree slope dropping into the canyon from the road. You should reach this drop-in point at 34°18.23'N 118°9.93'W and an elevation of 2640ft about 40min from the start having covered 1.2mi.

It is just a short way from the bottom of the drop-in slope to the top of the first rappel, a 25ft sloping slot that could be downclimbed under dry conditions. The anchor is a single bolt in the rock to the right of the lip but, like all single bolts, this should be backed up, in this case to a stout bush on the right. The second rappel follows almost immediately at 2550ft and about 1hr from the start.

The anchor is a single bolt in a boulder on the left side of the lip and this could be backed-up to a log a little further back. You rappel down about 40ft to a pool that is easily bypassed on canyon right. This places you on a ledge between the first pool and a second a few feet lower. Off-rappel you can proceed past this second pool on canyon left and descend 12ft of sloping rock to the bottom.

The third, last and longest rappel is just a short way down canyon and you should reach this about 1.5hrs from the start. This is the 160ft vertical drop into Big Tujunga. There is a double bolt anchor in the rock on the right side of the lip and the descent has several short sections of free rappel. It places you in a wooded area on the south side of the Big Tujunga.

After the last rappel you will need to turn right up the canyon and hike back to where the Fall Creek fire road crosses the Big Tujunga. Even when Mill Creek is at low water it is difficult to avoid some wading; and at high water the necessary river crossings could be very dangerous. On the way you pass the point where Fall Creek drops into the Big Tujunga from the north. Under low water conditions it takes about an hour to hike upstream to the Fall Creek

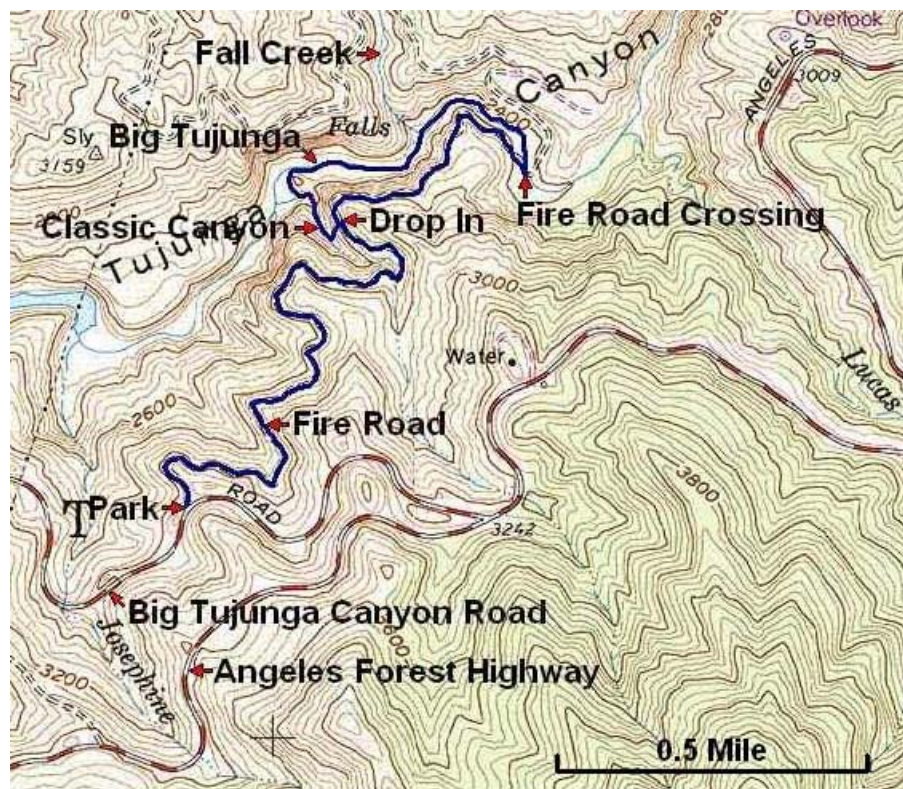


*Left: First rappel in Classic Canyon. Right: Second rappel in Classic Canyon.*

fire road crossing so you should reach this point at  $34^{\circ}18.31'N$   $118^{\circ}9.61'W$  and 2370ft about 2.5hrs from the start having traveled about 1.9mi. From there it only remains to hike up the fire road back to the parking area at  $34^{\circ}17.82'N$   $118^{\circ}10.20'W$  and an elevation of 3090ft. You will have covered about 3.6mi during the 3.5hr hike.



*Third rappel in Classic Canyon.*



Map of Classic Canyon Hike

## 3.15 Fall Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.6 miles
- Elevation gains: 240 feet and 460 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Four rappels down waterfalls, one 70ft high; some bushwhacking and wading
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear with 200ft rope, 50ft of webbing, 3 rappel rings, dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3B III

Fall Creek is a small tributary of Mill Creek that tumbles down the cliff wall of Big Tujunga Canyon a little distance downstream of the point where the Fall Creek fire road crosses the river. These waterfalls are readily viewed (and studied) from the fire road on the other side of the canyon and so, unlike most other hikes, you have a chance to plan your rappels in advance.

This is a relatively short adventure hike that rappels down the four waterfalls by which Fall Creek makes its dramatic entrance into the Big Tujunga. These rappels are quite demanding (the last and highest is about 70ft high) and should only be undertaken after some simpler experiences. They represent an exciting (and wet) challenge, ideal for a warm spring or summer day.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the dirt parking area (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft) by a locked gate on Big Tujunga Canyon Road, 0.5mi southwest of the junction with the Angeles Forest Highway.

### Hike

This adventure begins in the same way as several others we have described. You proceed through the locked gate (34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W) and hike the 1.7mi down the dirt road (5N27) to the floor of Big Tujunga Canyon; this is reached in about 30min. Near the bottom you will be treated to an excellent view of the Fall Creek Falls on the opposite or northwest wall of the canyon. Fall Creek makes the final plunge into Big Tujunga in a spectacular series of four waterfalls respectively 25ft, 35ft, 20ft and 70ft high reading from the top down. This series of falls provides the core of the present adventure.



To access the top of these falls, you cross Mill Creek (the name of the river in Big Tujunga) using the rudimentary concrete bridge (at  $34^{\circ}18.31'N$   $118^{\circ}9.61'W$  and elevation 2380ft) and continue to follow the fire road as it climbs the opposite wall of the canyon. It then contours into a valley and, 0.6mi from the river and 1hr from the start, you reach the point where the road crosses Fall Creek (at  $34^{\circ}18.62'N$   $118^{\circ}9.87'W$  and an elevation of 2620ft). From here you follow the streambed of Fall Creek, pushing through brush in several places, until you arrive at the top of the first waterfall 1hr 30min from the start. The view down the falls and into Big Tujunga is quite awesome and you should pause here and enjoy it before you start your descent.

The first waterfall drops vertically about 25ft into an attractive little grotto and pool. However, the easy descent and the only convenient anchor are off to the right where several lengths of webbing have been threaded through a crack in the rock. We chose to add our own loop of webbing in order to be safe and you may wish to do the same. The rappel is easy though there is an awkward yucca plant growing on a ledge about half way down. Though there is a pool at the bottom, we were able to descend to the ground at the edge of the water.

The second and third waterfalls follow immediately after the first. Fortunately two substantial trees are growing on the small plot of flat ground just below the first falls and these provide an excellent anchor for the second rappel. However, when you look down from this vantage point, it is clear that there is no reliable anchor between the second and third falls. Indeed, the large, waist-deep pool below the second waterfall discharges immediately over the third falls. Two alternatives are possible here. The best option is to continue the second rappel down the third falls. However, this requires a 160ft rope if you wish

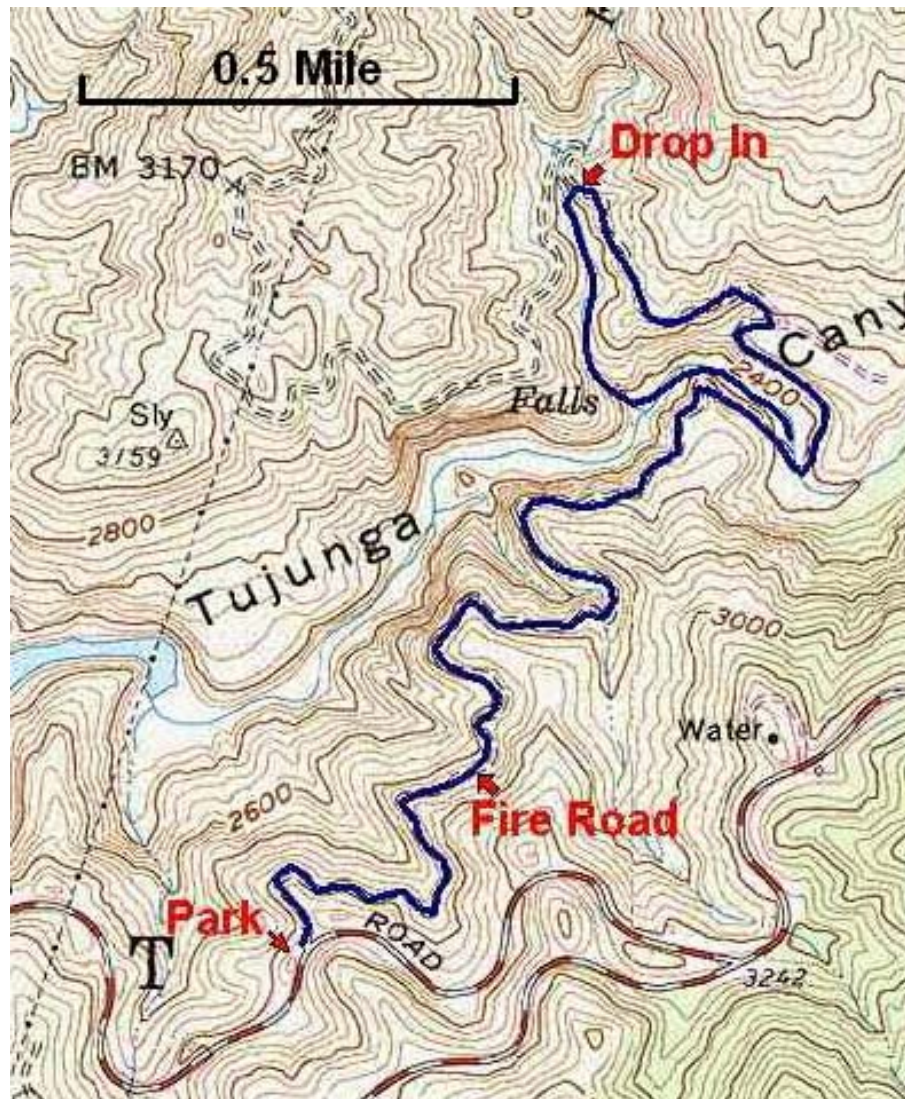


*Fall Creek falls.*

to do a double-strand rappel. A single-strand rappel can be completed with a 100ft rope but the rope recovery can be tricky due to the rocky lip of the second waterfall. And a rope hang-up here without a back-up rope means you are stranded above the last waterfall. The other option is to climb down the third waterfall on the left hand side; the climb is relatively simple but a little exposed and not recommended.

Below the third waterfall is pool with a small plot of land and a number of substantial trees, several of which are close enough to the fourth waterfall to provide excellent anchors. About 70ft high, this fourth waterfall (at  $34^{\circ}18.38'N$   $118^{\circ}9.83'W$ ) is the largest in this series. It is unusual for the San Gabriels in that there are a number of different routes for the descent. Either to the left or the right there is a small ridge and you can therefore set up for a dry rappel on either side. Alternatively, you may chose to rappel straight down through the notch in the ridge cut by the stream, in which case you will certainly be treated to a shower on the way. The pool at the bottom is not very deep and it is only a few yards from the bottom of Big Tujunga Canyon and Mill Creek. You should reach this point (elevation 2360ft) about 4hrs from the start.

From the end of Fall Creek, it is a short 0.25mi hike upstream to the place where the Fall Creek fire road crosses Mill Creek ( $34^{\circ}18.31'N$   $118^{\circ}9.61'W$ ). From there you hike back up the fire road to the trailhead that you should reach about 5hrs from the start.



Map of Fall Creek Canyon Hike

## 3.16 Upper Lucas Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.3 miles
- Elevation gain: 1240 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Steep chute downclimb, a 60ft rappel
- Special equipment: 160ft rope, harnesses, 8ft webbing and a rappel ring
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Lucas Creek originates on the northwestern slopes of Strawberry Peak and travels northwest to join the Big Tujunga. This collection includes two hikes along Lucas Creek. This first hike travels from the canyon head down to the Angeles Forest Highway; a later hike continues down to the Big Tujunga.

The head of the canyon can be accessed from the ridge between Josephine and Strawberry Peak. The canyon of Lucas Creek is a moderate sized, north slope canyon, wooded and brush-free. Thus it constitutes a fairly easy and reasonably short adventure hike that only has one substantial technical obstacle, a 60ft rappel that could be bypassed if necessary. It is good hike for almost anytime of year.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. From La Canada/Flintridge drive up the Angeles Crest Highway and turn right at the Clear Creek junction onto the Angeles Forest Highway. When you pass the junction with the Big Tujunga Canyon Road take note of the odometer and drive just over 1.0mi to where the Angeles Forest Highway crosses Lucas Creek (at 34°17.92'N 118°8.91'W and elevation 3040ft). Park one vehicle in the dirt parking area on the right and then drive back to Clear Creek junction in the other vehicle(s). Park in one of the pullouts surrounding this junction (at 34°16.22'N 118°9.19'W and elevation 3650ft).

### Hike

The Josephine Fire Road begins on the east side of Angeles Forest Highway just about 50yds from the intersection at an elevation of 3650ft. Pass the metal gate and hike up this well-used dirt road as it climbs steadily toward the ridge between Josephine and Strawberry Peaks. When, after 1hr 10min and 2.6mi

of hiking, you come to the ridge ( $34^{\circ}16.95'N$   $118^{\circ}8.52'W$  and elevation 4890ft) you are treated to spectacular views both to the south and the north. To the south you can see downtown Los Angeles and beyond, the Pacific Ocean, the Palos Verdes peninsula and Catalina Island. In the other direction, the northern San Gabriel mountains are spread out before you. You are looking up the valley of Mill Creek toward the saddle where the highway begins its descent toward Palmdale. To the left of that is Mount Gleason and you can see the Fall Creek/Mount Gleason fire road wind its way up the long ridge toward that summit.

Directly below you is the canyon of Lucas Creek that starts off to your right on the slopes of Strawberry Peak and slices west to cross the Angeles Forest Highway. You can glimpse a short stretch of that road far below you. Turn right and follow the trail eastwards along the ridge for about 0.5mi to Josephine Saddle ( $34^{\circ}16.92'N$   $118^{\circ}8.05'W$  and elevation 4850ft). You should reach this point about 1hr 20min from the start.

From Josephine Saddle you need to backtrack 150yds along the trail to find the recommended drop-in route for Lucas Creek. This consists of a steep, rugged gully with lots of sand and loose rock. The 460ft descent down this gully/scree slope is relatively easy though the danger from tumbling rocks is evident. Here it is important for only one person to descend at a time, for those below to take refuge to the side of the gully and watch for the tumbling rocks and for those above to stay still to avoid loosening rocks. You should reach the bottom of Lucas Creek canyon (elevation 4390ft) about 2hrs from the start.

Lucas Canyon itself is typical north slope canyon with a relatively easy gradient. It is wooded, brush-free and mostly open, fairly easy going over a boulder



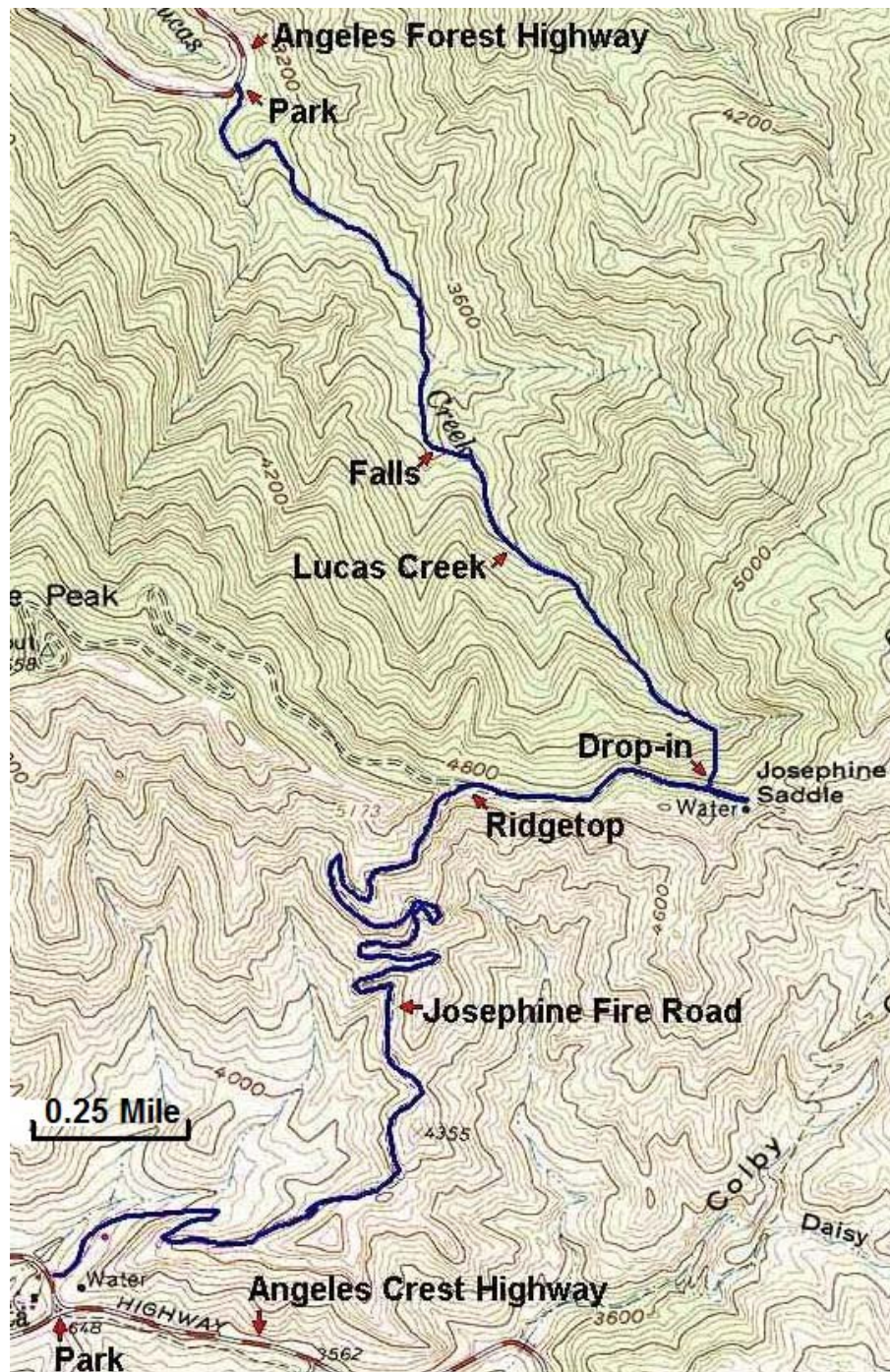
*Lucas Creek Falls.*



and log-strewn bottom. No use-trail is evident except very near the end. About 30min down the canyon at an elevation of 3970ft you will encounter a 20ft down-climb over bedrock. The best route here is down the center. Another 20min will bring you to an awkward 6ft waterfall that can be bypassed on the left.

Then, 3hr 10min and 3.5mi from the start at an elevation of 3670ft, you will arrive at the top of the only substantial obstacle in this hike. Here the canyon drops about 60ft down a steep and narrow waterfall. The best way to descend is to set up a rappel using one of the trees off to the right side as anchor. From there it is a 60ft rappel down to the gravel flat at the bottom. You descend to a junction with another large gully entering on the left. We note that this rappel can probably be avoided by climbing up the canyon wall on the left a short distance above the lip of the waterfall and contouring around to a large tree at the top of a steep, earthen gully that looked as though it could be downclimbed safely. The gully is in the vertex between the two merging canyons.

Proceeding downstream from the rappel, the canyon bottom is rough but still moderately easy going. Gradually, the stream develops and there are some very pretty and bucolic stretches with pools and small cascades. Near the end another large gully joins from the left and a use-trail is evident. The noise of the passing vehicles will also signal that the end is near. You should come to the Angeles Forest Highway and your return vehicle at  $34^{\circ}17.92'N$   $118^{\circ}8.91'W$  and an elevation of 3040ft about 4hrs 30min from the start.



Map of Upper Lucas Creek Hike

## 3.17 Lower Lucas Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.4 miles
- Elevation gain: 900 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Steep chute downclimb, 25ft and 20ft rappels
- Special equipment: 120ft rope, harnesses, 8ft webbing and two rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Lucas Creek originates on the northwestern slopes of Strawberry Peak and travels northwest to join the Big Tujunga. A descent of the upper section is described elsewhere in the hike of Upper Lucas Creek. Here we described a hike down the lower half of Lucas Creek, from the Angeles Forest Highway to the Big Tujunga. The canyon of Lucas Creek is a moderate sized, north slope canyon, wooded and relatively brush-free though there is some poison ivy in this lower section. It is a fairly easy and short adventure hike that has a little downclimbing and a modest technical hurdle, two rappels of 25ft and 20ft just where Lucas Creek enters the Big Tujunga. It is good hike for the spring when some water is flowing over the falls.

### Trailhead

This hike requires either a 1.7mi hike back along the road at the end or a short car shuttle to cover that section. From La Canada/Flintridge drive up the Angeles Crest Highway and turn right at the Clear Creek junction onto the Angeles Forest Highway. When you pass the junction with the Big Tujunga Canyon Road take note of the odometer and drive just over 1.0mi to where the Angeles Forest Highway crosses Lucas Creek (at 34°17.92'N 118°8.91'W and elevation 3040ft). Park in the dirt parking area on the right.

If you wish to cut out the 1.7mi road hike at the end, then first turn left at the junction of the Angeles Forest Highway and Big Tujunga Canyon Road and drive 0.6mi down the latter to a dirt parking area on the right where there is a metal gate across the fire road (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft). Leave the return vehicle there before driving back to the Angeles Forest Highway and proceeding to the start of the hike as described above.

## Hike

The drop in from the Angeles Forest Highway (at  $34^{\circ}17.92'N$   $118^{\circ}8.91'W$  and elevation 3040ft) to the lower section of Lucas Creek is not immediately obvious since there is much brush below the highway opposite the parking area. The best route is to hike 100yds back up the Angeles Forest Highway (going south) to where you will find a steep, brush-free scree slope dropping into the canyon. Descend this all the way to the stream. From there, the descent alongside the stream is easy going though there may be brush and poison oak in places. After about 30min you come to two pretty little waterfalls that are readily descended (elevation 2760ft) and shortly thereafter a large gully enters on the left.

The first significant obstacle occurs after about 1hr at an elevation of 2560ft and at a point where the canyon narrows. Here there are several small waterfalls and two canyon-spanning pools. It is relatively easy to climb around these obstacles, going to the right around the first pool and to the left around the second.

After about 1hr 30min at an elevation of 2490ft you encounter the only technical obstacle in this hike, a pretty pair of waterfalls at the very end of Lucas Creek. From the top you can see Mill Creek and the Big Tujunga. Both rappels have trees about 20ft back from the lip that serve as very secure anchors. The upper waterfall is a 25ft vertical drop into a knee-deep pool. Here it is best to stay to the left of the water stream. The second waterfall follows immediately and is a 20ft vertical drop into a thigh-deep pool. Here it is not easy to avoid the falling water.



*Lower Lucas Creek Falls.*



This topographic map illustrates the trail route through the Angeles Forest area. The trail is marked with a blue line, starting from the Trailhead near Big Tujunga Canyon Road and winding through the canyon. Key features labeled on the map include Mill Creek Canyon, Rappels, Lucas Creek, Fire Road, Water, Angeles Forest Highway, Park, Trailhead, Big Tujunga Canyon Road, and Overlook. A scale bar at the bottom right indicates a distance of 0.5 Mile. The map also shows contour lines and various elevation points.

205



## 3.18 Big Tujunga Narrows

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.0 miles plus the road return
- Elevation gain: 440 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Climbing, bouldering, wading and swimming
- Special equipment: Wading and swimming equipment, drybag
- ACA Rating: 2B II

A short distance below the Big Tujunga Road Bridge, Big Tujunga Canyon closes in and the river plunges through a short but quite rugged and precipitous gorge. In the summer when the river is low, you can negotiate a way through this gorge provided that you are willing to wade a lot and even swim in a few places. There is only one substantial waterfall along this stretch; it represents the only difficult obstacle on this hike but by judicious route finding you will be able to pass these falls and the deep ravine immediately downstream.

It takes about an hour and a half to negotiate the gorge. The rest of the hike consists of a very pleasant and bucolic hike down a wooded canyon with some lovely pools, several of which make good swimming. You return to “civilization” by way of the Fall Creek Fire Road.

### Trailhead

Though not necessary, this hike is best done using a car shuttle (or the placement of a bicycle) with which to cover the return leg along the road. The main trailhead is a dirt parking area (at 34°18.41'N 118°8.76'W and elevation 2940ft) on the east side of the road, 0.4mi south of Big Tujunga Narrows Bridge on the Angeles Forest Highway. It is most readily recognized by the large tree in the center of the parking area and confirmed by the presence of a trailhead on the other side of the road. If you wish to set up the car or bicycle shuttle, drive 1.3mi south on the Angeles Forest Highway to the junction with the Big Tujunga Canyon Road and another 0.5mi down the latter to a small dirt parking area on the right (west) where there is a locked gate leading to a fire road (at 34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W and elevation 3090ft). Leave the second car or bicycle here and return to the main trailhead.

## Hike

From the dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}18.41'N$   $118^{\circ}8.76'W$  and elevation 2940ft), cross the road and start down a well-trodden trail that descends into Big Tujunga Canyon. After about 25yds the trail divides with the main trail proceeding straight on. However a well-worn trail proceeds straight down the steep slope and, for this hike, it is better to proceed down this steep route. Near the bottom, there are strategically placed ropes to help you descend two steep and rocky sections. Once you reach the canyon bottom ( $34^{\circ}18.52'N$   $118^{\circ}8.77'W$  and elevation 2640ft), turn left and proceed downstream. There is no trail, but initially the going is fairly easy. However, the trees and foliage soon vanish and the river enters a narrow rocky gorge, proceeding from one sculpted pool to the next. For a short stretch, it is possible to progress without getting wet. But that is a brief reprieve. Soon you reach a point where wading becomes essential. Here you should prepare for an extended series of deep wades including a few places, further on, where there is no alternative but to swim. I recommend wading with your boots and socks on for, in this way, you ensure the best footing. Provided the weather is good enough (and this is most definitely a warm weather hike) I also recommend stripping down to shorts or bathing trunks. A large and fairly strong waterproof bag is almost essential. I put my backpack and all my clothes in this bag, seal it and use it as a flotation device when swimming becomes essential. Swimming may not be quite the right word; it is more like letting the current carry you with minimal arm strokes.

The first few deep pools only require wading through waist deep water. But in some years they may be deeper so careful route-finding is recommended. Then, about 60min from the start, you will arrive at the major obstacle on this



*Left: Upstream of the Narrows. Right: Exit from the Narrows.*

hike and it is wise to gauge the nature of this obstacle before proceeding. From upstream, you will see that the river drops down into a narrow, steep-walled ravine about 40ft deep. It may look as though you could follow the river into this ravine but, what you cannot see from this vantage point, is that there is a 20ft waterfall that blocks this route. Though not recommended, many young people slide down these falls into the deep pool below and then swim across the two pools beneath the falls.

The safer route is to follow the rock shelf to the right of the ravine that is easily accessed and places you about 40ft above the canyon bottom. Several ropes hang down into this ravine from a dubious anchor. You may be tempted to rappel down this same route but this is not recommended. Instead, you should proceed along the shelf, climbing higher as the right turn in the canyon is approached. Turning the corner, you should be able to see a fairly comfortable route that can be used to descend to the river. From the high point where you turn the corner, you can follow a narrow ledge as it traverses down to a point where another ledge switchbacks upstream to reach the bottom. This route is easier and safer than it might appear at first sight. Apart from being a little airy, the only difficulty occurs at the point of switchback, but even here there are many good footholds. The alternative is to rappel down the rockface in the same general vicinity using one or two of the sturdy bushes as anchors.

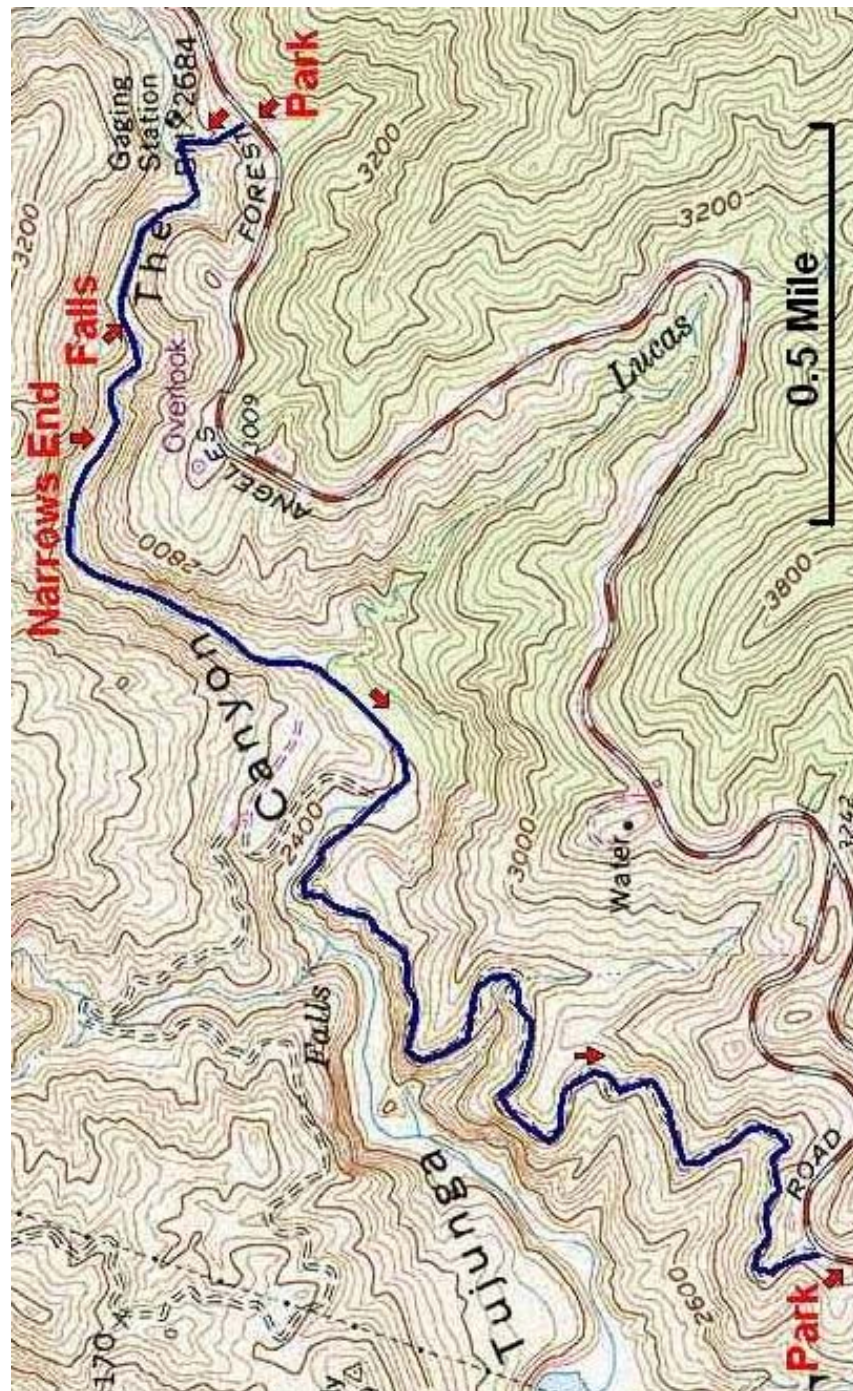
Having negotiated this major obstacle, you enter a very narrow section with polished vertical walls. Here the river forms deep pools separated by small cascades. Almost immediately, you will reach a deep pool where there is no alternative but to swim. It is, however, an easy swim (or float), particularly if you follow my recommendation and use a sealed plastic bag (or “drybag”) as a flotation device. There follows a series of smaller pools that mostly require wading and the negotiation of small cascades. One final swim between vertical walls will bring you to a gravel beach that marks the end of the narrows. Consequently, when you reach the gravel beach about 1hr 30min from the start of the hike, it is a good time to change into dry clothes.

Over the last, off-trail part of this hike the canyon broadens and the going becomes much easier. There are a few short rocky sections where knee-deep wading is necessary but these are interspersed with broad and serene stretches with lots of shade and foliage. This is a beautiful and infrequently visited section of Big Tujunga Canyon and there are numerous places to enjoy a picnic. Finally, the canyon broadens further and you must bear right at the boulder field and follow the river; here, 2hr 30min from the start of the hike, you reach the place where the Fall Creek Fire Road crosses the river via a rudimentary concrete bridge (at 34°18.31'N 118°9.61'W and elevation 2380ft). Above you to the right, a little way up the fire road is the Falls Creek campground. But our route follows the fire road in the opposite direction, climbing the left or east wall of the canyon. It is a fairly easy 1.7mi, 50min hike up the fire road to the locked gate off the parking area at the side of Big Tujunga Road (34°17.82'N 118°10.20'W). Hopefully, this is the place where you left the other vehicle or bicycle.

## Mill Creek extension

If you would like a longer adventure, you can park in the Forest Service area immediately north of the road tunnel that is, in turn, just about 0.25mi northeast of the Big Tujunga Narrows Bridge. From that parking area (at  $34^{\circ}18.95'N$   $118^{\circ}8.18'W$  and elevation 3040ft), you can drop straight into Mill Creek and follow it downstream to where it joins Big Tujunga just upstream of the drop-in point described at the start of this chapter. This Mill Creek extension adds about 2hr to the duration of the hike. The new section of canyon has only two obstacles that pose any problems. The first is a small 5ft drop as the stream slides through a narrow and slippery gap beside a large boulder. A piece of webbing is useful here to lower yourself into the pool below.

A short distance downstream is a much larger, 30ft waterfall; this can be negotiated by climbing the rocks on the right and following the well-worn use-trail a short way to the point where it descends to the canyon bottom. The remaining distance to the junction with Big Tujunga Canyon ( $34^{\circ}18.56'N$   $118^{\circ}8.59'W$  and elevation 2680ft) is very pleasant and wooded and well worth the effort in extending the hike.



Map of Big Tujunga Narrows Hike



## 3.19 Katharine Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6 miles
- Elevation gain: 1320 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Two modest rappels of 35ft and 25ft, some downclimbing.
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 160ft rope, 20ft webbing and two rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Katharine is the canyon just east of Lucas Creek; it parallels Lucas as it drops down off Strawberry Peak, flowing northwest to join the Big Tujunga just north of the big road bridge and just south of Hidden Springs. A sweet little canyon (much like those it is named after) it is shady, bucolic and relatively brush-free like most of the north facing canyons. Though containing many small and moderate downclimbs, there are only two rappels and one of these can probably be avoided. A small stream flows most of the year providing sustenance to the abundant plant and animal life. Bear tracks and scat are evident everywhere. The canyon could be descended almost anytime of the year though the fall colors in Big Tujunga make that time a special delight.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. From La Canada/Flintridge drive up the Angeles Crest Highway and turn right at the Clear Creek junction onto the Angeles Forest Highway. When you pass the junction with the Big Tujunga Canyon Road take note of the odometer and drive 2.7mi to the road bridge over the Big Tujunga. Park one vehicle in the pullout on west side of the road just past the bridge (at 34°18.72'N 118°8.26'W and elevation 2830ft). While there examine the climb out of Big Tujunga that you will need to make at the end of this hike. Fix in your mind several landmarks that will help in finding the best route for this ascent; there is a scree slope about 150yds north of the bridge that provides one such route. Then drive back to Clear Creek junction in the other vehicle(s). Park in one of the pullouts surrounding this junction (at 34°16.22'N 118°9.19'W and elevation 3655ft).

## Hike

The Josephine Fire Road begins on the east side of Angeles Forest Highway just about 100yds from the intersection with the Angeles Crest Highway at an elevation of 3650ft. Pass the metal gate and hike up this well-used dirt road as it climbs steadily toward the ridge between Josephine and Strawberry Peaks. When, after 1hr 10min and 2.4mi of hiking, you come to the ridge (at  $34^{\circ}16.95'N$   $118^{\circ}8.52'W$  and elevation 4890ft) you are treated to spectacular views both to the south and the north. To the south you can see downtown Los Angeles and beyond, the Pacific Ocean, the Palos Verdes peninsula and Catalina Island. In the other direction, the northern San Gabriel mountains are spread out before you. You are looking up the valley of Mill Creek toward the saddle where the highway begins its descent toward Palmdale. To the left of that is Mount Gleason and you can see the Fall Creek/Mount Gleason fire road wind its way up the long ridge toward that summit.

Turn right and follow the trail eastwards along the ridge for about 0.5mi to Josephine Saddle ( $34^{\circ}16.92'N$   $118^{\circ}8.05'W$  and elevation 4850ft), readily identified by the large circular water tank. You should reach this point about 1hr 20min from the start. Directly below you on the north side is the canyon of Lucas Creek that is described elsewhere in this collection.

From Josephine Saddle follow the trail northeastwards as it gently climbs and contours around the north side of Strawberry Peak and around the head of several of the forks of Lucas Creek. All of these forks are clearly part of the same watershed that leads down to the visible Angeles Forest Highway. The trail climbs gently over the ridge into the next watershed and just after it does, about 1.0mi or 25min from Josephine Saddle, it drops a short way to contour



*Left: Descending Katharine Canyon (photo by Ira Lewis). Right: Last rappel.*

through a streambed (at  $34^{\circ}17.46'N$   $118^{\circ}7.79'W$  and elevation 4945ft); this is Katharine Canyon and here you leave the trail to begin the descent. You should reach this drop-in point about 1hr 45min from the start having covered about 3.9mi.

The upper section of Katharine Canyon makes for relatively easy descent with little brush and lots of rough, exposed bedrock. About 45min after the drop-in, you will come to the first downclimb at an elevation of about 4510ft, a 15ft drop climbed down on the canyon left. About 10min later there is another, larger (30ft) sloping downclimb in mid-canyon

and this is followed about 35min later by another 30ft downclimb where the best route is via a slot on the left. The canyon is wooded throughout its length and gets more lush as you descend. Running water will be encountered most years around the mid-point of the descent and helps sustain not only the foliage but also a clearly evident animal population. Signs of bear are everywhere.

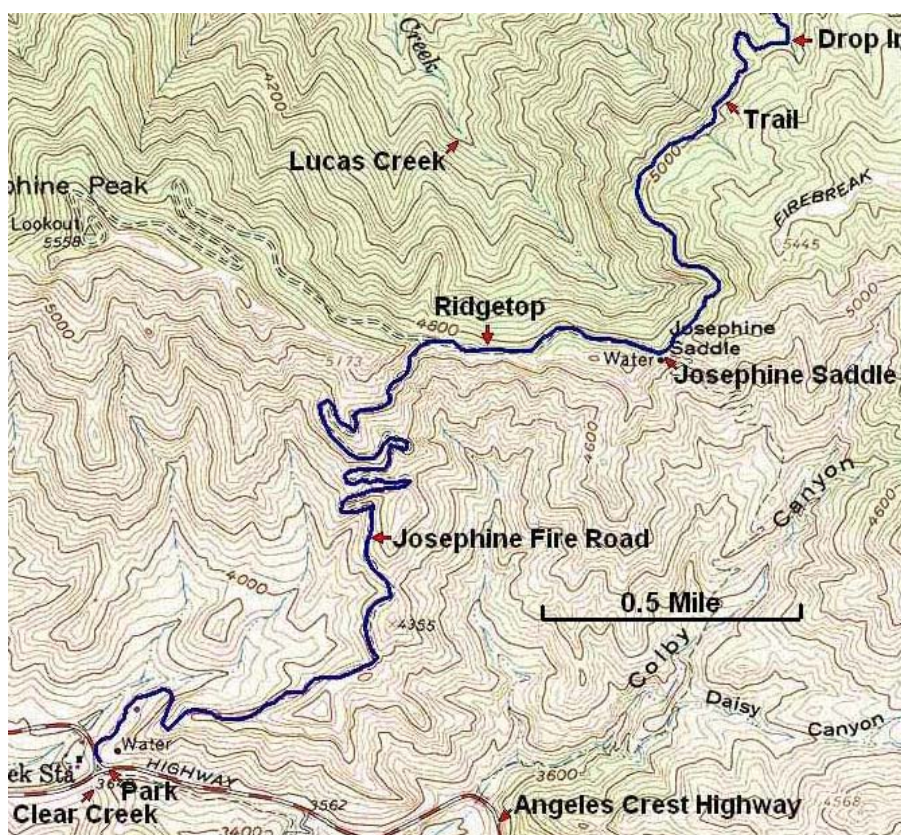
About 3.5hrs from the morning start at an elevation of around 3900ft you will come to the first rappel, a 40ft wooded drop where a steep gully tributary comes in on the left. You can rappel down the stepped watercourse or you can climb around to the left onto the nose of the junction and descend there using one of several tree anchors. It is probably also possible to downclimb by contouring just a little further left into the steep gully and descending there. An hour later there are several downclimbs in a narrow, twisting section of canyon. Another hour later you will come to the second and last rappel, a 25ft drop from a small tree anchor on the right. Just a few yards beyond these falls, Katharine Canyon ends at the Big Tujunga at  $34^{\circ}18.58'N$   $118^{\circ}8.10'W$  and an elevation of 2735ft. You should reach the Big Tujunga 5.5hrs after the morning start having



*Fall color in Big Tujunga.*

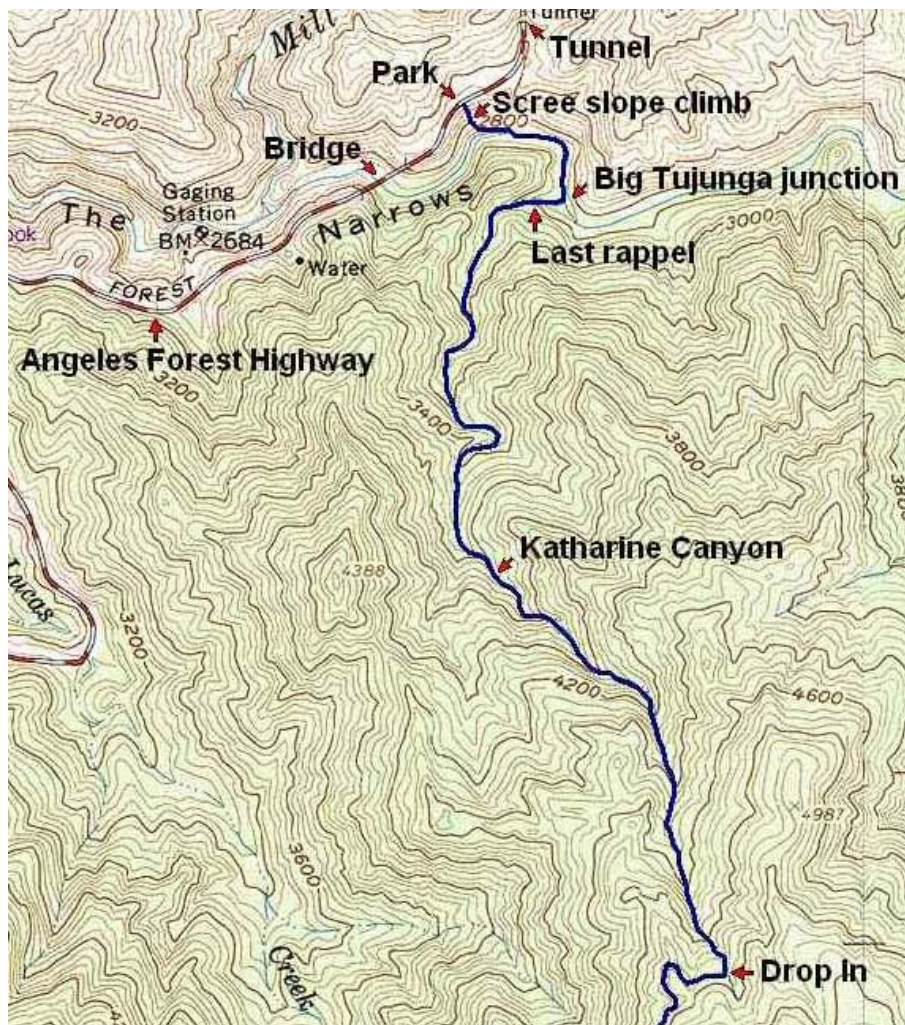
covered about 5.6mi.

This is a lovely, boulder-strewn section of the Big Tujunga, particularly enjoyable in the fall with its pools and colors. Turn right and proceed downstream and after a big left turn you should see the Angeles Forest Highway ahead of you, high up on the canyon wall. Below the highway the canyon makes a left turn but, well before that turn, you need to find a route through the bushes on the right that leads to the bottom of a steep scree slope (at about 34°18.67'N 118°8.22'W and elevation 2760ft). Ascending that scree slope brings you to the highway, hopefully close to where you parked the return vehicle at 34°18.72'N 118°8.26'W and an elevation of 2830ft. The hike takes about 6hrs during which you cover about 6mi.



Map of first part of Katharine Canyon Hike





Map of second part of Katharine Canyon Hike



## 3.20 Upper Big Tujunga

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.8 miles
- Elevation gain: 500 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak, Chilao Flat
- Difficulties: Some climbing, route finding and wading Special equipment: Wading gear
- ACA Rating: 2B II

Between the Big Tujunga Road Bridge and Colby Camp, Upper Big Tujunga Canyon winds through a pleasant gorge that provides a straightforward adventure hike with some moderate challenges. It is particularly enjoyable in summer since the river flows year round and there are a number of swimming pools along the way. The hike involves much boulder-hopping, some wading, one climb that is a little airy and several other climbs around small falls. No ropes or technical equipment are needed.

### Trailhead



*Left: First falls. Right: Upper Tujunga Falls.*

This hike requires a car shuttle or the placement of a bicycle with which to ease the return by road. The main trailhead is a dirt parking area (at 34°18.41'N 118°8.76'W and elevation 2940ft) on the east side of the road, 0.4mi south of Big Tujunga Road Bridge on the Angeles Forest Highway. It is most readily recognized by the large tree in the center of the parking area and confirmed by the presence of a trailhead on the other side of the road. But before parking here drive further north on the Angeles Forest Highway, across the Road Bridge and about 2.5mi further north to the road junction where the Upper Big Tujunga Road meets the Angeles Forest Highway. Turn right onto the Upper Big Tujunga Road and drive about another mile. Turn right onto the narrow paved road to Colby Camp. About 0.5mi down this road is a narrow metal bridge (at 34°18.59'N 118°6.81'W and elevation 3150ft) over the river where we shall later leave the canyon. Park the second vehicle in the lot just on the other side of the bridge (or leave the bicycle somewhere nearby).

## Hike

Back at the dirt parking area just south of the Big Tujunga Road Bridge (34°18.41'N 118°8.76'W), cross the highway and start down a well-trodden trail that descends into Big Tujunga Canyon. About 100ft above the river, this trail rapidly disintegrates. If you follow the trail to its end, you find yourself at the top of a steep cliff above and around a concrete gauging station. It is not a good idea to try and descend here. Rather, retrace your steps about 20yds to where there is a steep but less dangerous place to climb down the remaining 100ft or so. There are several trees and root systems that provide valuable hand and foot holds.

At the bottom (elevation 2640ft), turn right and start hiking upstream. It is rough but fairly easy going here though you must cross the river in several places and this is harder to do when the water is higher.

You will encounter a number of automobile remains and other artifacts presumably thrown into the canyon from the road and bridge above. After 25min you arrive at the junction of Mill Creek and the Big Tujunga. Stay right in the Big Tujunga and 45min from the start you pass under the Big Tujunga Road Bridge whose arches are high above you. Indeed, you may be watched from above as you make your way upstream. The going remains fairly easy in this pleasantly wooded section of the canyon. In many places there is a use-trail that helps speed progress up the canyon. About 80min from the start a large canyon enters from the right and just upstream of this junction the canyon broadens and the bottom becomes quite flat with a number of meadows. There are several pleasant picnic sites here and you may spot a deer or two.

About 1hr 40min from the start the canyon closes in again and at 2hr you arrive at a section of narrows. The first substantial falls cascade down about 20ft into a pool-filled rock cavity. Ascend a cleft immediately to the left of the falls, a quite straightforward climb. After another brief section of bouldering, a much more impressive obstacle comes into sight, 2hr 25min from the start. The river crashes down through a steep and narrow defile with polished rock walls

and then plunges over a 30ft waterfall into a large pool, almost a small lake. These are the largest falls in the upper section of the Big Tujunga Narrows. There is a broad area around the lake with a very pleasant, sandy beach. It is a beautiful place for lunch and a swim on a summer day. It is not immediately obvious how to get above this waterfall or series of waterfalls. There are, in fact, two routes, one quite straightforward, the other very difficult indeed. The cliffs immediately around falls are clearly only for the experienced rock climber. Instead, the route for most hikers lies up the somewhat airy use-trail that climbs the steep bank to the left of the falls. This is easier than it looks from below. You follow it by first ascending the gully to the left of the steep bank. A short distance up you should be able to discern a use-trail traversing back to the right across the steep bank.

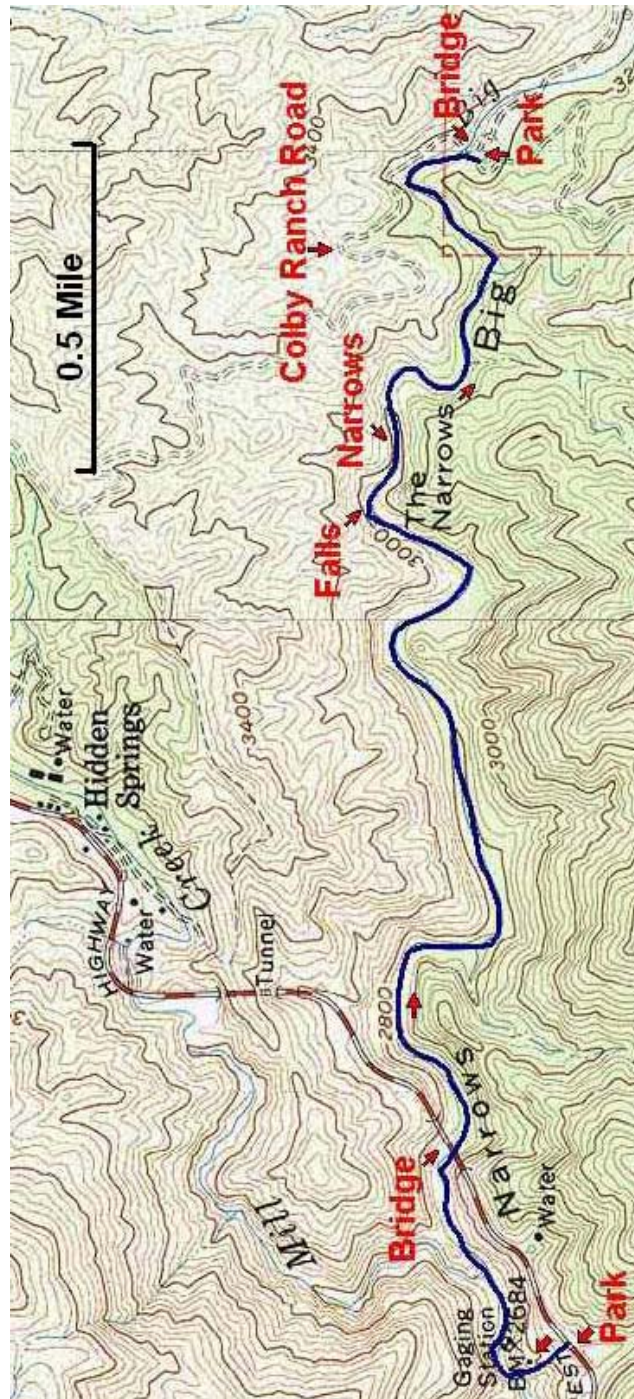
Follow this use trail across and up to the sharp ridge about 150ft above the river. This point is easily identified since, from it, you can look straight down on the river above the falls. The descent from here looks difficult but there is a well worn trail that is quite easy. To reach it you walk a few yards up the ridge until you can see clear signs of the use-trail descending; climb down about 6ft and then traverse to your left about 5yds between a rock and a bush. From here the trail goes straight down about 60ft; if it is not well worn then you should back track and look again for the trail. You descend onto a rock shelf a few feet above the river and, from here, the route upstream is clear.

But, before proceeding upstream, you may wish to clamber a few yards downstream to inspect the falls from above. You cannot, in fact, get very close to the main falls without climbing but you should be able to discern the upper part of the difficult climbing route up through this gorge. It lies along a ledge that climbs the south wall of the canyon to a height of about 50ft and then descends to a shelf right in the apex of the defile. You cannot see more from above but, from below the falls, you may have noticed a large slot about 6ft wide that cuts deeply into the cliff to the right of the falls. The rock climbing route through the gorge is to get into this slot (you may have to swim through the pool to get there) and then climb about 40ft up the rock at the end of the slot to the afore-mentioned shelf. There is an old rope hanging in this slot but it is very unwise to trust such ropes; there are, incidentally, a number of other such ropes hanging at various points within the gorge. But, I strongly recommend against any climbing in this defile unless you are an experienced rock climber.

Proceeding upstream from above the falls, the canyon is quite rocky for the rest of the way and there are several places where wading is not easily avoided. There is no difficult climbing but there are a number of places where the route requires some thought and a little scrambling. It is slow going over this stretch and harder in the winter when the water is colder and deeper. There are some beautiful pools that are much more fun on a hot summer day and positively invite you to swim.

When you are almost at the end of the hike, there is one 15ft cascade that discharges into a rocky pool. Often groups of young people hike down to this point from above and enjoy jumping into the pool beneath this waterfall. From downstream, you approach this cascade on the left of the canyon, climb down

to the river, cross it and then ascend to the right of the falls. This would be a very pretty spot except that it has been despoiled by vandals who have spray-painted the rocks in many places and have left substantial litter. I traversed this section with a heavy heart. Above the cascade there is a short wooded section before you encounter the Colby Canyon bridge at  $34^{\circ}18.59'N$   $118^{\circ}6.81'W$  and an elevation of 3150ft. Climbing the bank on the right side brings you to the parking area where you left the second vehicle or bicycle. It takes about 2hr to complete this upper half of the hike from the main falls to Colby Canyon bridge.



Map of Upper Tujunga Canyon Hike



## Chapter 4

# PACOIMA

The Pacoima Canyons are those that descend into the large Pacoima drainage. Only two such canyons have been explored by the author and are included in this book. This is in part because access to the top of these canyons is very limited and in part because the two included canyon descents were not particularly exciting. However, since there are many other canyons in this region, it is quite possible that there are other as-yet undiscovered and worthwhile canyons in this region.



Pacoima region.

## 4.1 Bee Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3 hours 20 minutes
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 580 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Sunland
- Difficulties: Three straightforward rappels of 50ft, 25ft and 30ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment including 160ft rope, 15ft webbing, one rappel ring, harnesses and helmets
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Pacoima Canyon drains the northwest corner of the San Gabriel mountains, flowing west between two substantial ridges before slicing south through precipitous terrain to emerge into the San Fernando Valley. In its gentler upper reaches it is a broad and gradual canyon but with steep walls created by the Mendenhall Ridge on the south and the Santa Clara Divide ridge to the north. Both ridges can be accessed using dirt roads called, unsurprisingly, the Mendenhall Ridge Road and the Santa Clara Divide Road. These allow access to a series of steep lateral canyons some of which make for good off-trail adventures. In this hike we drop into Bee Canyon from the Santa Clara Divide Road and descend into Pacoima Canyon. Three easy rappels are needed near the bottom and then a little bushwhacking takes you to Pacoima Canyon. From there you hike out of Pacoima to the Dillon Divide trailhead using the old fireroad that was also followed in the Laurel Canyon hike. Southeast-facing and with mostly desert like vegetation, Bee Canyon is best for a winter day hike.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. First leave a vehicle at the small roadside parking area at Dillon Divide (34°20.68'N 118°20.97'W and elevation 2770ft), the high point on Little Tujunga Road. To get there from the 210 Freeway in Sunland, take the Osborne Street offramp, drive north and turn left at the first traffic light. Osborne Street leads into Little Tujunga Road that proceeds up Little Tujunga Canyon past many horse ranches. At the head of the canyon, the road switchbacks up to Dillon Divide, about 7.5mi from the 210 Freeway. Just beyond the summit note the metal gate on the dirt road branching off to the right. Leave the first vehicle there and continue west on the road for 4.4mi where, just past Bear Divide, you turn right onto Santa Clara Divide Road. Drive 2mi up this asphalt road to where there is an overlook on the right at the

top of the ridge. Actually there are two overlooks, separated by less than 100yds and you want the second of these that has a grove of pine trees on the opposite side of the road. Park in the turn-off on the right (at  $34^{\circ}21.54'N$   $118^{\circ}21.98'W$  and elevation 3440ft).

## Hike

The top of Bee Canyon ( $34^{\circ}21.54'N$   $118^{\circ}21.98'W$  and elevation 3440ft) drops straight down from the roadside turn-off. The first steep section is a fairly brush-free dirt slope that you should descend into the start of the streambed. The streambed continues to descend quite easily with only occasional brush. About 45min into the descent at an elevation of 2760ft you encounter a series of small downclimbs, several with brushy bypasses on the right.

Then, 1hr 10min into the hike at an elevation of 2480ft you arrive at the top of the first of three rappels. These occur one after the other and allow the rope to be fed straight through. The first rappel involves a vertical drop of 50ft and, like the others, has an easy entry. The nearest anchor is a tree on the left about 20ft upstream from the lip. It is probably best to use a rappel ring here. This first rappel takes you down to a broad shelf and the top of the second rappel, a modest 25ft drop for which you should use the tree on the right as the anchor. The top of the third rappel is only 20yds downstream. Use the large tree to the left of the streambed for this 30ft descent. At the bottom you can stow away the rappelling gear. You should reach this point about 2hr after starting the descent.



*First rappel in Bee Canyon.*

Below the third rappel, there is an easy downclimb of a rocky cascade and then some bushwhacking as you approach the junction of Bee Canyon with Pacoima Canyon at  $34^{\circ}21.13'N$   $118^{\circ}21.51'W$ . Push through the brush to get to the river (or riverbed for it often dries up at the end of the summer) and turn upstream. You should now be about 2hr 15min and 0.7mi from the drop-in point and at an elevation of 2230ft.

As you proceed up Pacoima Canyon, try to locate the brush-free route and watch for the trail that climbs up out of the canyon on the right hand side. You should see the two first long switchbacks high above you and then be able to cross the low brush on a bench to the right in order to intersect the trail where it starts to climb the right wall (about  $34^{\circ}21.26'N$   $118^{\circ}21.22'W$ ). It takes about 25min to reach the trail after leaving Bee Canyon.

The trail starts at about 2270ft, 1.1mi from the start of the hike. After the first 100yds or so it is clearly following the remnants of an old dirt road that switchbacks twice and then contours southwest as it climbs out of the canyon. After 35min and 1.2mi you come to the junction with the Mendenhall Ridge Road at  $34^{\circ}20.91'N$   $118^{\circ}21.18'W$  and an elevation of 2850ft. Continue southeast down the Ridge Road; it is only a 10min walk back to Dillon Divide trailhead ( $34^{\circ}20.68'N$   $118^{\circ}20.97'W$ ). The hike covers a total of 2.7mi with a hiking time of about 3hr 20min.



Map of Bee Canyon Hike



## 4.2 Laurel Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7.9 miles
- Elevation gain: 1420 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Sunland
- Difficulties: Some downclimbing
- Special equipment: 60ft rope or webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A III

Pacoima Canyon drains the northwest corner of the San Gabriel mountains, flowing west between two substantial ridges before slicing south through precipitous terrain to emerge into the San Fernando Valley. In its gentler upper reaches it is a broad and gradual canyon but with quite precipitous walls created by Mendenhall Ridge on the south and Santa Clara Divide ridge to the north. Both ridges can be accessed using dirt roads called, unsurprisingly, the Mendenhall Ridge Road and the Santa Clara Divide Road. These allow access to a series of steep lateral canyons some of which make for good off-trail adventures. In this hike we drop into Laurel Canyon where it crosses Mendenhall Ridge Road and descend into Pacoima Canyon. Laurel is an easy, north-facing wooded canyon that is mostly brush-free and has just a few downclimbing challenges. It can be enjoyed in spring, summer or the fall before too much rain has fallen.

### Trailhead

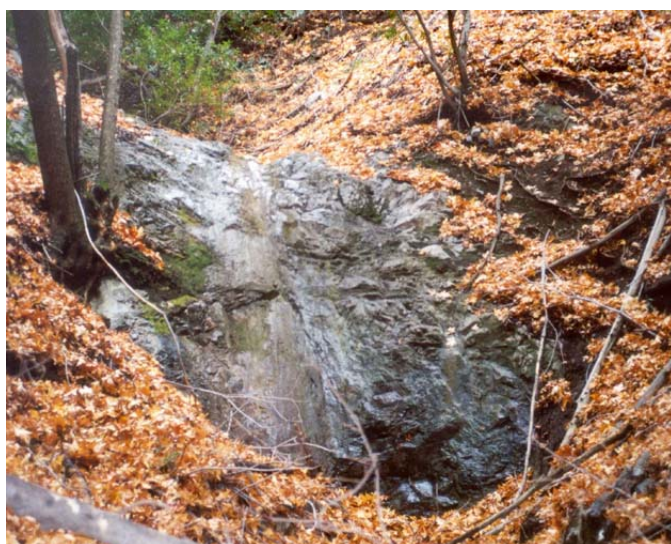
The trailhead is a small roadside parking area at Dillon Divide (34°20.68'N 118°20.97'W), the high point on Little Tujunga Road. From the 210 Freeway in Sunland, take the Osborne Street offramp, drive north and turn left at the first traffic light. Osborne Street leads into Little Tujunga Road and soon proceeds up Little Tujunga Canyon past many horse ranches. At the head of the canyon, the road switchbacks up to Dillon Divide, about 7.5mi from the 210 Freeway. Just beyond the summit note the metal gate on the dirt road branching off to the right. Park in the roadside parking area beside the gate.

### Hike

From the parking area (34°20.68'N 118°20.97'W and elevation 2770ft), proceed north on the Mendenhall Ridge Road with Pacoima Canyon below you on

the left. After 0.4mi and 10min you come to a fork in the road ( $34^{\circ}20.91'N$   $118^{\circ}21.18'W$  and elevation 2850ft). The left fork leads down into the bottom of Pacoima Canyon and is the return route for this hike. Taking the right fork, you continue to climb as the road contours around to the east following the direction of Pacoima Canyon. About 2.8mi and 1hr 5min from the start, you arrive at Highline Saddle with its electrical pylon; from here you get a good view down into Little Tujunga Canyon and beyond. Just a short distance further along the road you come to a second fork. Taking the left fork, you descend a little as you contour into the recess cut into the ridge by Laurel Canyon. About 3.3mi and 1hr 15min from the start at an elevation of 3580ft you come to the deeply recessed and obvious point where the road crosses Laurel Canyon creek ( $34^{\circ}21.07'N$   $118^{\circ}19.57'W$  and elevation 3580ft). Here you leave the road and head down the canyon.

In its upper reaches Laurel is a wooded but open canyon, and the off-trail descent is easy and pleasant. Indeed there are no distinctive landmarks until about 45min into the descent when you will encounter a straightforward 6ft downclimb at about 2940ft. Beyond this the canyon becomes a little more challenging with several downclimbs and occasional sections where a little bush-whacking is necessary. At an elevation of 2730ft there are two 6ft steps with rock pools that require some careful downclimbing and these are immediately followed by a 20ft waterfall that can be bypassed using the dirt slope on the right. A short distance further and you will come to the trickiest obstacle on this hike, a 12ft waterfall in a narrow gate. This is more easily downclimbed than might appear - using the footholds on the center right. But some may wish to use a belay for which there are convenient large roots on the left wall.



*Falls in Laurel Canyon.*

Others may choose to do a short rappel.

You should reach the bottom of Laurel Canyon ( $34^{\circ}21.57'N$   $118^{\circ}19.99'W$  and elevation 2510ft) about 3hr 15min and 4.4mi from the start. Here you are on a broad gravel wash that provides easy going as you turn left and head downstream. In the spring the river may be tricky to cross but it often dries up completely in the fall. The river meanders back and forth and, in several places, is close to breaking through to bypass a meander. As you progress a use-trail will begin to become evident. For several stretches it follows the remains of an old road that once reached far up into Pacoima Canyon. It is a very pleasant hike down this meandering canyon with many wooded benches and meadows on flats along the sides at the base of the steep walls. Two miles from the end of Laurel Canyon you should look for the exit trail. It proceeds up to the left on a large bench just after the streambed rounds a left turn where the bed is right up against the left-hand cliff. You should reach this waypoint (elevation 2270ft) about 4hr 15min and 6.4mi from the start.

After the first 100yds or so the trail is clearly following the remnants of an old dirt road that switchbacks twice and then contours southwest as it climbs toward the Mendenhall Ridge Road. Reaching that road at the first fork, it is then only a 10min walk back to the trailhead ( $34^{\circ}20.68'N$   $118^{\circ}20.97'W$  and elevation 2770ft). The hike covers a total of 7.9mi with a hiking time of about 5hr.



Map of Laurel Canyon Hike

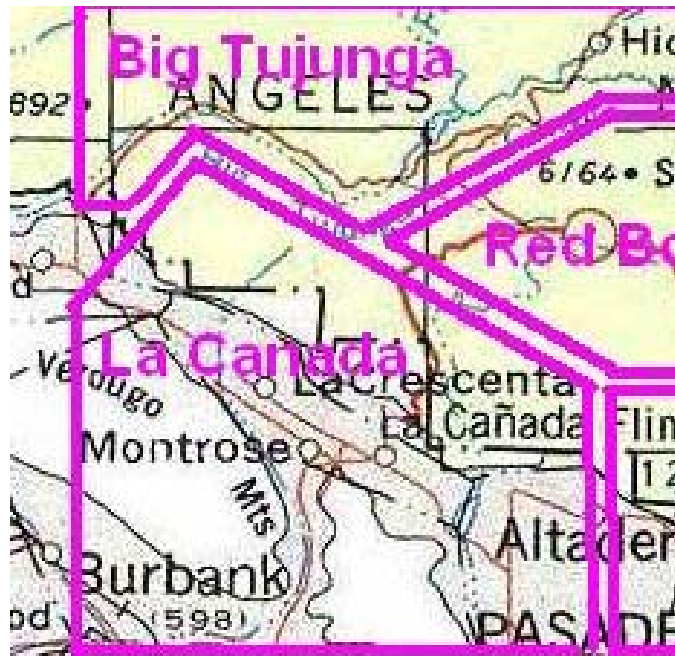




## Chapter 5

# LA CANADA

The La Canada Canyons are those that descend the south face of Mount Lukens into La Canada-Flintridge and the neighboring communities. Three such canyons are described and there may be others that would be worth exploring.



La Canada region.

## 5.1 Hall Beckley Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4 miles
- Elevation gain: 1340 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Pasadena, Condor Peak
- Difficulties: Eight rappels up to 140ft, some downclimbing.
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 160ft rope, 160ft recovery cord, 60ft webbing and eight rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3B III

Hall Beckley Canyon drops steeply down the south face of Mount Lukens into La Canada/Flintridge. It is a moderately challenging, quite brush-free canyon with several big rappels and lots of small downclimbs. Water runs in its lower reaches most of the year but there are no substantial pools to negotiate so only your feet will get wet. It is best for the winter, spring or fall; in the summer the hike up to the head of the canyon is very hot.

### Trailhead



*Left: The 80ft third rappel. Right: The 140ft seventh rappel.*

This hike requires a car shuttle. From the junction of Foothill Boulevard and the Angeles Crest Highway in La Canada/Flintridge drive west on Foothill and turn right (north) onto Palm Drive. Continue past Palm Crest School on the left. Just beyond this school and the stop sign that follows, Palm Drive begins to meander and you should park a recovery vehicle just a couple of hundred yards from the stop sign and close to Number 5147, Palm Drive.

Then, in the other vehicles, drive back down Palm Drive to Foothill Boulevard, turn left on Foothill and left again onto Angeles Crest Highway. Proceed up the Angeles Crest Highway to the Ranger Station. Take note of the odometer and drive another 2.4mi to where there is a small turnout on the left just after a sharp corner. This is the Dark Canyon trailhead though the trail is hard to spot when you are driving. A big sign on the other side of the road recounts the fire restrictions and a mile marker reads “30.02” vertically.

Parenthetically we note that many of canyons that descend the slopes of Mount Lukens, including Silver, Suicide, Sutton and Hall Beckley, have three alternative approach routes, all of which provide access to the upper reaches of the Mount Lukens road. The first of these, included in the descriptions of the Silver and Suicide Canyon descents, starts on the Angeles Crest Highway at the 2N79 trailhead at  $34^{\circ}15.62'N$   $118^{\circ}11.54'W$  and an elevation of 2940ft. The second, included in the description of Hall Beckley Canyon, also begins on the Angeles Crest Highway but at the trailhead for the Dark Canyon trail at  $34^{\circ}15.35'N$   $118^{\circ}11.81'W$  and an elevation of 2730ft. The third, included in the description of Sutton Canyon, begins in Deukmejian Wilderness Park at  $34^{\circ}14.98'N$   $118^{\circ}15.18'W$  and an elevation of 2335ft. The elevation gains up to the intersection of 2N76B and the Mount Lukens road (at  $34^{\circ}15.81'N$   $118^{\circ}13.74'W$ , near the drop in for Silver Canyon) are respectively 1680ft, 1890ft and 2285ft; however the distances are respectively 5.4mi, 3.3mi and 2.8mi. The hiker can choose whether he or she would rather hike a longer distance or a greater elevation gain.

## Hike

Directly behind the parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.35'N$   $118^{\circ}11.81'W$  and elevation 2730ft) the Dark Canyon trail switchbacks up through the trees, climbing steeply up to a wooded plantation area. Here you come to a dirt road that encircles the trees; turn right or left to follow the road around the plantation and then continue up to its junction with the Grizzly Flats Road at  $34^{\circ}15.66'N$   $118^{\circ}12.16'W$ , an elevation of 3310ft and 0.66mi from the start. This is a major fire road junction; a short distance to the west there is a fork where the right branch descends to Grizzly Flats. For the present hike you have two options here. You can take the fire road that goes west, fork left at the split and proceed on up the road toward the Mount Lukens Fire Road. That is the long but relatively easy option. The short but steep option is to follow the rough firebreak trail that proceeds ESE from the junction and climbs the ridge up to a point at  $34^{\circ}15.55'N$   $118^{\circ}12.35'W$  and an elevation of 3770ft where the trail rejoins the fireroad. We took the second option and rejoined the fireroad 1hr and 0.9mi from the start.

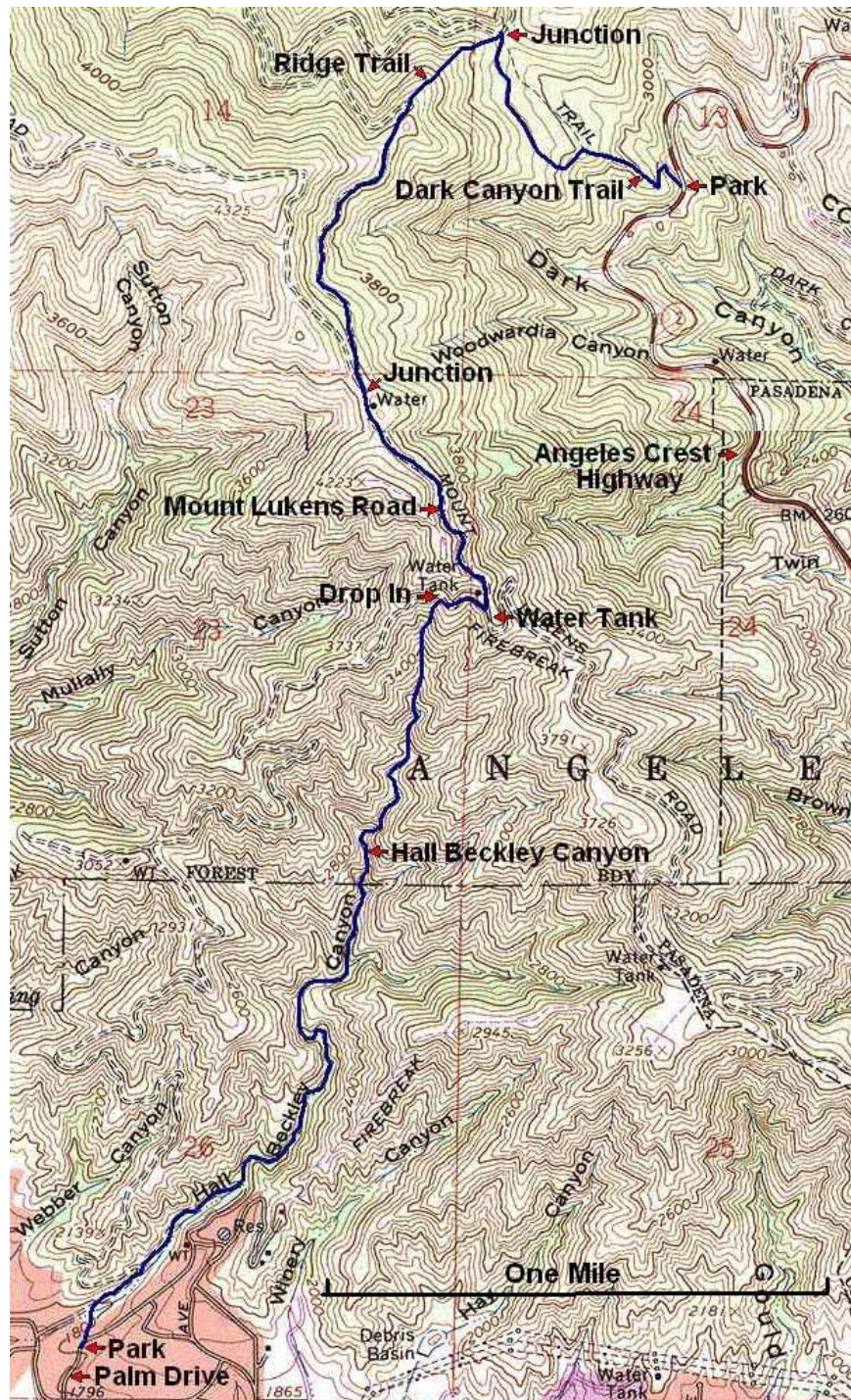
Proceed south along the road to the junction with the Mount Lukens fire road ( $34^{\circ}15.09'N$   $118^{\circ}12.45'W$  and elevation 4020ft). Here along the top of a major ridge you get great views of the San Gabriels to the west and to the east. Continue south on the Mount Lukens fire road as it broaches a small summit and begins to descend. Once you see a large watertank directly ahead of you, look for the road junction at  $34^{\circ}14.71'N$   $118^{\circ}12.20'W$  and an elevation of 3800ft. Here you are looking directly down into the head of Hall Beckley Canyon. Fork right and proceed about 200yds around the head of one Hall Beckley branch and then part way around the head of a second (and major) branch. Here you should readily discern the best drop in point for Hall Beckley Canyon at  $34^{\circ}14.72'N$   $118^{\circ}12.29'W$  and an elevation of 3720ft. It should take about 1hr 40min to reach this point, 2.2mi from the start. The drop-in is a steep, sandy brush-free wash that leads down from the road into the head of the canyon. After about 30min of steep but easy descent, a large gully comes in on the right (at about 3450ft) and 10min later you arrive at the first, small rappel of 20ft, anchored by a small bush on the left. Shortly thereafter there are a series of downclimbs beginning with a 30ft drop at 3240ft followed by several smaller downclimbs.

At an elevation of about 3040ft and 2hrs 45min from the start you will arrive at the second rappel, a 30ft drop from a bush anchor to the right side of the lip. Then 15min later you enter a more heavily wooded area where a large canyon comes in on the left at  $34^{\circ}14.46'N$   $118^{\circ}12.35'W$  and an elevation of 2930ft. The going is fairly easy for the next 25min until you abruptly arrive at the first of the big rappels, an 80ft inclined two-step drop from a bush anchor just to the right of the lip. This is immediately followed by another 80ft steep rappel for which a tree on the left provides a solid anchor. You should reach the bottom of this rappel about 3hrs after the morning start. Downstream of these rappels a large gully enters on the right at  $34^{\circ}14.32'N$   $118^{\circ}12.45'W$  and an elevation of 2700ft. Another short distance downstream there is a small 20ft rappel for which it is necessary to climb up to the tree on the right to acquire a solid anchor. This leads to several downclimbs and, about 20min later, to a small, two-step rappel from a bush anchor on the left side.

About 15min later, 5hrs 10min from the morning start at an elevation of about 2680ft, you will abruptly come to the top of the biggest rappel in Hall Beckley Canyon, a 140ft five step drop in a narrow slot (narrow by San Gabriel standards). Using the anchor around the small tree some distance up on the right side, you descend steps of 80ft, 27ft, 15ft, 6ft and 12ft beside what is normally a small water flow. The final rappel is a short way downcanyon and consists of two small steps of 10ft and 6ft for which there is no good anchor; we used a skimpy root on the right and practiced a combination downclimb/rappel. The water company installations begin just downstream of these rappels. On the left side a tunnel runs about 80ft into the canyon wall in order to tap the water there and pipes run from here down to the end of the canyon. About 15min below this point a large canyon enters on the left at  $34^{\circ}14.10'N$   $118^{\circ}12.47'W$  and an elevation of 2370ft. There are two small vertical drops just a few yards up this canyon from the junction. You should reach this junction about 6hrs 15min after the morning start having traveled about 3mi.

Downstream of this junction the water company has installed some rudimentary wire cables at a number of small drops but you should use gloves if you utilize those cables. Otherwise it is a fairly straightforward hike down the canyon from the last junction and after about 30min you come to the first human construction, a small flood control dam that has a convenient ladder to ease descent. From there, you continue near the streambed past a couple of houses on the right side. Beyond these do not take the dirt road that climbs out of the canyon on the left. Instead continue down another flood control dam and then transition up to the road on the right side that proceeds down the canyon. When you come to two forks proceed left at both. After the second the road crosses the stream and 100yds later comes to the gate across the road just beside where your recovery vehicle should be parked near #5147 Palm Drive at  $34^{\circ}13.47'N$   $118^{\circ}13.00'W$  and an elevation of 1820ft. The duration of the hike should be about 7hrs during which you cover about 4mi.





Map of Hall Beckley Canyon Hike

## 5.2 Sutton Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5.3 miles
- Elevation gain: 2285 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Sunland, Condor Peak, Pasadena
- Difficulties: 6 small rappels up to 25ft, some downclimbing.
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 120ft rope, 40ft webbing and 3 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3B III

Sutton Canyon is one of several in this collection that descend the southern slopes of Mount Lukens down to trailheads in La Canada Flintridge and La Crescenta. Though it requires a little bushwhacking to get into its head, the canyon is a relatively easy one with just 6 small rappels, the largest being about 25ft. Three of these rappels are down near the end of the canyon where there is a series of four or five steps in a short section of canyon.

Sutton Canyon is best for the winter, spring or fall; in the summer the hike up to the head of the canyon gets very hot. Water runs in the lower reaches of the canyon most of the year. However there are no substantial pools to negotiate so only your feet will get wet.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. From Foothill Boulevard in La Crescenta, drive 1.8mi north on Ocean View Boulevard all the way up to the end (the last bit is called Highrim Road). Park here and scope out the rough trail that climbs out of Sutton/Pickens canyon up to the west end of the parking area at roads end.

Then, in the other vehicles, drive back down Ocean View Boulevard and turn right onto Foothill Boulevard. Drive 2mi west on Foothill and turn right onto Dunsmore Avenue. Drive 1.1mi up Dunsmore to the end where you will make a right turn onto Markridge Road and then a left into Deukmejian Wilderness Park. Park in the parking area (34°14.98'N 118°15.18'W and elevation 2335ft) at this nice new recreational facility with many hiking trails.

Parenthetically we note that many of canyons that descend the slopes of Mount Lukens, including Silver, Suicide, Sutton and Hall Beckley, have three alternative approach routes, all of which provide access to the upper reaches of the Mount Lukens road. The first of these, included in the descriptions of



the Silver and Suicide Canyon descents, starts on the Angeles Crest Highway at the 2N79 trailhead at 34°15.62'N 118°11.54'W and an elevation of 2940ft. The second, included in the description of Hall Beckley Canyon, also begins on the Angeles Crest Highway but at the head of the Dark Canyon trail at 34°15.35'N 118°11.81'W and an elevation of 2730ft. The third, included in the description of Sutton Canyon, begins in Deukmejian Wilderness Park at 34°14.98'N 118°15.18'W and an elevation of 2335ft. The elevation gains up to the intersection of 2N76B and the Mount Lukens road (at 34°15.81'N 118°13.74'W, near the drop in for Silver Canyon) are respectively 1680ft, 1890ft and 2285ft; however the distances are respectively 5.4mi, 3.3mi and 2.8mi. The hiker can choose whether he or she would rather hike a longer distance or a greater elevation gain.

## Hike

From the parking area in Deukmejian Wilderness Park (34°14.98'N 118°15.18'W and elevation 2335ft) hike a short way to the trailhead notice board and then continue up the broad path that leads up into the canyon. The trail that you want is called the Crescenta View Trail and this forks right off the broad path after about 100yds. The trail crosses the streambed and then begins a long climb up the side of Dunsmore Canyon. After several hundred feet of elevation gain, the trail gains the ridge top and from there follows the steeply ascending ridge all the way up to the end of an old fire road at 34°15.37'N 118°13.97'W and an elevation of 4320ft. This waypoint, 1hr 50min and 2.2mi from the start, is marked by the standing remains of an old, dead pine tree. Turning left, you then follow the old fireroad (2N76B) for another 0.6mi to where it meets



*Left: Lower Sutton Canyon (photo by Ken King). Right: Rappel at 2790ft (photo by Ken King).*

the Mount Lukens Road (2N76) at  $34^{\circ}15.81'N$   $118^{\circ}13.74'W$  and an elevation of 4620ft. You should reach this junction 2hrs and 2.8mi from start.

Turning right (east) at the junction hike down the Mount Lukens Road for about 0.9mi to where the road contours around the head of Sutton Canyon. There are several drop-in routes near the head at about  $34^{\circ}15.45'N$   $118^{\circ}13.06'W$ ; one route is to descend the small steep ridge about 100yds west of the canyon head since it has some clear patches in the brush. Descend about 100ft down the ridge and then, just before a small saddle, veer left following animal trails into the gully bottom. You should reach the gully bottom at 4050ft about 3hrs 20min after the morning start.

Fortunately the canyon from here on is relatively brush-free though the upper reaches have some loose and sandy downclimbs. At 3810ft there is a very loose and awkward drop that most will choose to rappel for about 20ft from a tree anchor on the right. Just a short distance downstream you will encounter another steep downclimb at 3690ft just before a major junction where at least two other gullies come in on the left. Another brief hike brings you, at 3530ft, to a 20ft drop with an exposed bypass on the right that is better rappelled from a tree anchor on the left. You should reach this rappel about 4hrs from the start. Here Sutton begins to become more woody and shaded; a large canyon comes in on the left at 3410ft, another comes in from the right at 3140ft and yet another enters on the left at 3020ft. Shortly thereafter you encounter the first signs of human presence, an old rusty water pipe high on the right side of the canyon. You should encounter the pipe at 2980ft about 4hrs 50min from the start.



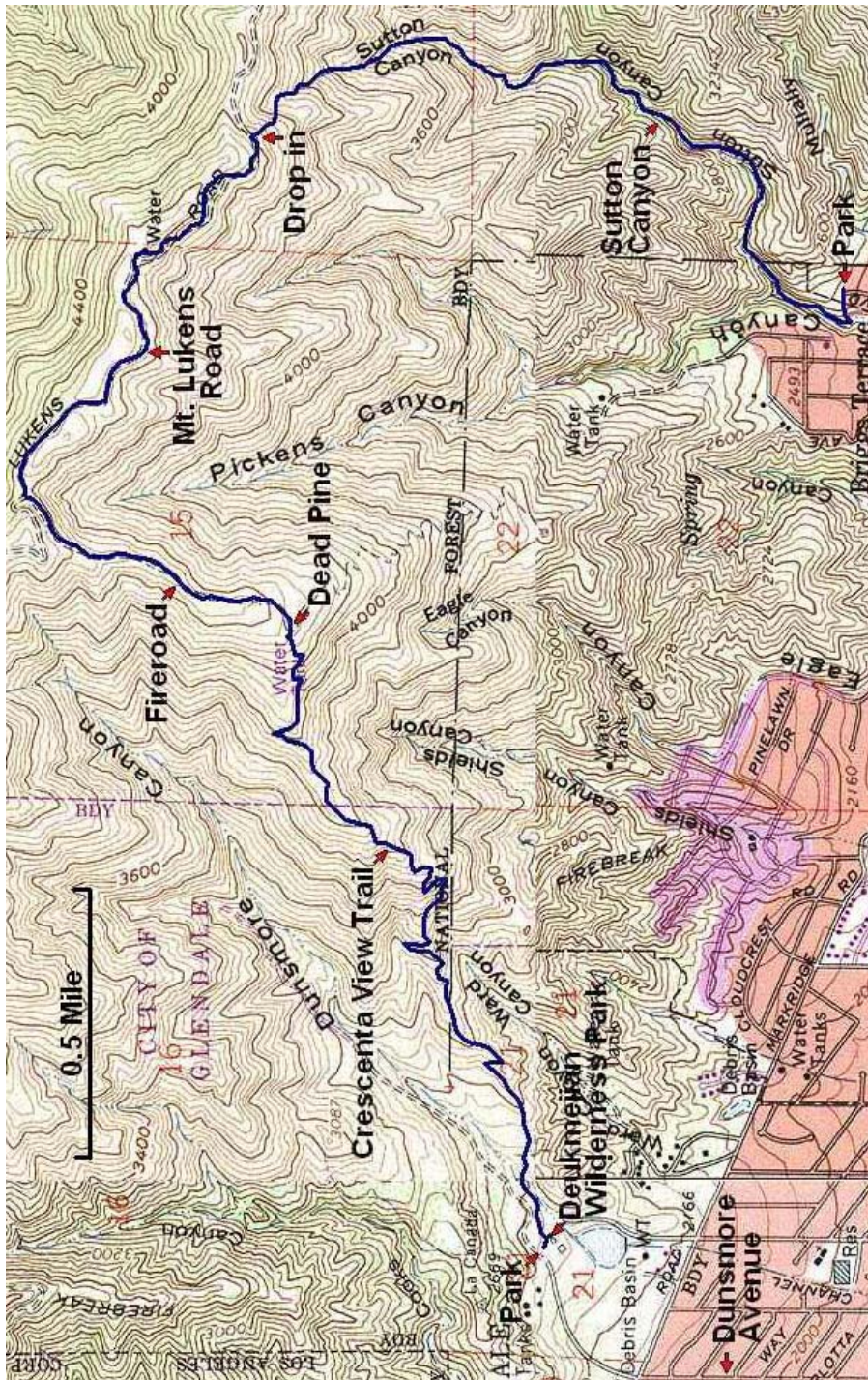
*The third step in the staircase (photo by Ken King).*

The canyon continues to be easy going though there is one small 20ft rappel at 2790ft for which there is a tree anchor at the lip. Then, finally, at 2530ft and 5hrs 50min from the start, you will arrive at the top of the Sutton Staircase, a series of steps that represent the main action in Sutton Canyon. The first step consists of an old man-made 15ft stone dam strangely placed at the top of a series of natural drops. This first step is easily bypassed on the left and leads to the second step, a natural drop of about 20ft that can be rappeled using a large tree on the left. Below this and just a short distance downstream is the third and largest step, a 25ft natural, vertical rappel that is best anchored from a tree on the left a little way back from the lip. Water normally flows in all these lower falls but the pools at the base are usually no more than shin-deep. The fourth step is a 15ft two-step rappel from a tree on the right and the small, fifth step is readily downclimbed using a profusion of tree roots on the left.

Below these five steps it is only a few hundred yards to the end of the canyon descent. As the canyon opens up, look for twin pipelines descending on one side of the canyon and climbing the other. Just beyond the pipelines, you will encounter a small flood-control dam. Look for a rough use-trail that climbs the canyon wall on the left just upstream of the dam; ascending this will bring you immediately to the trailhead at the top of Ocean View Boulevard and to your return vehicle(s).

You should reach this trailhead at 34°14.52'N 118°13.36'W and an elevation of 2450ft about 6.5hrs from the morning start having covered about 5.3mi.





Map of Sutton Canyon Hike

## 5.3 Pomeroy Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 1340 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Burbank, Pasadena
- Difficulties: 2 small rappels up to 30ft, some downclimbing
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 120ft rope, 20ft webbing and 2 quicklinks
- ACA Rating: 3A II

The Verdugo Hills can be likened to an offshore island of the San Gabriels. Towering about 2000ft above Glendale and Burbank they are separated from the San Gabriels only by the 210 Freeway. Though not officially part of the Angeles National Forest they represent a valuable additional piece of wild land and one whose extensive trail system is widely used and enjoyed by hikers. As yet we have not found any very good canyoneering locations in the Verdugo Hills but we include here this descent of Pomeroy Canyon in order that the Verdugo Hills be at least represented. Pomeroy Canyon does have two small rappels but the bushwhacking required to descend it from the top makes it only marginally attractive. It is best done during the cooler winter months.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. To deposit the return vehicle take the Western Avenue off-ramp from the Golden State Freeway (I5) in Glendale and drive northeast on Western all the way to the end of that street. Turn right onto Mountain and after a few hundred yards turn left into Brand Park. Drive up to the parking lot beside the public library and leave the return vehicle there (34°10.94'N 118°16.60'W and elevation 830ft).

Then, in the other vehicles, drive back down Western to the I5, south on the I5 and transition to the eastbound 134 freeway. After a few miles transition to the northbound Glendale freeway (State route 2) and take the first off-ramp from that freeway onto Mountain Street. Drive west on Mountain and, at the bottom of the hill, turn right onto Verdugo Road. After a short distance this forks left and becomes Canada Boulevard. After about 0.5mi turn left onto Colina Drive, that, after about 200yds, veers left and becomes Sunshine Drive. Follow Sunshine as it winds up into the foothills. Park on the right side of Sunshine Drive just before the point where Sandringham Drive takes off on the

left (further up Sunshine Drive you are likely to get a parking ticket). Your parking location should be 34°14.98'N 118°15.18'W and your elevation 2335ft.

## Hike

From the point where you parked (34°14.98'N 118°15.18'W and elevation 2335ft), hike up Sunshine Drive to the closed gate and continue up the short asphalt road beyond the gate. This soon gives way to a well-maintained dirt road that climbs steadily into the Verdugo Hills. About 1hr from the start you contour over a ridge where there is a prominent utility pole; now you are looking down into the Pomeroy Canyon basin. Off to the northwest and just to the left below a group of radio towers you should see a white rock prominence that marks the point where we drop into Pomeroy Canyon. Continuing up the road you soon encounter a junction some 2.4mi from the start at 34°11.30'N 118°15.38'W and an elevation of 2400ft; here the roads are signposted and you should continue along the left route signed the “Verdugo Motorway”. The road descends for about 100yds to a saddle and just beyond this saddle you should leave the road on the left and follow the use-trail along the ridge-top. Soon this ridgetop trail climbs to a summit overlooking the white rock prominence described earlier. You should reach this summit about 1hr 20min from the start.

From the summit, proceed down the steep, rough use-trail toward the white rock prominence. But just before reaching this goal, contour left into the nearby gully and begin descending the gully that requires some light bushwhacking. In many places there are animal tracks that provide easy passage. After about 45min of descent down through an elevation of 2000ft, the going begins to get

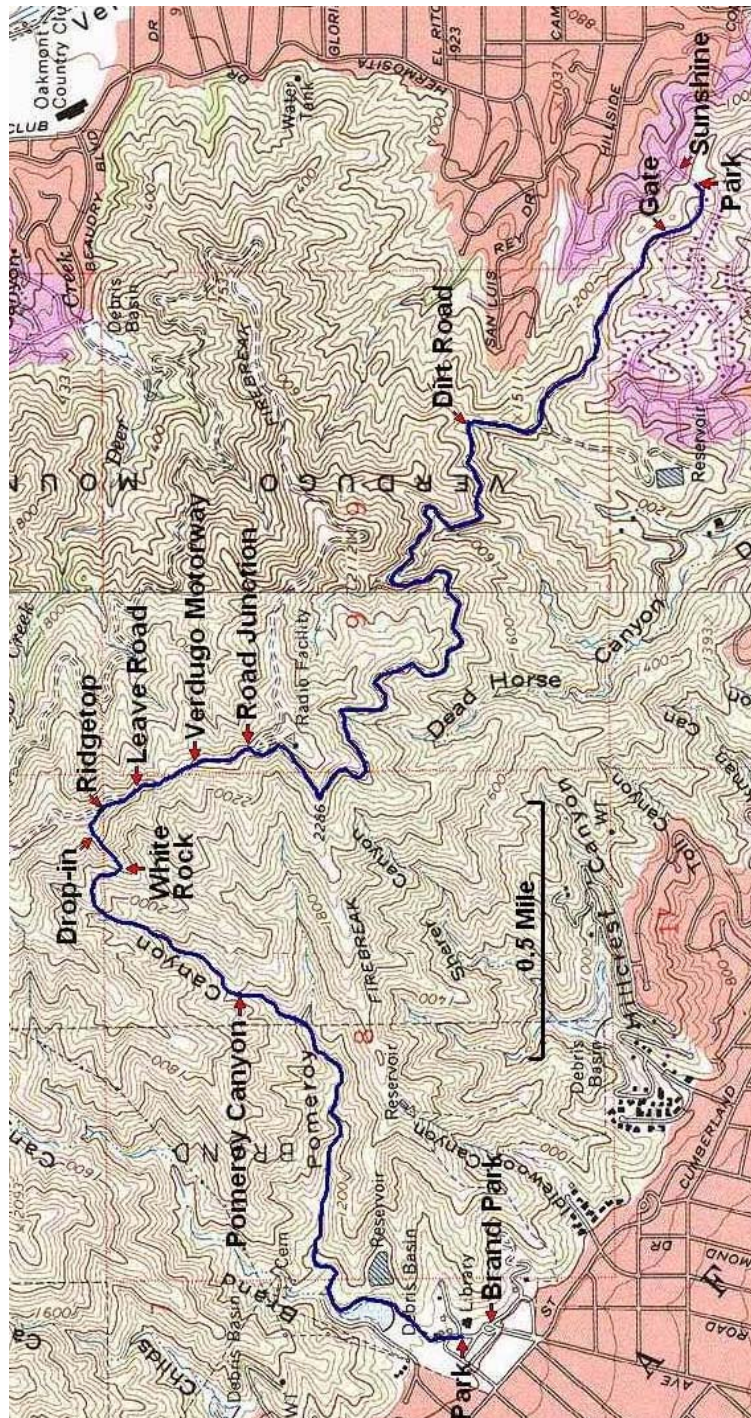


*First rappel.*

more difficult and it is easier to find a high path along the left wall that avoids the thick plant growth in the canyon bottom. Eventually after about 2hrs of descent at an elevation of 1500ft you finally arrive at the top of the first rappel, a 25ft drop that can be anchored from a large tree trunk a short way back from the lip. The second and last rappel is just a short distance downstream. Anchored by a chockstone a short way upstream this second rappel descends about 30ft down a broad chute that doglegs to the left.

At the base of this second rappel you encounter the well-worn trail (it becomes a fire road a little higher up). You follow this trail (and later road) down the watercourse all the way to Brand Park and your return vehicle at  $34^{\circ}10.94'N$   $118^{\circ}16.60'W$  and an elevation of 830ft. The complete hike should take about 4.5hrs during which you cover about 4.5mi.





Map of Pomeroy Canyon Hike





## Chapter 6

# RED BOX

The Red Box Canyons are those in the general vicinity of the Red Box road junction on the Angeles Crest Highway. This group includes one classic, namely Supercloud Canyon. I note that although it appears from below as though there might be other worthwhile branches of Supercloud, our explorations failed to reveal any descents of interest.



Red Box region.

## 6.1 CCC Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak, Pasadena
- Difficulties: About 11 rappels up to 80ft and many small pools, some 5ft deep.
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 160ft rope, 50ft webbing, 5 rappel rings, drybags (and wetsuit in winter).
- ACA Rating: 3B III

CCC Canyon drops down from the Angeles Crest Highway into the Arroyo Seco just north of the CCC Ridge and has about 11 rappels with one sloping descent of 80ft and the rest smaller than 40ft. There are many chest deep pools to negotiate and some where you can't avoid getting wet. It could be very chilly on a cold winter day so a wet-suit would be advisable under those conditions. Once you exit into the Arroyo Seco it is an easy trail hike down to Oakwilde Picnic Ground and then a steep hike up the Twin Canyon trail to the Angeles Crest Highway.

Though the water in the canyon is not recommended, water is of course available from the Arroyo Seco at the end of CCC Canyon so a filter would be useful especially in summer. This canyon could be descended almost anytime of the year even in summer since it has lots of shade. However, the hike out is very hot in the summer.

### Trailhead

This hike benefits from a short and easy car shuttle along the Angeles Crest Highway. First, from La Canada Flintridge drive up the Angeles Crest Highway past the Forest Service Station about 3.4mi from the 210 Freeway. About 1.2mi beyond that Angeles Crest Station you will see a small turn out on the right just before a gentle left hand curve. Park the return vehicle here at 34°14.74'N 118°11.42'W and an elevation of 2610ft). Check that there is indeed a trail that proceeds southeast from this pullout and is headed for electrical pylons in the distance.

Then, in the other vehicle(s), proceed on up the Angeles Crest Highway for another 2.2mi to 34°15.70'N 118°11.30'W at an elevation of 3050ft where there

is a large turnout on the left on the outside of a long right turn in the road. Park here.

## Hike

From the starting trailhead at  $34^{\circ}15.70'N$   $118^{\circ}11.30'W$  and an elevation of 3050ft cross the road to where there is a broad drop-in slope around the head of CCC Canyon. The easiest route of descent is at the south end and proceeds down past some pine trees where the ground cover is sparse. This takes you down to the streambed where the conduit under the road exits into the canyon bottom. From this point on there is a long open, brush-free stretch of shady canyon interrupted only briefly at 2700ft (30min from the start) by a small 8ft downclimb via tree roots on the left. About 45min from the start at 2660ft you will arrive at the top of the first technical obstacle in the canyon, an 80ft sloping rappel down some slippery steps. The anchor is a tree on the left.

Another 30min of easy travel follows before you arrive at a substantial drop-off at 2550ft and 1hr 15min from the start. From the lip you can see that the canyon turns right and drops down toward the confluence with another major fork entering on the right. Ahead and to the right you can see the CCC ridge and the fire-road that runs along its ridge-top. The drop-off starts with a sloping 40ft incline that drops into a pothole that is immediately followed by a 30ft vertical drop into another pool. This double drop can be rappeled from a manzanita bush up on the right of the lip of the 40ft incline. Alternatively, this descent can be bypassed by means of a steep use-trail on the right that descends the ridge to a point just below the 30ft drop where you rejoin the canyon. Just around the corner is the third of the steps in this series, a 40ft vertical rappel from a bush up on the left down into a small, 3ft deep pool.



*Left: 80ft rappel in CCC Canyon (photo by Ken King). Right: First deep pool (photo by Ken King).*

Downstream, there is a section of easy travel with occasional obstacles. Roughly 1hr 50min from the start at 2330ft there is a 30ft rappel from a bush on the left and a few minutes later a 20ft downclimb up and over the shoulder on the left. Twenty minutes later you come to a series of pools that end with a sloping 20ft rappel from a root on the left that deposits you in the first chest-deep pool. This is followed by a long easy section with many small pools.

The action quickens about 3hrs 15min from the start at 2040ft beginning with a small 8ft downclimb past a large log propped up against the lip and then a 12ft drop into a neat little grotto that is most easily rappeled on the left. This is immediately followed by two small downclimbs around deep pools, the first on the left and the second on the right, both using bushes and ledges. Then 3hrs from the start at 1980ft you arrive at the series of rappels that constitute the final descent into the Arroyo Seco. The first is an awkward 15ft drop into a deep pool for which the only viable anchor is a bush high on the left. This is immediately followed by a chimney downclimb into another 5ft deep pool. The next step is the most interesting, a 35ft overhanging rappel down a narrow slot into a moss-covered and cliff-ringed grotto. The anchor is a large tree on the left but watch for the bee hive here. The rappel deposits you into a pothole that is fortunately only a couple of feet deep. A simple 15ft sloping rappel from a tree on the right follows before you arrive at the last rappel, a 20ft drop from a large log propped up against the lip. This drops into a pool at the side of the Arroyo Seco. You should arrive at this confluence with the Arroyo Seco at 34°14.96'N 118°10.70'W and an elevation of 1930ft about 4hrs 45min from the morning start having traveled about 1.4mi in that time.

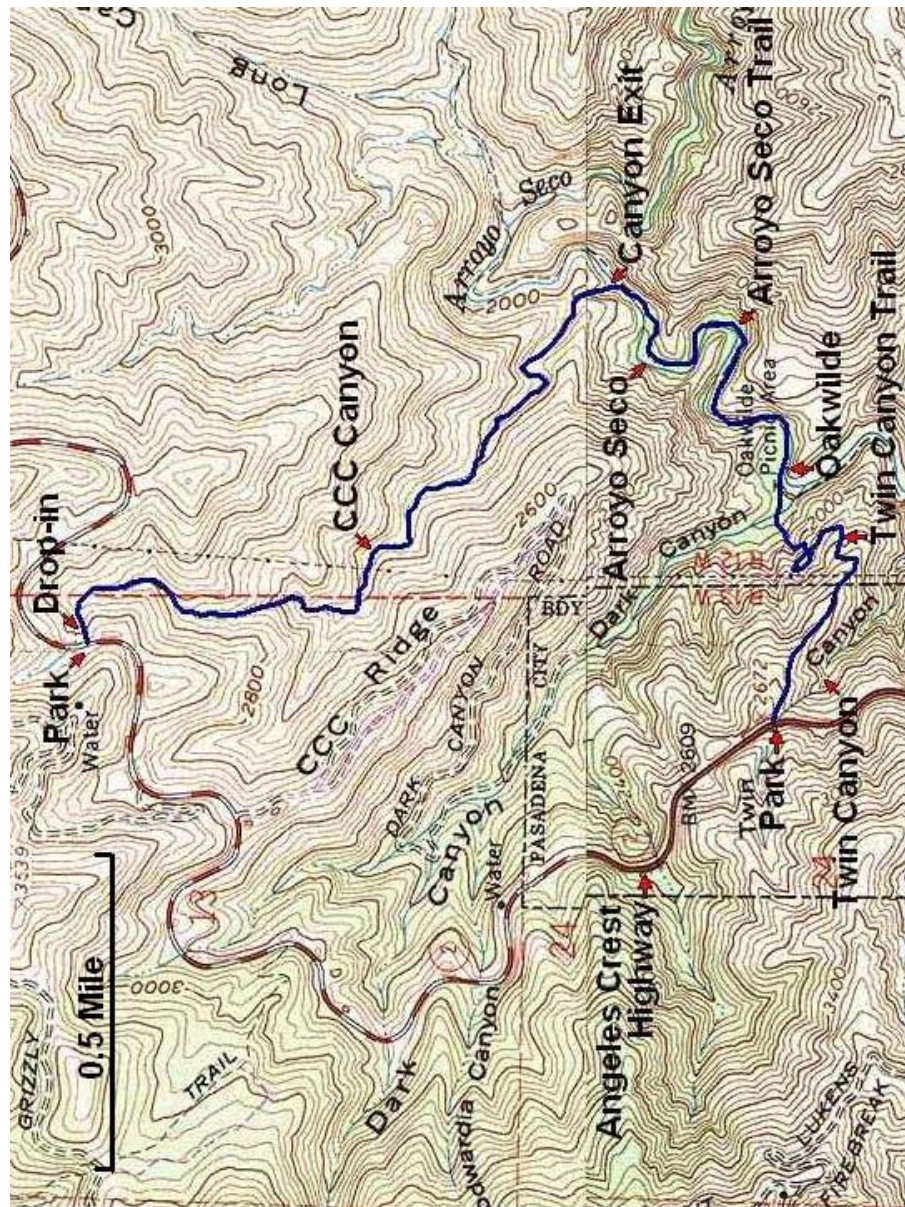


*Grotto and pothole.*



Cross the Arroyo Seco to find the well-traveled trail up on the southern slope of the canyon; turn right for the easy hike downstream to the Oakwilde Picnic Area. You should get to Oakwilde at  $34^{\circ}14.74'N$   $118^{\circ}11.03'W$  and an elevation of 1810ft about 5hrs 15min from the morning start having traveled about 2.1mi. The picnic tables in the sun make a good place to dry out and have lunch.

Some care is needed to locate the start of the steep Twin Canyon trail that you will follow up to the Angeles Crest Highway. From Oakwilde start up the marked Dark Canyon trail (Dark Canyon meets the Arroyo Seco at Oakwilde). Just after you leave the picnic area and about 100yds past the restrooms, the trail crosses the Dark Canyon stream. Immediately after the crossing, make a sharp left turn leaving the Dark Canyon Trail to follow the unmarked Twin Canyon trail. This trail climbs very steeply at first. The grade eases as you reach the ridgetop and pass under electrical pylons. It then becomes a fairly easy trail that traverses along the side of Twin Canyon over to meet the Angeles Crest Highway at the pullout where you left the return vehicle. You should reach this pullout at  $34^{\circ}14.74'N$   $118^{\circ}11.42'W$  and an elevation of 2610ft after about 6hrs of hiking having traveled about 2.7mi.



Map of CCC Canyon Hike

## 6.2 Casada Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5 miles
- Elevation gain: 1780 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: 3 rappels of 40ft, 180ft and 110ft, some tough bushwhacking
- Special equipment: Helmet, harness and rappeling gear; 200ft rope, 200ft recovery cord, 25ft webbing, 3 rappel rings, clothing for bushwhacking
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

On Sep.22, 1960, US Marine Corp Captain Howard O. Casada Jr. was killed when his Navy F-104 Starfighter (56-0740), based at China Lake Naval Weapons Center and carrying Sidewinder missiles, crashed into the southern face of Josephine Peak at an elevation of 4500ft. The cause of the crash was thought to be oxygen depletion at altitude. Casada was 29 at the time and was survived by his wife, infant son and father. At the time of the crash, there were many reports from the Pasadena area of a sonic boom. The crash started a fire that burned about 15 acres before it could be extinguished by Forest Service crews and planes dropping flame-retardant. According to a Pasadena Star-News article the next day, Mrs Peggy Hotchkiss was manning the Josephine Peak fire lookout at the time of the crash and had to be evacuated because of the fire threat. The crash took place in or close to this unnamed canyon that drops precipitously off the south face of Josephine Peak. We named it after Captain Casada.

The adventure begins at the summit of Josephine Peak and descends the canyon directly to the south of that peak, hoping along the way to find signs of that high speed impact. The descent of Casada Canyon consists of three distinct phases, a section of very tough, even brutal, bushwhacking, an attractive and open middle section with some big rappels and then a final section of lighter bushwhacking. A little water runs in the lowest section. This hike is best on a winter day for otherwise the south facing upper sections could get very hot indeed.

### Trailhead

If you wish to set up a vehicle shuttle for the 0.5mi trip up the road to Clear Creek Junction at the end of the hike then, starting at Clear Creek Junction, drive the 0.5mi west on the Angeles Forest Highway to a point where there is

a pullout on the right and a corrugated metal drainage structure stands in the canyon just below the highway on the right side. Park the return vehicle here at 34°16.42'N 118°9.65'W and an elevation of 3490ft.

Then, in the other vehicle(s) return to Clear Creek Junction where the Angeles Forest Highway splits off from the Angeles Crest Highway 9.4mi north of the 210 Freeway in La Canada Flintridge and 6.2mi north of the Angeles Crest Forest Service Station. Park in the dirt pullout at Clear Creek Junction at 34°16.22'N 118°9.21'W and an elevation of 3650ft.

## Hike

From the parking area at 34°16.22'N 118°9.21'W and an elevation of 3650ft walk hike about 50yds down Angeles Forest Highway to where the Josephine Fireroad begins. Hike up this fireroad for 2.6mi to the ridgetop junction at 34°16.95'N 118°8.53'W and an elevation of 4880ft where you are treated to spectacular views both to the south and the north. To the south you can see downtown Los Angeles and beyond, the Pacific Ocean, the Palos Verdes peninsula and Catalina Island. In the other direction, the northern San Gabriel mountains are spread out before you. You are looking up the valley of Mill Creek toward the saddle where the highway begins its descent toward Palmdale. To the left of that is Mount Gleason and you can see the Fall Creek/Mount Gleason fire road wind its way up the long ridge toward that summit.

It takes about 1hr 10min to reach this ridgetop junction. Turn left and continue up the Josephine Fireroad as it climbs toward the Peak itself. The final leg of this ascent circles around below the Peak and you want the overlook on the southwest directly below the summit where the ridge rising toward the peak from the west meets the fireroad. You should reach this drop-in point at



*Casada's F-104 Starfighter.*



34°17.11'N 118°9.25'W and an elevation of 5430ft about 2hrs and 3.9mi from the start. Gear up here and prepare for the descent of Casada Canyon.

There is a well-worn, open use-trail along the top of the ridge that runs west from Josephine Peak and allows easy access to the top of any canyon that runs down from this ridge. However, all these canyons contain dense, almost impenetrable brush between the ridgetop and any passably open streamcourse. Casada Canyon is no exception. Indeed it is divided into three distinct sections. Below the ridgetop is a section of very dense and brutal brush that eventually leads to a nice open section in the middle where the rappels are located. At the bottom there is another bushwhacking section though passage here is alot easier than at the top.

There are several possible routes through the first section. One explored route is to hike a short distance down the ridgetop from the drop-in to the first rocky promontory (Casada Point) and then continue about 100ft down the ridge to 34°17.09'N 118°9.36'W and an elevation of 5260ft) where a rough use-trail proceeds to the left, appearing to contour around the bottom of the cliff on your left. This is the southern face of Casada Point, the high point in the photograph taken from the bottom. This explored route only traverses a short distance along the cliff bottom before heading straight down through the dense brush. If you can find this already traveled route this may be the way to go but the route still involves some brutal bushwhacking. If you go this way, then about 2hrs after the drop-in, you should be able to reach an open streamcourse at about 4800ft where several gullies come together.

[Before continuing we should mention several other unexplored options that might allow easier passage through this upper section. One would be to walk out to the peak of Casada Point and rappel down the cliff face as far as possible. Viewed from below it appears that there is a Cree slope below the cliff that could ease the descent and postpone the bushwhacking. Another possible alternative



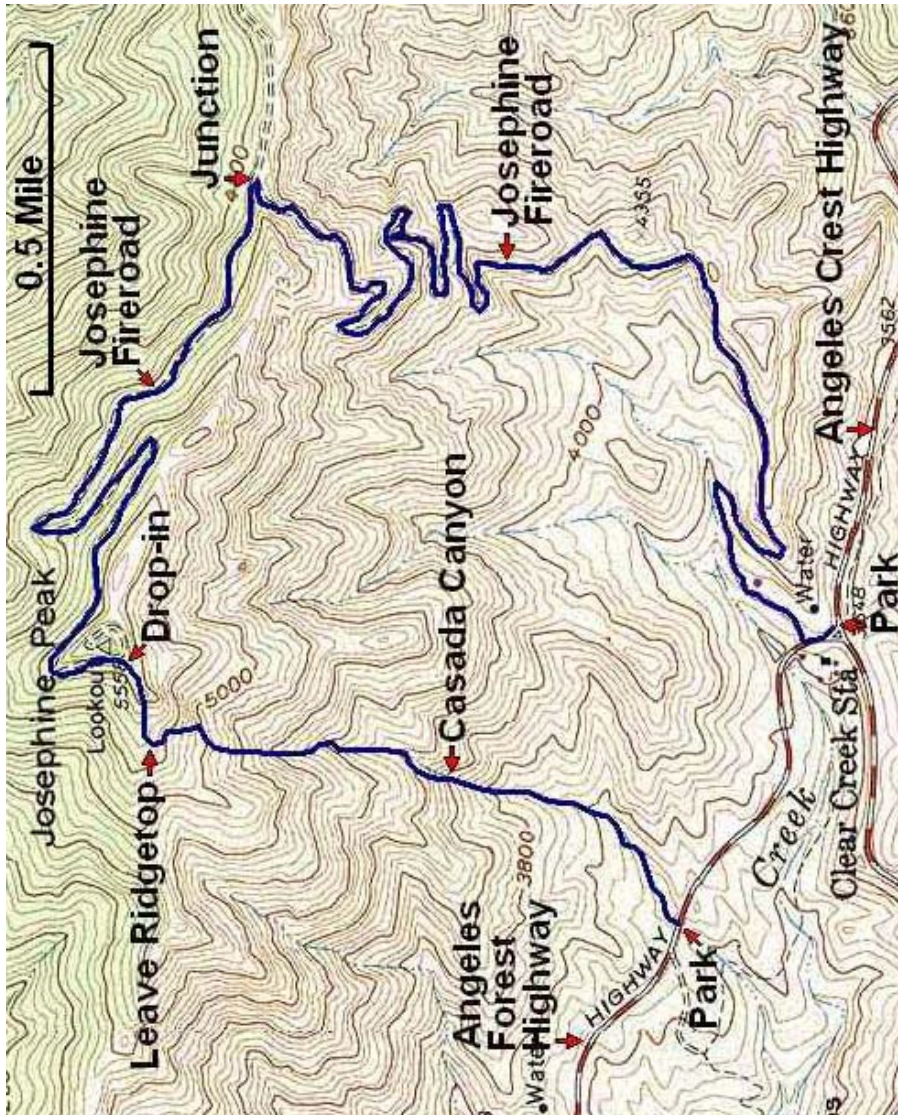
*Left: View from the bottom: start is just to the left of the cliff-faced peak, Casada Point, and the 180ft rappel is in the lower right (in white). Right: 180ft rappel.*



route would be to stay close to the bottom of the Casada Point cliff for longer than the explored option and to rappel steep rock where needed.]

Resuming description of the explored option at the confluence of the gullies, the going is suddenly much easier though still steep. After dropping another 200ft or so the gradient eases and you enter the attractive middle section of the canyon. A little further downstream at an elevation of 4540ft you will arrive at the top of the first rappel about 4.5hrs from the morning start. This is a 40ft rappel down sloping rock from a big, shady tree at the top. This is followed by a number of easy downclimbs over white bedrock. Then, just a short way downstream, the canyon gradient steepens and at 4210ft and 5hrs from the start you arrive at the top of the steep drop near the bottom of Casada Canyon. This begins with another series of easy friction descents over white bedrock that culminates at 4200ft at the lip of a big 180ft rappel over the same shining white rock. The anchor for this big sloping rappel is a sturdy bush on the left near the lip. You descend into a narrow bush-choked slot but it is only a few yards to the top of the last rappel, a vertical 110ft drop from a bush anchor on the right. Again you descend into a bush-choked canyon bottom.

You should reach the bottom of these rappels about 6hrs into the hike. Downstream there are two long, sloping downclimbs of about 40ft before all that is left is a long, brushy hike out that concludes when you encounter a conduit for the stream and climb a few feet up to the road and your return vehicle. The end is at 34°16.42'N 118°9.65'W and an elevation of 3500ft. The hike should take about 7.5hrs during which you cover about 5mi.



Map of Casada Canyon Hike

## 6.3 Royal Gorge

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2 miles through gorge, 9 miles to and from Angeles Crest Highway
- Elevation gain: 2340 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Pasadena, Condor Peak
- Difficulties: One rockface traverse around waterfall
- Special equipment: 20ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A III

The Royal Gorge is a pleasant and wooded canyon that offers a fairly easy adventure hike. There is only one significant obstacle to overcome in traversing it, an attractive waterfall about 10ft high that empties into a large pool. This makes for a very pleasant swim during the summer months.

### Access

Apart from the one waterfall, the main problem with this adventure hike is access. Probably, the most convenient strategy is to hike down to the Gorge from the Angeles Crest Highway (elevation 3560ft) and Switzer Picnic Area (elevation 3300ft). You hike downstream to the old campground known as Commodore Switzer (at 34°15.53'N 118°9.27'W and elevation 2910ft) and take the trail that climbs the left side of the canyon to bypass Switzer Falls. After passing high above Switzer Falls you will come to a trail junction (34°15.41'N 118°9.22'W and elevation 2990ft) where you fork left, descend into the canyon again and follow the Bear Creek trail to the mouth of Bear Canyon (34°15.06'N 118°8.99'W and elevation 2600ft), a distance of 2.7mi from the highway. Here you leave the trail and proceed downstream, entering the Gorge.

After the transit of the Gorge, you can return to the start using the main trail (11W14) through Long Canyon from the Arroyo Seco back to Switzer Camp. This route requires recognition of the junction of the Royal Gorge with the maintained trail at the end of the off-trail section of the hike, namely the point where Long Canyon joins the Arroyo Seco (34°15.11'N 118°10.60'W and elevation 1980ft). We refer to this point as the “lower end of the Royal Gorge” (note that it is just north of the southern edge of the Condor Peak topo map). Perhaps the best clue that this junction is near is the high thin waterfall dropping straight down into a canyon pool on the right as you approach the end of the hike through the Royal Gorge. The trail back to Switzer Camp traverses

back up the side of the canyon and across the top of this waterfall as it enters Long Canyon. From the lower end of the gorge, the distance back to the Angeles Crest Highway through Long Canyon and Switzer Camp is 4.4mi.

Another possible strategy is to set up a long car shuttle and to continue on downstream through Oakwilde Campground and the lower Arroyo Seco to Altadena. It is 8mi from the lower end of the Royal Gorge to the parking area at the end of Ventura Drive in Altadena ( $34^{\circ}11.64'N$   $118^{\circ}10.08'W$  and elevation 1160ft). Such an itinerary could either be hiked or biked. In the latter case, you could ride mountain bikes down from the Angeles Crest Highway to the lower end of the Gorge and then hike a loop through the Gorge and back down the trail again to the bikes. The advantage of this is that the lower stretch of the Arroyo Seco can be covered much faster on a bike than on foot. On one such outing we set off from the Angeles Crest Highway about 8.30am and reached Altadena at 4.30pm. If you choose to use a car shuttle with this strategy then the preferred parking place in Altadena is not the end of Altadena Drive as suggested in some books, but the larger parking area overlooking the Arroyo Seco at the end of Ventura Drive and just after that street turns south. The main trail (road) into and out of the Arroyo Seco emerges here.

## Hike

The upper end of the Royal Gorge is reached from Commodore Switzer ( $34^{\circ}15.53'N$   $118^{\circ}9.27'W$ , elevation 2910ft and 1.2mi downstream from Switzer Picnic Area) by taking the trail that climbs the west wall of the canyon in order to circumvent Switzer Falls. About 0.2mi along this trail and near its summit the trail divides ( $34^{\circ}15.41'N$   $118^{\circ}9.22'W$  and elevation 2910ft). The right fork (11W14) takes you down Long Canyon to the lower end of the Royal Gorge. The left fork (12W08) climbs down into the main canyon again. We note that, once the canyon bottom is reached, you can hike upstream about 0.3mi to the pool at the bottom of Switzer Falls, though, along the way, a small waterfall must be negotiated by climbing along the rock on the right hand side.

To reach the upper end of the Royal Gorge you proceed downstream from the point where the trail reaches the canyon bottom. The trail (12W08) passes some



*Left: Cascades near Bear Creek. Right: Pool and falls in Royal Gorge.*

tranquil pools and small falls and continues on down the canyon for about 0.7mi to the point where Bear Creek joins the Arroyo Seco (at 34°15.06'N 118°8.99'W and elevation 2600ft). It is appropriate to define this junction with Bear Creek as the upper end of the Royal Gorge. Note that it takes just about 30min to hike the 1mi from the point high on the canyon wall where the trail forks to the junction with Bear Creek. The maintained trail then proceeds up Bear Creek; but we leave the trail and continue downstream into the Royal Gorge.

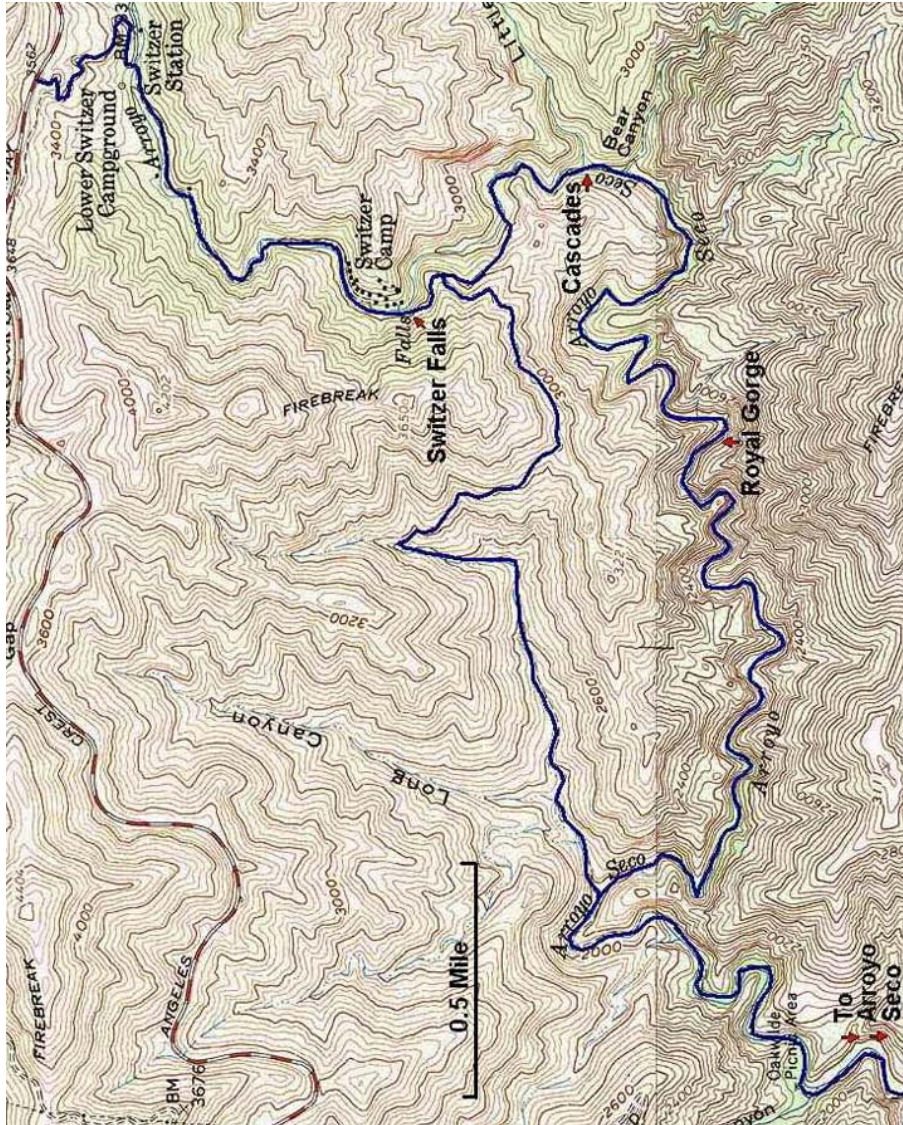
The upper section of the Royal Gorge is a verdant canyon that is fairly easy hiking though with many stream crossings and only a faint use-trail. The walls increase in height but the canyon remains broad with a number of stream-side meadows and tree-covered benches. Here, in the cool depths where water runs year round, the trees flourish. As you progress, the canyon winds back and forth so that some sections see much more sun than others. Consequently, the flora changes with each bend. There are some sections with desert-like foliage and numerous yuccas; other, cooler sections are populated with numerous alders. It is a pleasant hike that can differ considerably with the season and is probably best seen in the spring, fall or winter. However, like all these canyon hikes it is not wise to try them after rain when the risk of a flash flood is considerable.

About 1hr downstream from the beginning of the Royal Gorge you will encounter the only significant obstacle in the Gorge, a waterfall that is not particularly high (about 10ft) but falls directly into a large and deep pool (about 10ft deep) contained between steep rock sidewalls. You can circumvent this in several ways. You can traverse the left-hand rockface using a series of natural footholds and handholds in the rock. This is easier than it appears at first sight. Webbing has been strung along this rockface and could be used in an emergency but should not be trusted. The alternative is to swim across the pool by first downclimbing or rappeling to the right of the falls where there are a number of footholds.

From the bottom of the falls to the lower end of the Royal Gorge (34°15.11'N 118°10.60'W and elevation 1980ft) is a hike of 1hr 20min. The only other obstacles worth specific mention are just a short distance downstream of the falls where the canyon is quite narrow and the stream spans the entire width. Here, you may have to wade. Note that this section can present a more substantial obstacle when the water in the stream is high. Our hike was made in January of 1996 before significant amounts of rain had fallen that year.

In summary, it takes about 2hrs 40min to traverse the Royal Gorge. About 15min from the bottom is a place where the canyon makes a 180 degree bend from due west to due east. This bend can be clearly identified on the topo map. Once you reach this point you have almost completed the transit of the Royal Gorge.





Map of Royal Gorge Hike

## 6.4 Colby Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 2 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 470 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak
- Difficulties: One small assisted descent (or rappel)
- Special equipment: 40ft of webbing (or rope and harnesses)
- ACA Rating: 2A I

Colby canyon is an attractive small canyon on the southern slopes of Strawberry Peak. The maintained trail to that summit begins by climbing the east wall of Colby Canyon on its way to Josephine Saddle. However, well below that saddle it crosses the Colby stream again. This hike proceeds up the maintained trail to that crossing and then descends along the canyon bottom back to the starting point. It is an easy and short adventure hike that is recommended for the beginner. There is only one place where some assistance is needed in order to descend a small waterfall. Otherwise this is a gentle and attractive canyon with a year long stream. The hike can be done at any time throughout the year.

### Trailhead

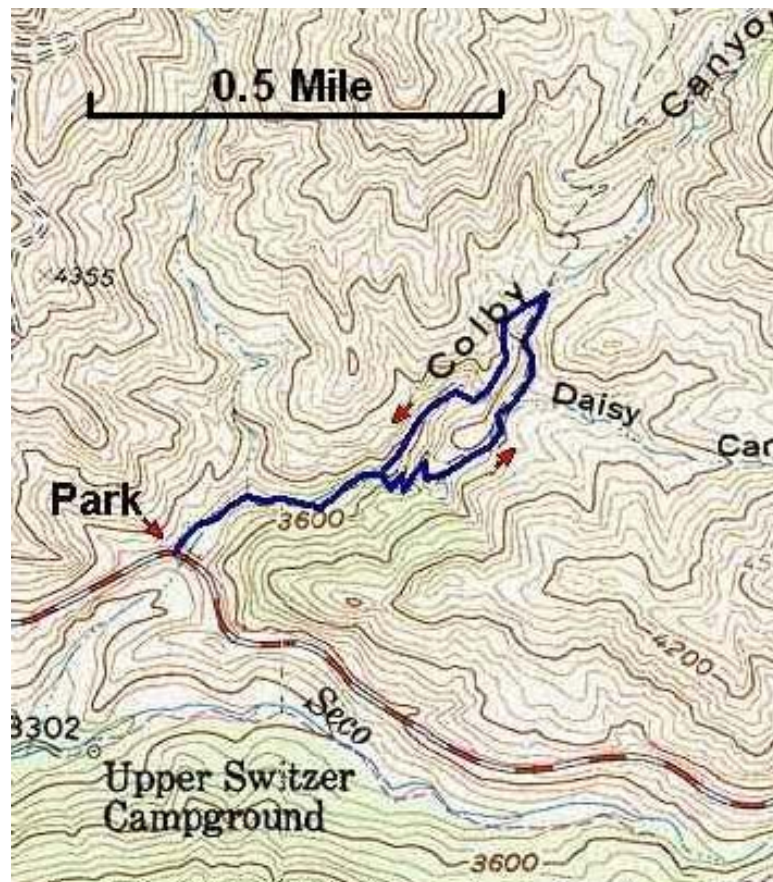
Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway from La Canada/Flintridge to a point about a mile beyond where the Angeles Forest Highway branches left at Clear Creek and about 0.5mi beyond the Switzer Picnic Area turnout. The road descends briefly and, at the bottom where it contours through Colby Canyon, you will find a large dirt parking area on the right and signs for the Colby Canyon trailhead (34°16.17'N 118°8.43'W and elevation 3480ft).

### Hike

From the parking area (34°16.17'N 118°8.43'W and elevation 3480ft), hike up trail into Colby Canyon. After following the stream for a short distance the trail climbs the east wall of the canyon and this provides some attractive views of the wooded canyon below. Soon the trail enters a side branch (called Daisy Canyon) and ascends for a short distance before contouring back into Colby. After 25min, you arrive again at the stream in Colby Canyon. Here, at 34°16.45'N 118°7.97'W and an elevation of 3950ft, you begin your descent along the canyon bottom.

About 100yds downstream of the stream crossing, you arrive at a steep, 15ft waterfall. Here there are two choices. You can either rappel down into the pool at the base using stout bush anchors on the left or you can follow a trail on the left that climbs about 10ft to a small ridge and then contours into a gully that is readily descended. Another 100yds or so and you will encounter a chute-like waterfall of about 30ft consisting of several cascades and intermediate pools. There is a use-trail up and around this on the left. Then, about 80min from the start, the canyon makes an abrupt right turn after which there is narrow, rocky section. A short distance along this there is a 10ft waterfall, the only one on this hike where some assistance is needed. Use a length of webbing around the two bushes about 8ft up the rockface on the right in order to assist the downclimb on the left or, alternatively, to rappel down the waterfall. I suspect you could also bypass this obstacle by returning to the abrupt right turn and climbing up a shallow gully to a saddle, the other side of which allows you to descend back to the stream at a point downstream of the small waterfall.

A short distance downstream, the use-trail along the canyon bottom becomes more evident. This is a very pretty stretch of small canyon and you should pause to enjoy it. Soon you arrive at the point where the maintained trail leaves the stream to climb the east wall of the canyon. About 2hrs after setting out, you will arrive back at the trailhead (34°16.17'N 118°8.43'W and elevation 3480ft).



Map of Colby Canyon Hike

## 6.5 Strawberry Peak

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.0 miles
- Elevation gain: 2680 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Condor Peak, Chilao Flat
- Difficulties: Two moderate free climbs
- Special equipment: None
- ACA Rating: 2A III

The ascent of 6164ft Strawberry Peak from the Colby Canyon trailhead is a hike that appears in many hiking guides. It is included here because it is a fine hike with great views in many directions as well as a significant climbing challenge. The first half of the ascent follows the established Colby Canyon trail up to Josephine Saddle on the Josephine/Strawberry ridge. Then the off-trail portion follows this ridge to the summit of Strawberry. Though off-trail most of this route simply requires following a well-established use-trail. However, that use-trail is interrupted in two places by rockfaces that require climbing and careful route finding. Provided you follow the usual route and exercise proper care, these climbs can be done safely without technical equipment. The summit climb can be particularly exhilarating.

The hike is best for a clear spring or fall day. In the summer it can be very hot especially below the ridge. It should not be undertaken in the rain or when there is snow lying on the ground. In either case the climbs can become quite treacherous.

### Trailhead

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway from La Canada/Flintridge to a point about a mile beyond where the Angeles Forest Highway branches left at Clear Creek and about 0.5mi beyond the Switzer Picnic Area turnout. The road descends briefly and, at the bottom where it contours through Colby Canyon, you will find a large dirt parking area on the right and signs for the Colby Canyon trailhead (34°16.17'N 118°8.43'W and elevation 3470ft).

### Hike

From the parking area (34°16.17'N 118°8.43'W and elevation 3470ft), hike up trail into Colby Canyon. After following the stream for a short distance the



trail climbs the east wall of the canyon and briefly follows a side canyon before dropping back into Colby. After 25min you cross the Colby stream at 34°16.45'N 118°7.97'W and an elevation of 3940ft and then ascend through a large scrub forest. About 1hr 15min and 2mi from the start you will reach Josephine Saddle (34°16.92'N 118°8.05'W and elevation 4850ft) where the watertank provides a cool, shady spot on a hot day. Strawberry Peak has been visible for most of the hike and you should be certain to identify it from the saddle (it is almost due east) if you have not already done so.

The “off-trail” and more challenging part of the hike begins at the saddle and follows the ridge all the way to the top of Strawberry Peak. In fact, the popularity of this hike means that there is a good use trail for most of the way. From the saddle, follow the trail that climbs eastward from the saddle. After just 20yds, leave the well-developed trail and branch right onto the use-trail that follows the ridge. Roughly 15min from the saddle you arrive at the first major obstacle. The decomposing granite rock of the ridge abruptly climbs about 100ft. There are several straightforward climbing routes over this obstacle that allow you to proceed without technical gear or excessive risk. I recommend proceeding upward on the right, then contouring around to the left where there are several chutes you can use to reach the top. It is also wise to take careful note of the route as you climb (and perhaps install a few ducks at strategic points). It is always harder to navigate while downclimbing and these notes or ducks will save time and energy during your later descent.

From a small summit (5445ft) a short distance beyond this first obstacle, you will see that the ridge loops to the north on its way to the summit of Strawberry Peak. Care should be taken to follow the trail that coincides with the apex of the ridge throughout. Indeed, if you are not on the ridge you have taken the wrong trail. As you approach the peak fir trees begin to appear and, shortly thereafter, you reach a rocky prominence from which there is a good view of the major obstacle on this hike, a steep boulder-strewn incline leading to the summit of Strawberry Peak. You should reach this point about 2hr 20min from



*Left: Ridge approach to Strawberry. Right: Strawberry Peak climb.*

the start.

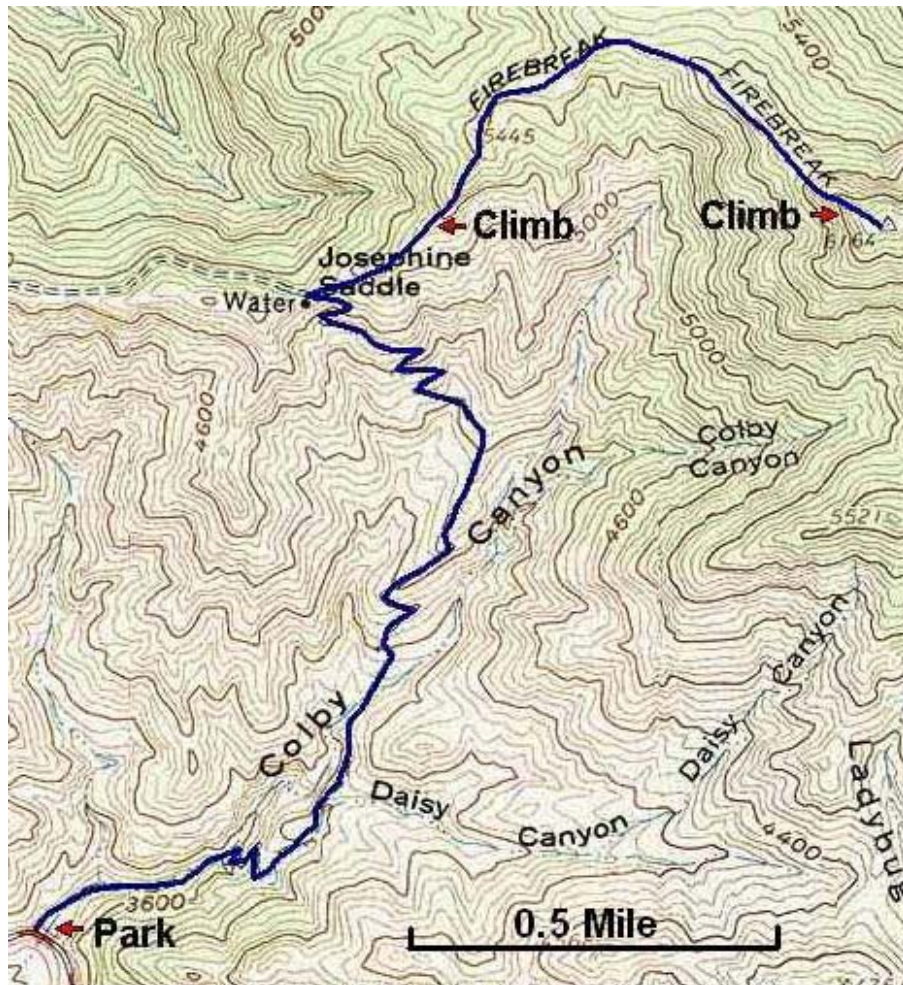
From the vantage point of the rocky prominence it is a good idea to survey the climb up the steep face ahead. The route is marked by green arrows painted on the rocks and the first of these should be visible. Between the rocky prominence and the start of the climb is a small boulder-strewn area and it is necessary to descend about 50ft in order to traverse this. (Remember this descent for it is important to ascend it on your return in order to find the ridge trail.)

As you begin the climb, take time to check that you are on the right route. Be careful to follow the green arrows because, not too far to either side, there are steep and dangerous cliffs. Indeed the cliff on the left, on the north face of Strawberry is one of the highest in all of the San Gabriels.

Though it begins a little to the right, the route follows the apex of the ridge. Fortunately there are lots of good handholds and footholds so the climbing is quite straightforward. As you ascend the route moves to the center and you ascend along the apex. It takes about 20min to complete the climb and the 6164ft summit of Strawberry Peak ( $34^{\circ}17.01'N$   $118^{\circ}7.23'W$ ) is just a short walk from there. It takes about 2hr 40min to hike from the trailhead to the top and distance of about 3mi.

The summit of Strawberry is a serene place with plenty of shade from which to admire the spectacular views. To the south, downtown Los Angeles is visible beyond the Mount Disappointment ridge and Brown Mountain. Further east the television towers of Mount Wilson pierce the skyline. To the north you look up the broad valley of Mill Creek toward Mount Gleason and the desert beyond.

The descent and return along the same trail takes about 2hr 20min. Down-climbing the obstacles is somewhat harder than ascending so it is necessary to proceed slowly and carefully.



Map of Strawberry Peak Hike

## 6.6 Cloudburst Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 3 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.45 miles
- Elevation gain: 320 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Chilao Flat
- Difficulties: Steep 250ft drop-in
- Special equipment: 160ft rope and rappeling gear
- ACA Rating: 2A II

Cloudburst Canyon is one of a group of canyons that drop precipitously off the north face of Mount Disappointment just to the west of Red Box junction. They are readily visible from the Angeles Crest Highway just east of the Switzer Camp turnoff. From the road the bright cliffs seem unnegotiable but such a perspective telescopes the terrain.

Elsewhere we describe a challenging hike through the main canyon that we call Supercloud. Cloudburst is the only one named on the topographical map and is, in fact, a modest canyon by comparison. It enters the complex from the southeast and, apart from a moderately difficult drop-in is an easy canyon suitable for a short adventure hike. The drop-in does require careful navigation since the route described is the only one that avoids the steep cliffs that prevent access from any other direction.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. Drive both vehicles up the Angeles Crest Highway from La Canada/Flintridge past the junction at Clear Creek and the Switzer Parking Area. Two miles beyond the Switzer Camp turnoff, the road makes a broad sweeping turn to the left. At the start of this turn on the right side of the road there is a white metal gate where you will emerge at the conclusion of this hike. Turn one vehicle around and leave it in one of the turnouts just before the gate and bend ( $34^{\circ}15.65'N$   $118^{\circ}6.96'W$  and elevation 4010ft). Then, in the other vehicle, proceed on up the road to Red Box Junction and turn right onto the Mount Wilson road. A short distance (0.4mi) beyond Red Box, a gated asphalt road (2N52) switchbacks up to the right. Drive a few yards up this road to the parking area before the gate ( $34^{\circ}15.26'N$   $118^{\circ}6.08'W$  and elevation 4750ft).

## Hike

From the parking area (34°15.26'N 118°6.08'W and elevation 4750ft) proceed around the metal gate and hike 0.7mi (20min) up the asphalt road (2N52) to the point where it reaches the first ridgetop and makes a hairpin turn to left. The ground drops away precipitously on three sides of the hairpin turn (34°15.35'N 118°6.64'W and elevation 5070ft). To the north you can see the busy Angeles Crest Highway as it climbs toward Red Box. On the south is the deep cut that Cloudburst Canyon slices into the mountainside. The off-trail route begins just beyond the hairpin where you make a steep descent into Cloudburst. Finding exactly the right gully is critical here for all other routes lead to the steep cliffs that otherwise completely surround the head of Cloudburst Canyon. The drop-in point is on the right side of the road just 60yds beyond the hairpin bend (and 20ft beyond the start of the guard rail on the left). Step over the guard rail on right and descend past a low retaining wall. The gully is very steep and earthy. After about 50ft, it becomes steeper though still negotiable. For peace of mind we chose to rappel using the large pine tree on the left side to descend about 70ft. Then we anchored off a bush on the right to descend the next 80ft to where the inclination eased. From there it is simply a matter of descending the scree slope to the junction with the main branch of Cloudburst Canyon. You should reach this point (elevation 4830ft) about 1hr 20min from start.

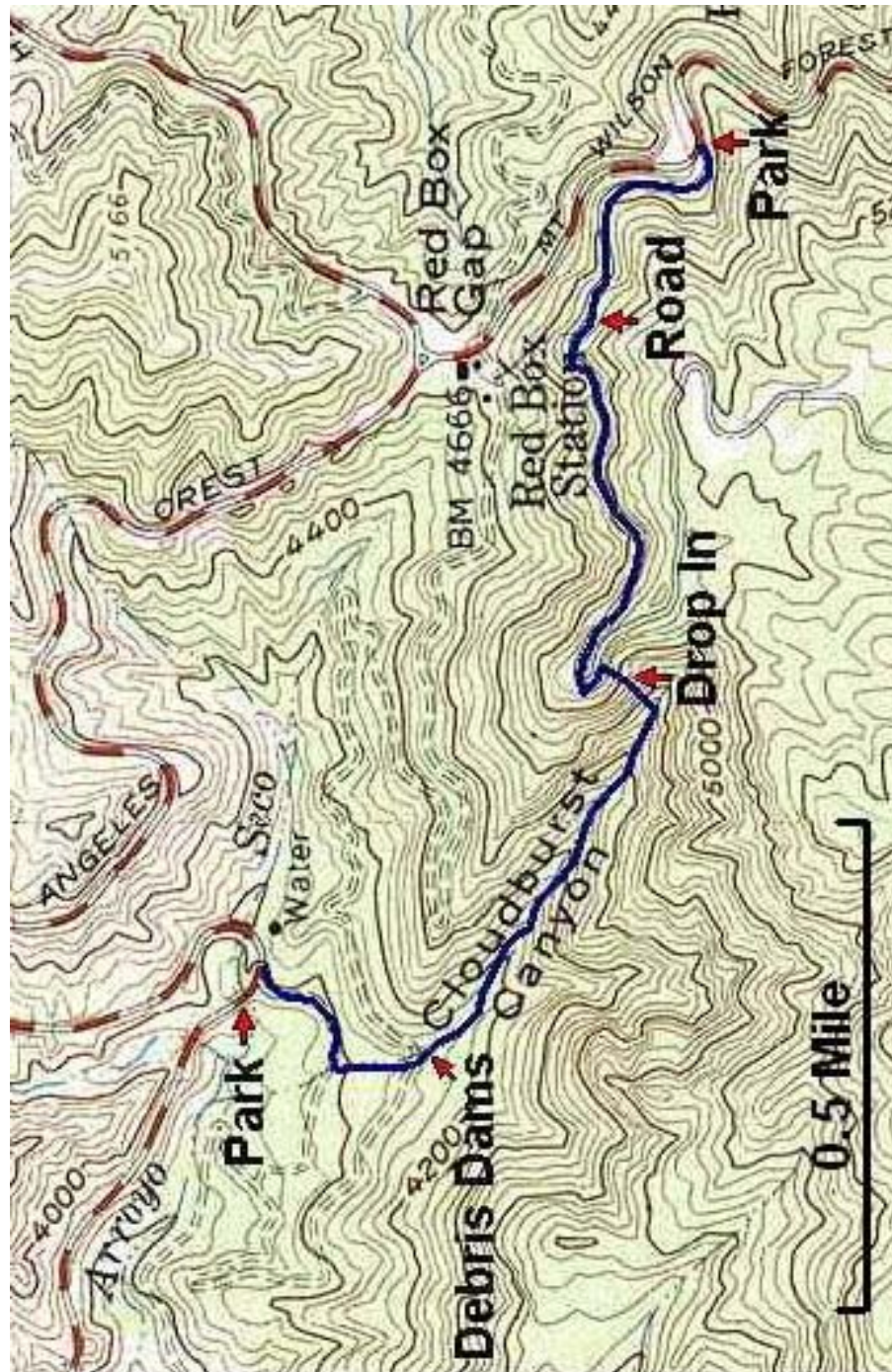
The remainder of the hike is quite straightforward. Cloudburst Canyon itself is rocky but easy going with little brush and no significant downclimbs. It is normally dry. Since it runs almost due west, the left or north side has trees and ferns while the south has the typical desert like vegetation. At 34°15.46'N



*Cloudburst Canyon.*



118°7.00'W, an elevation of 4180ft and 2hrs from start you will arrive at the junction with a larger canyon entering on the left (Supercloud Canyon) and, a short way below the canyon junction you will encounter two debris dams with stream center drops of about 12ft and 6ft. These can be negotiated on the left or rappelled if you wish. About 50yds below the dams a broad trail (fire road) crosses the streambed. Continue on down the stream bed and about 100yds further at 34°15.59'N 118°7.07'W and an elevation of 3990ft) you encounter the fireroad again as it switches back. Go right along the trail. This takes you back to the Angeles Crest Highway at the place where you parked the first car (34°15.65'N 118°6.96'W and elevation 4010ft).



Map of Cloudburst Canyon Hike

## 6.7 Supercloud Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3 miles
- Elevation gain: 800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Chilao Flat, Mount Wilson
- Difficulties: Six substantial rappels
- Special equipment: 190ft rope, 60ft webbing, rappeling equipment
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The north face of the ridge that includes Mount Disappointment and San Gabriel Peak is one of the most rugged and precipitous in the San Gabriel range. It contains some marvelously sculpted canyons including the one that is visible to the south as you drive up the last couple of winding miles toward the junction at Red Box. This canyon has no name on the topo map - though the much less dramatic and smaller canyon below it to the northeast is called Cloudburst Canyon. One has to wonder whether the map maker may have misplaced the name. But the deed is done and so we have given the name Supercloud to the dramatic but unnamed canyon that is the subject of this adventure hike.

Supercloud is a highly recommended short adventure hike down through a vertical wonderland to a verdant tree lined, north-facing canyon. The head of the canyon is readily accessed and the drop-in is relatively easy. The descent involves six vertical waterfalls (usually dry) varying in height from 30ft to 90ft



*Left: View from the ridge. Right: First rappel.*

and surrounded by some spectacular scenery. Though it should be avoided during or after rain, the canyon can be quite dry during most of the year. It is, perhaps, most enjoyable during a dry fall or winter day.

## Trailhead

The hike requires a car shuttle. Drive both vehicles up the Angeles Crest Highway from La Canada/Flintridge past the junction at Clear Creek and the Switzer Parking Area. Two miles beyond the Switzer Camp turnoff, the road makes a long sweeping turn to the left. At the start of this turn on the right side of the road there is a white metal gate where you will emerge at the conclusion of this hike (at  $34^{\circ}15.65'N$   $118^{\circ}6.96'W$  and elevation 4010ft). Turn one vehicle around and leave it in one of the turnouts just before the gate and bend. From this parking area you can look south directly up at the sandstone walls of Supercloud. It looks very difficult from this viewpoint.

Then, in the other vehicle, proceed on up the road to Red Box Junction and turn right onto the Mount Wilson road. A short distance (0.4mi) beyond Red Box, a gated asphalt road (2N52) switchbacks up to the right. Drive a few yards up this road to the parking area before the gate ( $34^{\circ}15.26'N$   $118^{\circ}6.08'W$  and elevation 4750ft).

## Hike

From the parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.26'N$   $118^{\circ}6.08'W$  and elevation 4750ft), proceed past the metal gate and hike up the asphalt road, 2N52, passing above Red Box junction. After 20min and 0.7mi you reach the first hairpin turn to the left (and the drop-in point for a different hike down Cloudburst Canyon that is on your right). Continuing on up the road, 1.7mi and 45min from the start you arrive at a second hairpin turn to the left at ( $34^{\circ}15.04'N$   $118^{\circ}6.65'W$  and an elevation of 5450ft. Just past the apex of this turn a broad trail or former



*Left: Fifth rappel. Right: Supercloud Hollow.*



fire road (with a small dirt berm across the entrance) branches off to the right. Follow the remains of this old dirt road as it contours off to the west below the ridge west of Mount Disappointment. Do not drop down into the canyon that you cross about 0.1mi from the asphalt road since it connects with Cloudburst Canyon. Instead continue on along the faint dirt road; about 0.3mi from the asphalt (1hr from the start) the dirt road ends at 34°15.03'N 118°6.82'W and an elevation of 5600ft; an animal trail continues to contour around the heads of Supercloud Canyon but you will drop into Supercloud here by proceeding straight down the steep slope at the end of the dirt road.

Though steep the descent is quite easy since the surface is relatively fine sand and earth. Veer to the right into the bottom of the gully that soon turns toward the west. The stream bottom is relatively easy going until, 1hr 20min from the start at an elevation of 5150ft, you abruptly arrive at a lip with a jaw-dropping chasm ahead. However, closer inspection reveals a fairly straight-forward descent. The first step is to rappel down beside the streambed to a long shelf about 50ft below. The anchor is a large tree some distance back from the lip on the left side. Having reached the shelf (elevation 5090ft) the second vertical drop looks very large indeed but appearances are quite deceptive. The anchor here is a stout bush on the right but it would be wise to back this up with a wrap around one of the rock projections just above the bush. The rappel from here is about 70ft to the bottom and the completion of the first big drop.

A short distance downstream of these first two waterfalls, a large canyon, perhaps the main canyon, enters from the left and there is a short stretch of bouldering before you enter a tree-lined section. At 4950ft and 2hr 20min from the start, you encounter a modest 30ft waterfall for which the best anchor is a large tree about 10ft up the slope on the right side. This is followed almost immediately by a small waterfall that can be bypassed on the left. After another short stretch of bouldering, you see ahead another lip that appears to lead to a second, massive chasm. A huge log lies across the top of this waterfall and closer inspection again reveals that the drop is quite manageable. The top of this fourth rappel is at an elevation of 4870ft and 2hr 40min from the start. The large log is a good anchor and the 50ft vertical descent involves some free rappel and pretty hanging moss decoration.

The fifth rappel (4800ft and 3hr from the start) is just a short distance downstream and consists of a stack of large boulders piled up above a narrow slot. The anchor is a stout small tree a short distance upstream on the left and the 35ft descent requires the negotiation of the boulders and a narrow chimney. Another relatively easy, tree-lined section follows before you arrive, 3hr 30min from the start (and at 4700ft), at the third awesome drop during this descent of Supercloud. This involves a 90ft vertical drop into a shady glade. A number of sizeable trees are growing out of the face of this waterfall and provide assurance of an intermediate anchor if this is needed. There are two possible anchors at the top, a stout bush on the right and a small tree on the left. It is probably best to use the former and to head for the right at the bottom since your 190ft rope may only just be long enough for a double rappel and the highest point at the bottom is on the right.

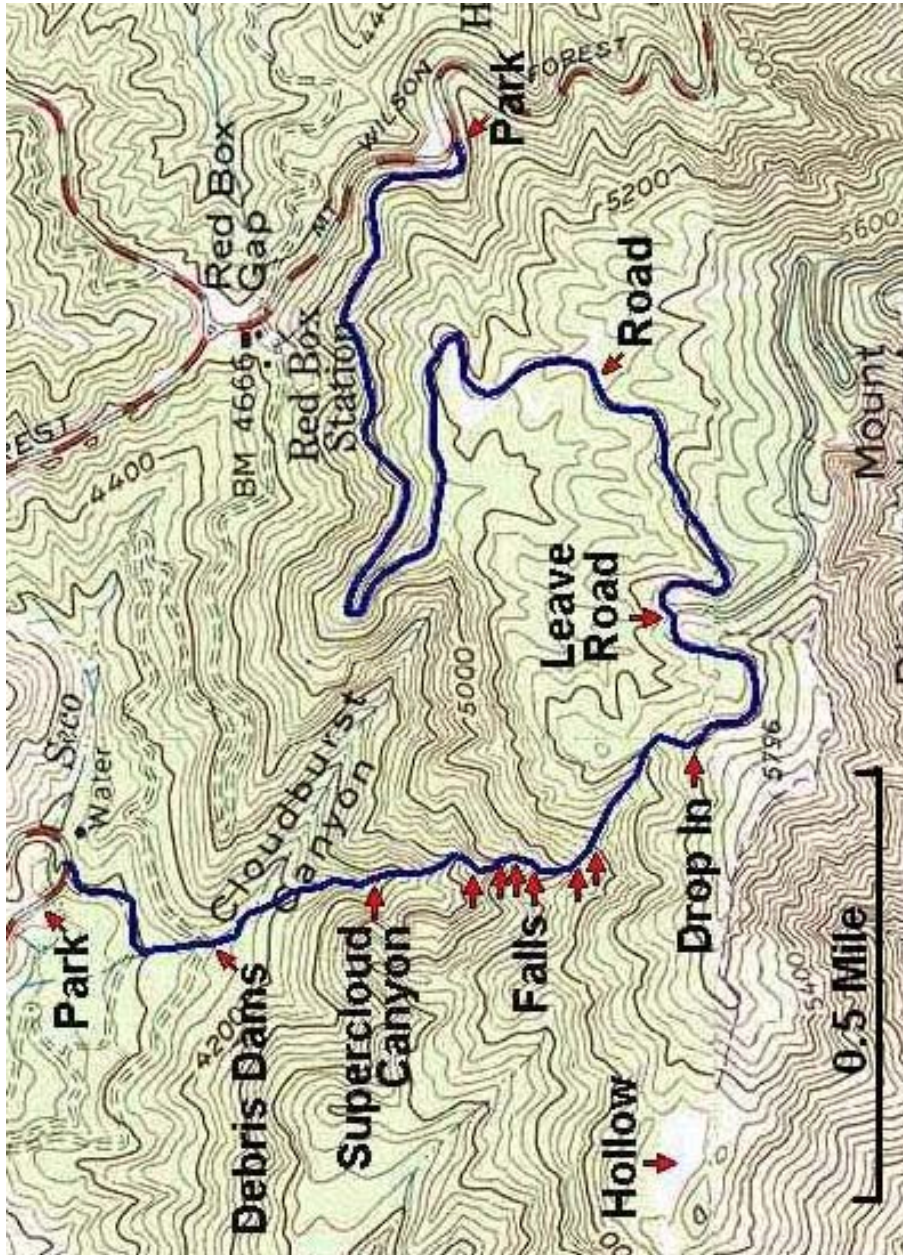


This completes the rappeling in this descent. It is a relatively short hike downstream to the junction with Cloudburst Canyon (entering on the right) at 34°15.46'N 118°7.00'W, an elevation of 4180ft) and 4hr 15min from the start. Just a short way below the junction you arrive at the top of two debris dams with stream center drops of about 12ft and 6ft. Off to the left in a flat area of forest are the ruins of an old house. The debris dams are readily negotiated on the left below the house. And 50yds below the dams a broad trail (fire road) crosses the streambed. Continue on down the stream bed and about 100yds further at 34°15.59'N 118°7.07'W and an elevation of 3990ft you encounter the fireroad again as it switches back. Go right along the trail; a short hike takes you back to the Angeles Crest Highway and the place where you parked the first car (34°15.65'N 118°6.96'W and elevation 4010ft) about 4hr 30min from the start.

### **Side trip to Supercloud Hollow**

If you have time, you might choose to take a side trip (about 0.8mi and 1hr round trip) to an odd natural feature near the drop-in point for Supercloud. This is a large flat and bare depression on the ridge a short distance to the west. Supercloud Hollow (elevation 5310ft) measures about 100yds by 200yds and is an oddity that is worth a visit. There may be times after a major winter storm when it becomes a shallow lake.

To reach the hollow, follow the animal trail that proceeds on beyond the end of the dirt road at the drop-in point (34°15.03'N 118°6.82'W and elevation 5600ft). This trail traverses across the scree slopes at the heads of the various branches of Supercloud as it climbs and contours up to the top of the ridge (elevation 5650ft). There is a fairly brush free firebreak or animal trail along the top of the ridge and you follow this west to the point where the hollow is clearly visible below you. A broad firebreak descends several hundred feet directly to Supercloud Hollow (34°15.05'N 118°7.32'W and elevation 5310ft). After the visit, return to the ridge top and thence to the drop-in point for Supercloud Canyon.



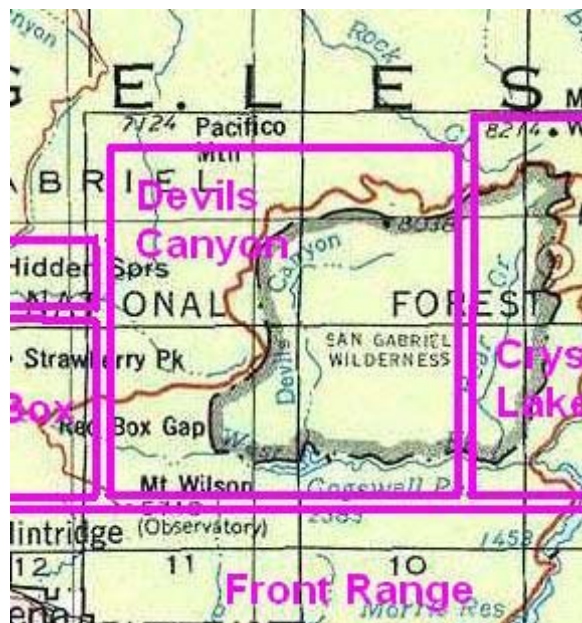
Map of Supercloud Canyon Hike



## Chapter 7

# DEVIL'S CANYON

The Devil's Canyon group includes three adventure hikes that together make up a complete transit of Devil's Canyon itself. There are probably a number of other potential canyoneering descents in the Devil's Canyon Wilderness Area that remain to be explored but most of these will require an overnight camp.



Devil's Canyon region.

## 7.1 Bobcat Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8.5 hours (one way) (9 hours to falls and back)
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.5 miles (one way) (5.8 miles to falls and back)
- Elevation gain: Minimal (2200 feet on return from falls)
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain, Chilao Flat, Mt. Wilson, Azusa
- Difficulties: Several small rappels (one way hike), some bouldering
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 100ft rope, 30ft of webbing and 2 rappel rings (for one way)
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Bobcat Canyon provides several different levels of adventure. It can be explored during an out-and-return hike that descends the upper section of Bobcat. This is a fairly easy, off-trail experience into an infrequently traveled canyon. About four hours of hiking down the canyon will bring you to a waterfall that is impassable without rappeling equipment; this is at the limit of an out-and-return day hike.

With rappeling gear, it is possible to continue on down Bobcat Canyon to the point where it joins the West Fork of the San Gabriel and then to hike up the West Fork to the place where the Shortcut/Rincon Fire Road crosses the river. This loop hike requires two vehicles and the preparatory placement of the return vehicle.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the large dirt clearing and overlook known as Windy Gap on the Angeles Crest Highway about 1mi west of Charlton Flats at 34°17.10'N 117°59.57'W. This overlook at an altitude of 5111ft looks down into the heads of three different canyons. In the hike entitled "Devil's Canyon Loop" we describe emerging from the easternmost of these three, a gully we have called Skull Canyon. Bobcat Canyon is the westernmost of the three canyons and travels south from here to join the West Fork of the San Gabriel at a point near the upper limit of the waters of Cogswell Reservoir.

If the intention is to complete the one-way hike from Windy Gap to the West Fork of the San Gabriel then a return vehicle must first be placed at the point where the Shortcut fire road crosses the West Fork. To do this, you will need to drive about 3mi down the Shortcut/Rincon fire road, a steep and rough dirt road that winds down from the Angeles Crest Highway into the canyon of



the San Gabriel river. This is best done in a four-wheel-drive vehicle though a two-wheel-drive vehicle can make it. However, in order to access the fire road you must obtain a permit from one of the local US Forest Service offices. Along with the permit will come information on how to unlock the large iron gate that normally blocks entrance to the fire road.

To reach the entrance to the Shortcut/Rincon fire road you drive up the Angeles Crest Highway to a point 0.5mi beyond where the Upper Big Tujunga Road branches off to the left. Here, on the right, you will find the entrance to the fire road as well as information on the trails that branch from it. The fire road climbs very briefly and passes a water tank before beginning the descent into San Gabriel Canyon. It takes a little over 30min to drive down to the river crossing at  $34^{\circ}14.86'N$   $118^{\circ}2.02'W$  and an elevation of 2760ft where there are several places to park.

Having placed the return vehicle at the river crossing, you should return to the Angeles Crest Highway and drive east another 2.7mi to the Windy Gap trailhead.

## Hike

The first important step in this hike is to locate the trail that follows the top of the ridge on the east side of Bobcat Canyon. To do this, hike up the broad trail leading off to the west from the parking area. This climbs west toward the top of Mount Sally but you only go about 50yds up the trail. Just past a water tank, look for a trail that goes down through the bushes to the left (south). There are several such trails but they quickly merge as they converge on the apex of the



*Small rappel.*

descending ridge that begins to take form after about 50yds. There are, however, many forks and, to avoid losing the main trail, my advice is to concentrate on staying on the apex of the ridge. Soon there is only one wide, sandy ridge trail and you mostly descend, paralleling the uppermost reaches of Bobcat Canyon that lies off to your right. After 0.5hr you descend to a saddle ( $34^{\circ}16.85'N$   $117^{\circ}59.54'W$  and elevation 4960ft) where there is a large, open grassy area spotted with yuccas. Turn right here and descend into Bobcat by way of a use-trail down a small, brush-free gully. It is a brief descent and soon you are beside the small stream in Bobcat Canyon itself ( $34^{\circ}16.83'N$   $117^{\circ}59.61'W$  and elevation 4860ft). Proceeding downstream, there are several waterfalls to negotiate and it is fairly obvious whether to circumvent these on the right or the left. When I went this way in the winter there was running water for the entire length of the canyon but the upper reaches may be dry in the summer.

After 1hr 20min the canyon makes a clear turn to the right and, 25min later, you come to a junction where a substantial canyon enters from the right (a use-trail leads up this canyon). The going here is fairly easy with only occasional places where bushwhacking is necessary. In many places you can take advantage of a well-worn animal trail. There are also many small pools and falls to enjoy and reasonable shade for a summer day. A little over a hour later (2hr 50min from the start) you encounter another junction with a large canyon entering from the right. This comes directly down from Mount Sally and could be called Sally Gulch though there is no such name on the topo map. The elevation of this junction is 3400ft. Note that an altimeter is a good way to plot your progress down this canyon provided you remember to set it to the correct altitude at the trailhead.

Just 25min below this second junction (and 3hr 15min from the start) you encounter a tricky free climb. The obstacle is a small waterfall with steep cliffs on both sides. The climb down is easy though a little precarious. You descend from the left to a narrow rock ridge that sticks out into the canyon from that side. Climb down the apex of this rock ridge to the flat land below. Downstream is an overgrown boulder field where there are many comfortable places that could be used for an overnight campsite.

Downstream of the boulder field, the canyon narrows again and quite suddenly, at  $34^{\circ}15.21'N$   $118^{\circ}0.40'W$ , an elevation of about 2900ft and a hiking time of 4hrs from the start, you encounter a substantial waterfall with a rocky pool below. This requires a rappel and is also as far as you can go on an out-and-return day hike. It takes 5hrs to hike back to the trailhead from here.

## One Way Hike

The anchor for this first rappel is a substantial bush on the left near the lip of the waterfall. The falls descend 25ft into a large pool, that is immediately followed by a second drop whose height cannot be estimated from the top. In fact, this second obstacle is easier than it appears from above; it can be free climbed with little difficulty though you will need to wade through a second pool.

South of these falls, there is a long and flat stretch of canyon that is most easily hiked in or near the stream bed. Eventually you come to a place where the canyon makes a large and abrupt left turn followed immediately by a right turn where it also narrows dramatically. This is the entrance to the final narrows leading to the West Fork of the San Gabriel River. A short distance into the narrows and about 5hrs 45min from the start, you encounter a small, 20ft waterfall that necessitates a rappel. There is a convenient anchor in the form of a large rock in midstream. We note that, if traveling upstream from the West Fork, this small waterfall would be the end of the line for it would be difficult to ascend without technical rock-climbing equipment and expertise.

About 10min further, you come to dramatic twin waterfalls with a large, deep pool in between, almost enclosed by the surrounding cliffs. Both falls are vertical, the upper being about 30ft high, the lower about 25ft high. There are several large rocks at the top that could be used as anchors. The descent would clearly need to be done as a single rappel and would be enjoyable if you have sufficient time. However, if you are short of time as we were, there is a somewhat airy trail on the right that can be used to bypass this obstacle. A short distance downstream there are several small falls that can be circumvented on the left. Finally, 6hrs 15min after the start you will reach the end of Bobcat Canyon at the point where it empties into the West Fork of the San Gabriel ( $34^{\circ}14.47'N$   $118^{\circ}0.01'W$  and elevation 2420ft). The junction is readily recognized since the West Fork is a substantial stream throughout the year.

From this junction, you start up the West Fork and it is an easy 2.5mi hike back to the vehicle on the Shortcut/Rincon Fire Road. It is a very pleasant, wooded canyon with a bottom that is quite broad and open for most of the way. The use-trail becomes more and more evident the closer you get to the fire road. There are only two features that need to be noted. About 1mi from Bobcat Canyon, the canyon narrows and the use-trail climbs the north wall in order to bypass a large canyon-filling pool. On a bench on the right side immediately upstream of these narrows are the remains of an old trail camp; indeed there are many very pleasant camping spots along this stretch of the West Fork.

About 1.5mi from Bobcat Canyon, a substantial wash enters from the north and has deposited large banks of gravel in the middle of the canyon bottom. This has forced the main stream up against the south wall of the canyon. Coming from downstream, it is natural to be traveling on the bench on the north side of the stream and this could mislead you to follow the side wash thinking it is the main canyon. We traveled about 100yds up this side wash before realizing our mistake and backtracking to find the main stream.

The Shortcut/Rincon fire road and the concrete ford it uses to cross the West Fork ( $34^{\circ}14.86'N$   $118^{\circ}2.02'W$  and elevation 2760ft) are readily recognized and you should reach it about 8hrs 30min from the time you left Windy Gap. The drive back up to the Angeles Crest Highway takes about 30min and it would be wise to time your hike so that this is completed before dark.



## 7.2 Upper Devil's Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 9 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 12 miles
- Elevation gain: 600 feet and 1500 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain
- Difficulties: One modest waterfall, much bouldering
- Special equipment: One 30ft length of webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A IV

This adventure hike begins your exploration of Devil's Canyon by taking you from its origins on the south face of Waterman Mountain down through the upper canyon to the place where the Devil's Canyon Trail from Chilao reaches the river. You start in the beautiful pine forest of Waterman Mountain and descend to the desert-like vegetation in the depths of Devil's Canyon, finally climbing back up to the conifers alongside the Angeles Crest Highway at Chilao. For most of the hike, you will follow the Devil's Canyon stream. Usually, this flows continuously from a point about 0.5mi from Twin Peaks Saddle. However, some years it can dry up almost completely, leaving only a few pools. We completed the hike one particularly hot summer day and were very glad of the water filter that we had packed and the water in the few remaining pools.

### Railheads

You will need to set up a car shuttle for this long hike. Drive east on the Angeles Crest Highway. Just before you reach the turn-off for the Chilao Visitor Center you will encounter the Devil's Canyon trailhead. On the left is a large dirt parking area (34°19.42'N 118°0.19'W and elevation 5310ft). Leave one vehicle here since you will end this hike by climbing up the trail from the canyon bottom and emerging here. Then, in the other vehicle, proceed east along the Angeles Crest Highway for about 7mi to the Mount Waterman



trailhead near Buckhorn. About a mile beyond the Waterman ski lifts, a dirt road leaves the pavement and climbs steeply and forward up to the right. (There is a much rougher dirt road about 100yds before the one you want; do not take that.) At this trailhead ( $34^{\circ}20.68'N$   $117^{\circ}55.25'W$  and elevation 6770ft), there are small places to park on either side of the road. The trail is just a few yards past the main dirt road and runs parallel but just below the road for the first hundred yards or so. It then leaves the proximity of the dirt road and heads east.

## Hike

The first part of the hike proceeds along a pretty trail through the pine-forested north slope of Waterman Mountain. Starting at  $34^{\circ}20.68'N$   $117^{\circ}55.25'W$  and an elevation of 6770ft), it climbs gradually for the first 1.3mi to a saddle at  $34^{\circ}20.29'N$   $117^{\circ}55.07'W$  and elevation 7160ft. Here, 25min from the start, there is a precipitous and spectacular view down into one of the upper forks of Bear Creek. Off in the distance to the left you can make out the end of highway 39 and the remains of the old road that connected that highway with Islip Saddle. Below you is the rugged catchment of Bear Creek. It would make an interesting adventure hike of two or more days to descend from here into the canyon below and follow it all the way down to the Bear Creek Narrows (see Bear Creek Narrows).

But our present route is up the ridge to the right, following the maintained trail up Waterman Mountain. The views here continue to be marvelous and you should take time to enjoy them. The mountain off to the southwest is Twin Peaks. We are headed for the saddle between Twin Peaks and Waterman Mountain that you can discern from the several overlooks you will encounter. About 2mi or 55min from the start you arrive at a trail junction ( $34^{\circ}20.15'N$   $117^{\circ}55.48'W$  and elevation 7380ft) where the right fork continues to the broad summit of Waterman Mountain (8038ft). You take the left fork (actually straight on) that soon begins to descend the southern slope of Waterman Mountain. After 1.6mi another junction is reached; taking the left fork you continue to descend another 400ft (over a mile or so) to the Twin Peaks Saddle at  $34^{\circ}19.64'N$   $117^{\circ}55.77'W$  and an elevation of 6550ft. Here, 1hr 40min from the start, you reach the end of the maintained trail though a well-worn

use-trail proceeds on up the other side and eventually reaches the eastern summit of Twin Peaks.

However, before you reach the saddle you should recognize that you are descending a small ridge with a gully on your right. This gully is, in fact, the start of Devil's Canyon. When you reach the saddle, this gully veers off to the right or west. You should follow the streambed in this direction. But, before doing so, take a moment to enjoy the view of the Bear Creek basin in the other, eastern direction.

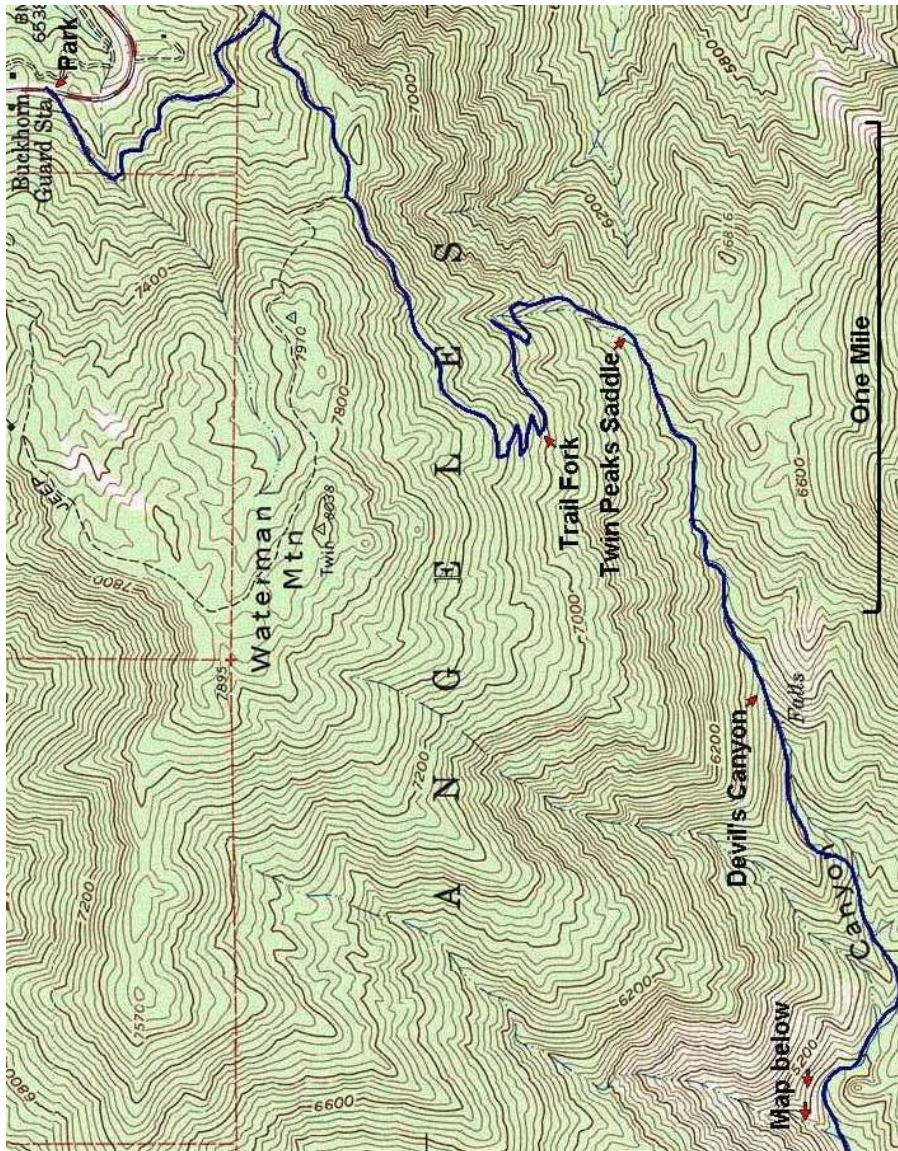
There is only the faintest use-trail down Devil's Canyon. The first section is a pleasant hike down a shallow, wooded canyon. Follow the stream most of the time, though there are places where it is better to proceed along the earthy northern slope or along benches on that side. In places it is convenient to climb a little way up the northern slope in order to get past obstacles. After 0.8mi or 1hr 10min from the saddle (2hr 45min from the start) you will come to an overgrown stretch of canyon that is just upstream of the falls that are marked on the topo map ( $34^{\circ}19.37'N$   $117^{\circ}56.62'W$  and elevation 5880ft). These falls descend about 30ft down a sloping rockface and hardly deserve to appear on the topo map, since, in other canyons, there are many larger waterfalls that are not shown. Though they represent only a minor obstacle, care should still be exercised. There are two routes by which to descend. When the water is low (it was dry during one of my descents) the easiest way is to climb down the sloping rockface proceeding from one ledge to the next, first on the left, then on the right and then back on the left. The other route is via a narrow trail that contours from the top around to the left to meet a scree slope that takes you to the bottom. Perhaps a length of webbing would be useful here to provide security for the beginner.

Between the falls and the place where you intersect the Chialao/Devil's Canyon Trail, there are no substantial obstacles. It is a long three miles of bouldering, with a few sections of bushwhacking. In many places there are substantial benches that provide welcome sections of easy, open ground. There are also stretches of use-trail that become more continuous the further you proceed. Clearly, many people venture upstream from the Devil's Canyon Trail and near the junction with the trail the route is well ducked. It takes about 4hr 30min to cover the distance from the falls to the trail junction. You should reach this point about 7hr 30min from the

start.

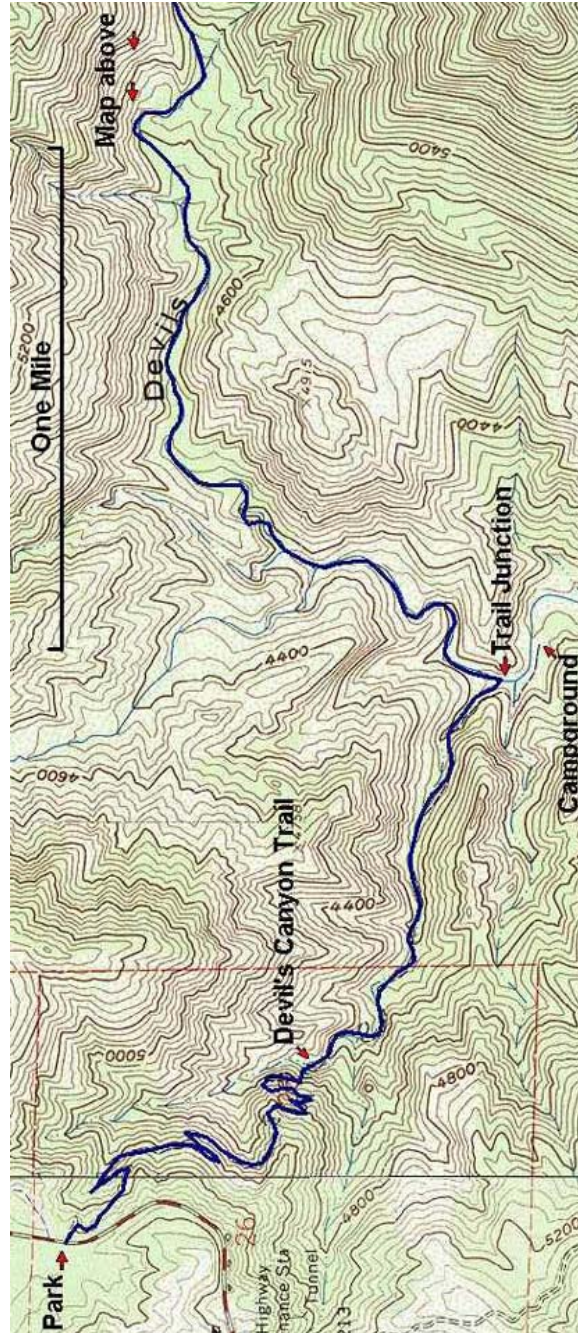
Some care is needed to recognize the junction with the Devil's Canyon Trail though the latter is outlined with rocks and logs. The junction ( $34^{\circ}18.66'N$   $117^{\circ}59.01'W$  and elevation 3960ft) occurs in a grove of tall grass near a pleasant pool with a beach. Be on the lookout for the site of the old Devil's Canyon trail camp that is on a large bench off to the right. It is immediately preceded on the right by a boulder field through which the trail winds. If you encounter this trail camp you have gone too far and will need to backtrack about 100yds to find the trail.

The Devil's Canyon Trail starts its upward climb by ascending a side canyon that meets the main stream at an acute angle so that, in following it, you almost reverse directions. The trail ascends about 1350ft over 3mi to the Angeles Crest Highway and the parking area where you left the first vehicle. The first half is mostly in the shade for which we were thankful on a particularly hot summer day. The last switchbacks are more exposed but in the shade late in the day. It takes about 1hr 40min to complete this climb and reach the Devil's Canyon trailhead ( $34^{\circ}19.42'N$   $118^{\circ}0.19'W$  and elevation 5310ft).



Map of east section of Upper Devil's Canyon Hike





Map of west section of Upper Devil's Canyon Hike



## 7.3 Devil's Canyon Loop

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7 miles
- Elevation gain: 1860 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain
- Difficulties: Many small but steep rock and earth climbs.
- Special equipment: 30ft of webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A III

The central feature in this adventure hike is the rugged and spectacular Devil's Canyon deep in the innermost reaches of the San Gabriel mountains. The catch basin of this canyon forms a large part of the Devil's Canyon Wilderness Area within the Angeles National Forest.

Devil's Canyon (and the river that flows within it, year round) begins just to the west of the saddle separating Waterman Mountain and Twin Peaks. It plunges into a deep ravine, traveling west for several miles before turning southward. At this turn the canyon broadens briefly and so allows the only easy access to its upper reaches. A well-maintained trail leaves the Angeles Crest Highway and switchbacks down to the river at this point.

Three adventure hikes in Devil's Canyon are described in this book; this one visits the middle section. It begins easily with a descent along the Devil's Canyon trail and ends with a little known route out of (or into) the canyon. It is an exciting and challenging adventure hike that does not require any special equipment though a length of webbing may be useful in places.

### Railheads

The hike requires a car shuttle. From La Canada/Flintridge drive up the Angeles Crest Highway past the Red Box junction. About 1mi before Charlton Flats you come to a place where there is a large,

dirt clearing to the right (south side) of the road. This overlook at  $34^{\circ}17.10'N$   $117^{\circ}59.57'W$  and an altitude of 5111ft is known as Windy Gap. It provides spectacular views to the south and east. Three different canyons begin below this overlook. We will emerge from the canyon that drops down from the overlook in an easterly direction. I call this Skull Canyon. Leave a vehicle in this parking area and drive about 4mi further east (actually north east) along the Angeles Crest Highway to the clearly marked beginning of the well-maintained Devil's Canyon Trail ( $34^{\circ}19.42'N$   $118^{\circ}0.19'W$  and elevation 5310ft). Park on the large dirt parking area on the left side of the highway.

## **Hike**

Cross the road and follow the trail that descends about 1350ft over 3mi to the canyon bottom at  $34^{\circ}18.66'N$   $117^{\circ}59.01'W$  and an elevation of 3960ft. The trail meets the river at a beautiful spot in the southward turn of Devil's Canyon where there is a series of sparkling pools and small cascades that invite a leisurely rest stop. A short distance downstream there is a large primitive campground on a bench to the west of the river. The trail continues on downstream for about a mile but then fades into a use-trail as the canyon narrows. It is, however, straightforward to follow this use-trail and to bushwhack your way downstream for another mile and a half, though progress is frequently slowed by the need to climb over boulders and down small waterfalls. Finally, you reach the beautiful Devil's Canyon Narrows where the river plunges over two substantial waterfalls. Here the river has cut a narrow and precipitous defile through solid rock, leaving a series of deep and crystal clear pools separated by sparkling cascades. Despite their great natural beauty, the Devil's Canyon Narrows are rarely visited because of the difficulty of reaching them. Thus they retain an aura of great remoteness and true wilderness.

About 100yds before reaching the Devil's Canyon Falls, you encounter a small waterfall that is passed by means of a rock ledge on the left or east side. This is followed by a series of falls and pools that can be difficult to negotiate when the water is high. As you progress through this section try and take note of a moderately large canyon entering from the west. Just downstream of its mouth is a campsite by a large rock that has a substantial cave or shelter

beneath it. You will return to this point a little later. About 50yds further on you come suddenly on the uppermost of the two Devil's Canyon Falls (34°17.18'N 117°58.47'W and elevation 3250ft). Here the water spills about 20ft into a large and beautiful pool surrounded by rock walls.

It is difficult but not impossible to climb down past the upper falls without technical climbing gear. There are two ways to do so, each of which has a short section where a piece of webbing should be used for safety. The first and most obvious route can be inspected from the viewpoint above the right or west side of the falls. From there one can trace a route along the rockface to the left or east side of the falls. This consists of a ledge about 12-15ft above the pool. The ledge ends just about where the pool ends and you can find a number of foot and handholds at this point that will allow you to climb down to the canyon bottom. This climb is made safer and easier by wrapping a length of webbing around the rock outcropping at the end of the ledge. Looking back at the falls from this vantage point you will notice another climbing route up and over the west side of the falls but this is much less safe. Another route that can be used to negotiate the upper falls is to climb the east slope of the canyon about 15yds upstream of the falls. The climb is quite safe and, as you ascend, watch for a semblance of a trail veering to the right through the bushes. This eventually reaches the spine of the ridge to the east of the canyon and you can then climb down the spine back into the canyon; again there is a semblance of a trail that you should follow. As you climb down the last part of this ridge, a steep rocky section, it is wise to use a length of webbing for safety, particularly since the rock here can be quite loose. This route reaches the canyon bottom about 50yds below the upper falls and immediately above the lower falls. At this point the rugged canyon makes an abrupt left turn and plunges through a narrow fissure and over the lower falls into another large pool. This is the turn-around point for this adventure hike.

Parenthetically we should add a few notes for those whose intent is to continue on down the canyon and connect with the next adventure hike called Lower Devil's Canyon. More technical rappeling equipment is needed in order to safely negotiate the lower falls. One possibility is to use one of the large rocks in the canyon bottom as an anchor and to rappel directly over the falls into the large pool. How-

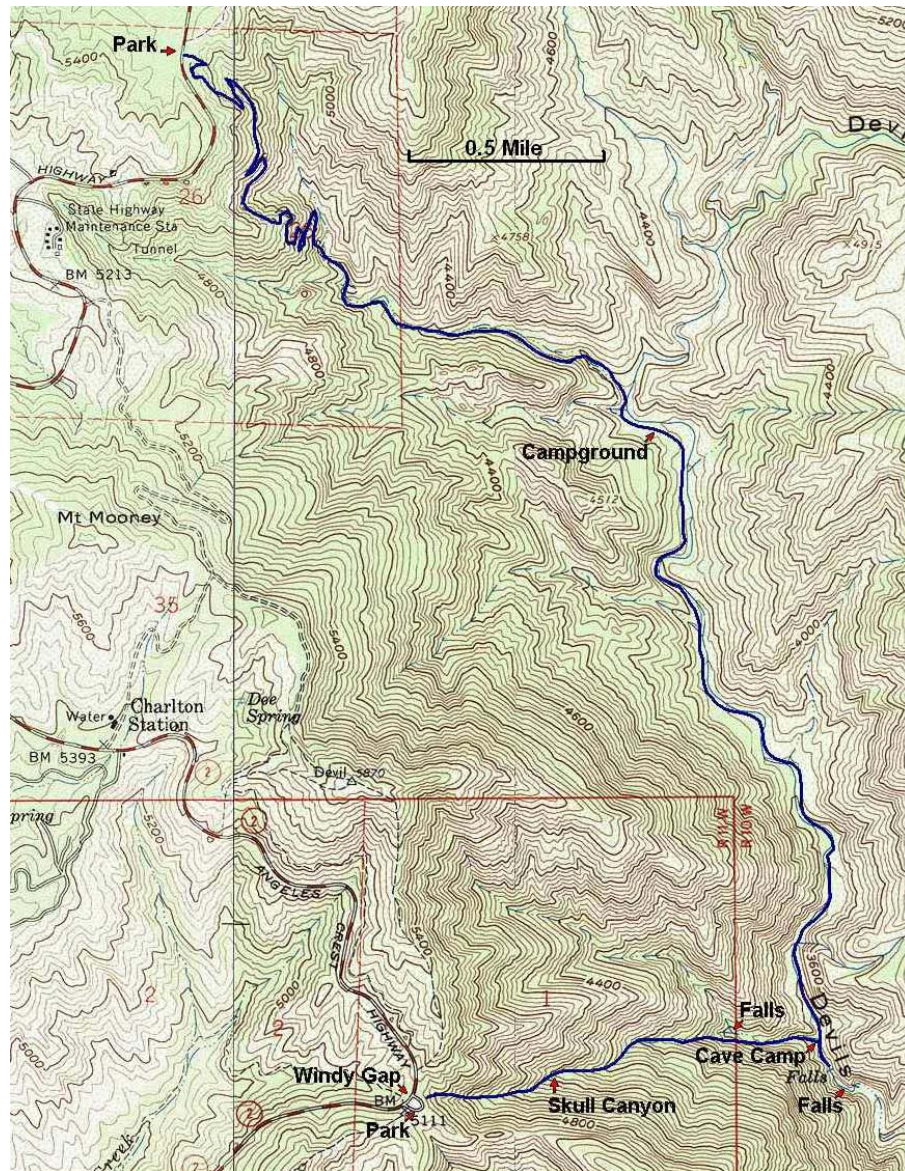
ever this necessitates swimming across the pool. The other route is to climb up the ridge described above to a point about 20ft above the canyon floor (above the falls). There you will find that a much longer rappel from that ridge (using one or more of the several trees on the ridge) would allow you to reach an area beside the lower pool and thus access the route on down the canyon. This rappel is about 50ft high.

The return leg of the present adventure hike begins when you retrace your steps to a point about 100yds above the upper falls where a substantial canyon enters from the west at  $34^{\circ}17.25'N$   $117^{\circ}58.50'W$  and an elevation of 3400ft. This is Skull Canyon. You can confirm identification of this canyon by finding the campsite just south of the canyon entrance that has a cave under a large rock. Progress up Skull Canyon is briefly impeded by brush but this is only a problem for a brief stretch and it then becomes relatively easy to make your way up the canyon. About 15min after beginning this ascent, the canyon closes in and you suddenly encounter a steep and narrow falls about 20ft high. This would be very difficult to ascend using a direct approach. Later, you will come to see that, even if you were able to climb directly over these falls, a much higher waterfall would bar further progress. Though this seems ominous, the route around these obstacles is relatively straightforward. From a point about 20yds below the lower falls, you must climb directly up the steep earth-covered slope on the left side of the gully. The marks left by many others who have climbed up or slid down this slope are quite evident. The principal difficulty is the very first part of the ascent but, fortunately, there are many useful roots to act as handholds. About 25ft up this slope you enter a narrow and steep side gully. After about 20yds you should veer to the right up the rock and earth covered slope that forms the side of the gully. The use-trail should continue to be evident. At the top of the earth and rock covered slope, the use-trail contours around the face of a steep bluff and then drops back into the main canyon just upstream of a normally dry waterfall with a vertical drop of more than 50ft. From this point you can look back down the canyon and recognize the difficulty of a direct attack on these waterfalls.

We have just described the main obstacle in the ascent of Skull Canyon. However, there are at least six more substantial waterfalls that you must conquer during the climb. All of these can be

climbed safely without any special equipment or danger. Often there are faint use-trails that help you locate the easiest route that is frequently but not always to the right side of the falls. These obstacles generally decrease in size as you climb higher. Moreover with increasing elevation the foliage gradually changes from pine forest to chapparal. There are also several places where the canyon forks and you need to exercise some judgment in choosing the main branch. Near the top yuccas begin to appear and you will start to encounter trash thrown from the road above. In particular, I counted a series of four automobile tires in the streambed. Close to the top you will come to a place where there is a steep and loose gravel slope on your left. At this point you should leave the gully and climb straight up this scree slope (the beer bottles and other trash will help confirm that you are on the right path). At the very top you need to follow one of a number of use-trails that wind through the bushes. From these bushes, you emerge onto the large dirt clearing at Windy Gap where you left the first vehicle ( $34^{\circ}17.10'N$   $117^{\circ}59.57'W$  and altitude 5111ft). The elevation gain during the climb up from Devil's Canyon is 1860ft and the ascent takes about 2hrs.





Map of Devil's Canyon Loop Hike

## 7.4 Lower Devil's Canyon

### Characteristics

- Biking time: 2.3 hours
- Estimated biking distance: 17 miles
- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7 miles
- Elevation gain: 960 feet (bike) and 790 feet (hike)
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain
- Difficulties: Some short rock climbs
- Special equipment: 20ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A IV

This is an adventure hike that has considerable variety. The first part involves an easy 6mi bike ride along an asphalt road up a beautiful wooded canyon followed by a short ride up a steep incline, across a dam and along a dirt road. This leads to a modestly challenging hike with some scrambling over rocks. Since you will return by the same route, you can adjust the length of the adventure to the available time. If, on the other hand you are determined to reach the ultimate terminus of the hike, Devil's Canyon Falls, then you should be prepared for a day long outing with an early start and a late finish.

The off-trail part of the hike traverses the lowest section of Devil's Canyon between the Falls (see Devil's Canyon Loop) and the point where Devil's Canyon joins the West Fork of the San Gabriel River.

### Trailhead

You begin by driving up Highway 39 above Azusa, passing the Morris and San Gabriel dams. Continuing north past the junction with the East Fork road and the off-road vehicle area, you arrive at the junction with the West Fork of the San Gabriel River. Here,

just beyond the Forest Service Camp at Rincon, there is a small dirt parking area on the left to the south of the road bridge and a larger asphalt parking lot on the left to the north of the bridge. Park in either place, unload your bicycle and prepare for the ride up the West Fork. The starting point is the gate at the entrance to the narrow asphalt road up the West Fork that is just south of the road bridge ( $34^{\circ}14.48'N$   $117^{\circ}52.12'W$  and elevation 1580ft).

### **Bike ride**

The asphalt road from Highway 39 up the West Fork of the San Gabriel River (2N25) is closed to vehicles and is therefore a popular bike trail. The surface is smooth and the road rises gradually over 6mi to the base of the incline before Cogswell Dam. It is one of the easiest and most enjoyable bicycle rides in the San Gabriels. The road follows the stream through trees and occasional small flats and there are many pools where you can stop to rest or enjoy this verdant canyon. It is a particular favorite of fishermen but you must obtain a permit to indulge in this activity.

After about 6mi you pass a pleasant flat where there used to be a campground, Glenn Canyon Trail Camp ( $34^{\circ}14.44'N$   $117^{\circ}57.14'W$  and elevation 2040ft). Half a mile further, the road suddenly steep-



*Left: Almost at end of Devil's Canyon. Right: Entrance to narrows.*

ens and it is a hard climb up about half a mile to the top of Cogswell Dam (elevation 2400ft). On the way you pass through the hamlet of houses belonging to the personnel who tend the dam. When you reach the dam turn right at 34°14.60'N 117°57.85'W and cross over the top of the dam. At the other side turn left and follow the dirt road that contours along the north side of Cogswell Reservoir for a short distance before turning north and entering a large side canyon. At this point you are leaving the West Fork of the San Gabriel and entering Devil's Canyon. The dirt road continues up Devil's Canyon for about half a mile. At one point it forks; continue straight on the upper or right fork. A short distance beyond the dirt road becomes a trail following a narrow ledge some height above the canyon bottom. Soon, this ledge vanishes (at 34°15.24'N 117°58.43'W and elevation 2480ft) and you should hide your bicycle in the bushes and prepare to continue on foot. There are several places where it is fairly easy to climb down from the ledge to the stream.

## **Hike**

Beyond this point there are only vestiges of a trail up Devil's Canyon. During the first few hundred yards of boulder hopping near or along the stream look out for the signs of the bighorn sheep herd that frequents this lower canyon. If you surprise them at the stream they will scamper straight up the steep canyon walls. It is a truly awesome spectacle, as they seem to defy the forces of gravity. Often they will halt about fifty feet up as if knowing that you cannot follow them there. Sometimes you will hear them high above you and, frustratingly, not be able to see them.

After about 0.2mi you enter a large bowl with benches on both sides and a quite dramatic cliff wall on the right. Veer to the left and walk along the bench on that side that has several rudimentary camp sites in the sand. At the upstream end of this bowl, the river flows through a rocky narrows in which you will need to climb over some modest obstacles. Approaching these narrows (34°15.51'N 117°58.53'W and elevation 2610ft) from the left or west side, you will encounter a small waterfall. Normally modest, this waterfall must be quite a spectacle during floods for the pool downstream of it seems to have a quite different topology every time I pass this way. On occasions there has been a pool large enough to swim in. At other times there has been no pool at all.



It could be quite tricky to get above this small waterfall. Fortunately, there is almost always a log placed across the top of the waterfall that you can access from the rock on the left. Walking across this log allows you fairly easy access to the rock ledge on the right side upstream of the falls. Just beyond this there are several other places where you must climb up modest rock slopes past waterfalls. But soon, the canyon opens up again and the going becomes easier. About 0.3mi upstream there is a place where it is necessary to climb up on the rock to the right in order to get past a large pool but beyond this there is a long stretch of canyon with few special features.

After about 2mi of hiking you will pass a place where there is a high waterfall on the left hand canyon wall ( $34^{\circ}15.98'N$   $117^{\circ}58.38'W$  and elevation 2760ft). Often this is dry but, when flowing, it must be a very pretty sight. Continuing on upstream, the canyon bottom is open with desert vegetation. There is normally a sandy/rocky bench on one side of the canyon or the other and this usually affords the easiest passage. About 3mi from the start of the hike there is a particularly wide boulder field at the top of which the stream makes a sudden left turn into a narrow canyon. After entering this narrow section, there are several tributaries that enter the canyon by way



*Pool in lower Devil's Canyon.*



of falls from high overhead. Then the canyon turns right again and another 0.5mi of wooded canyon brings you to a large and deep pool (34°17.14'N 117°58.40'W and elevation 3200ft). This is as far as you can go; looking around you will see that to proceed on safely would require technical climbing equipment.

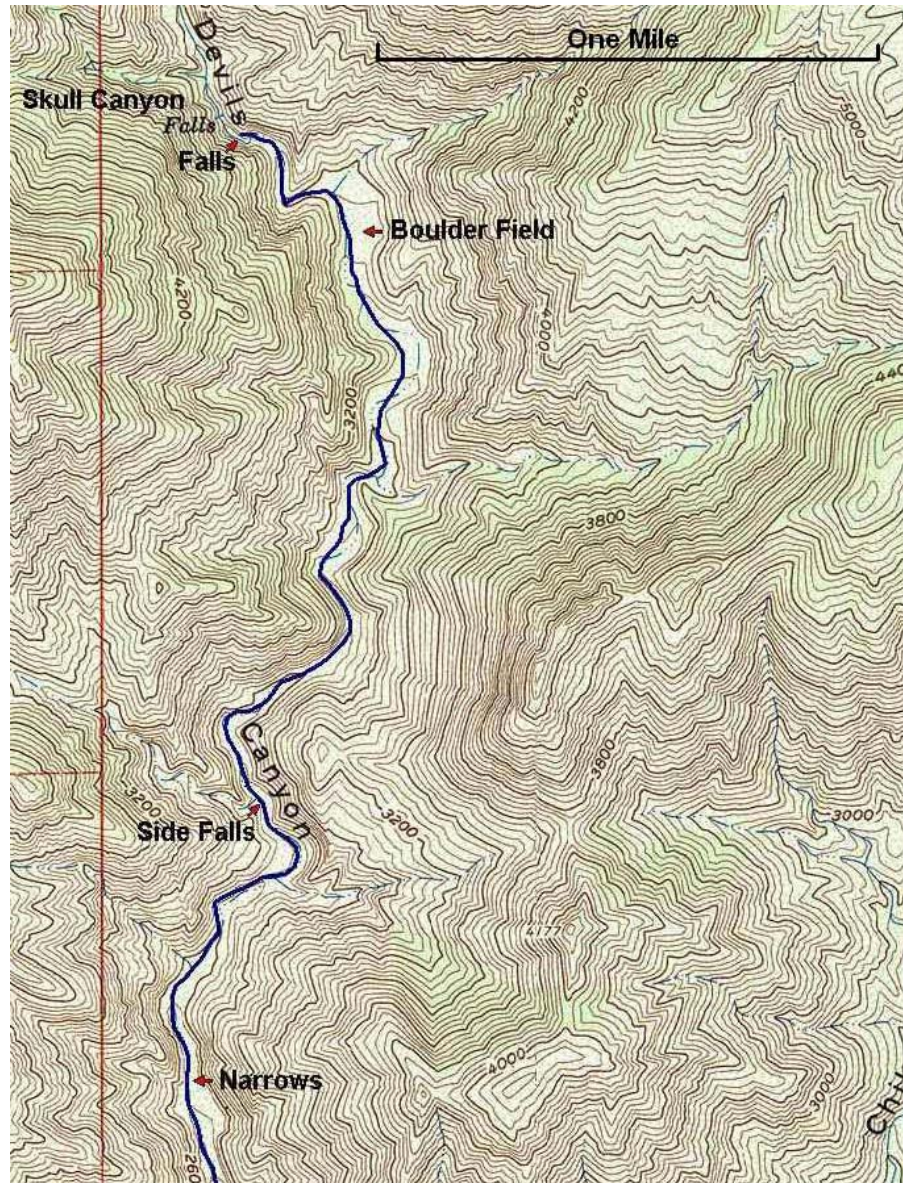
You have reached the pool at the bottom of Devil's Canyon Falls. The Lower Falls emanate from a narrow defile up on the rockface on the left wall of the canyon. Though not especially high (about 20ft) the rockface has few ledges, handholds or footholds. Moreover one must swim to reach the rockface on either side of the falls. It is clear that the only practical way to get above the falls is to climb the cliff about 10yds to the right of the falls or the gully another 10yds further right. An old rope hangs part way down the cliff (that has a good ledge about half way up) but only a fool would use this rope. Either the cliff or the gully could be used for a rappelling route to descend from the canyon above (see Devil's Canyon Loop).

But this is the limit of the hike defined here. If you have come this far, you will need to begin your return with little delay in order to be sure to reach your bicycle before sunset. It would be foolhardy to try and negotiate the lower part of this canyon in the dark. However, with a good bicycle light, it is not a problem to ride down the West



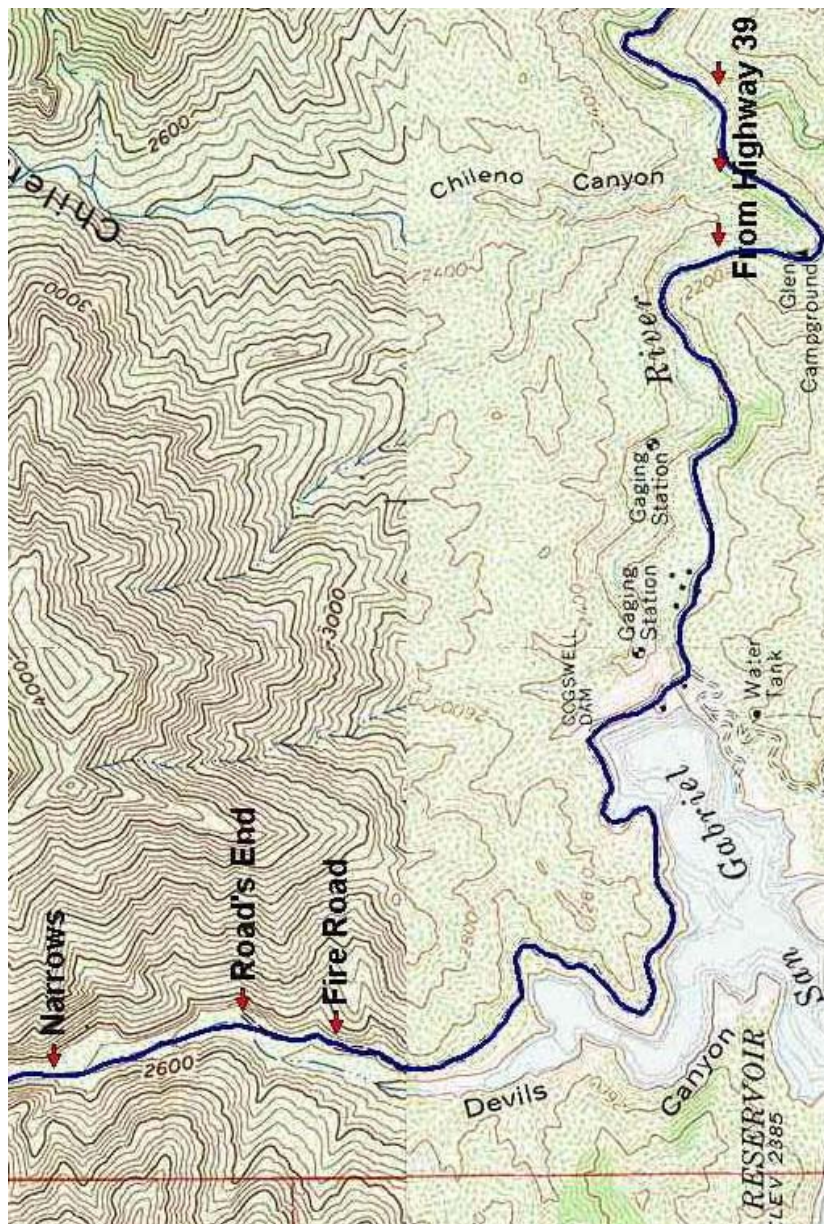
*Lower Devil's Canyon Falls (photo by Hugh Blanchard).*

Fork Road after sunset.



Map of upper section of Lower Devil's Canyon Hike





Map of lower section of Lower Devil's Canyon Hike



## Chapter 8

# CRYSTAL LAKE

The region near Crystal Lake includes a number of adventuring hiking possibilities and we included herein five hikes in this region, a number of modest adventures and one descent into a major drainage, Bear Creek in the Devil's Canyon Wilderness Area. That drainage encloses many other branches of Bear Creek that could be worthwhile exploring.





Crystal Lake region.

## 8.1 Bear Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 14 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 14 miles
- Elevation gain: 1930 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain, Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: Substantial scrambling and two short rappels
- Special equipment: 40ft webbing, rappeling gear with 80ft rope
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

This adventure hike takes you through the spectacular Bear Creek narrows and involves two modest rappels down the sides of waterfalls. It is a two day hike though it can be done during a long summer

day if you want to hike the last part during darkness. However, I strongly recommend you take the two days to enjoy the marvelous scenery of the Bear Creek Narrows. The hike is best done during the summer months for it involves a fair amount of wading. It is important to do it only when the water is low; several places in the narrows could be dangerous when the stream is swollen by rain.

### **Trailheads**

This adventure requires a car shuttle. Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa along the north fork of the San Gabriel river to a point about 200yds south of Colbrook where there is a trailhead and a large parking area on the west or left side of the road. This is the Upper Bear Creek and Smith Saddle trailhead ( $34^{\circ}17.25'N$   $117^{\circ}50.55'W$  and elevation 3280ft). Leave one vehicle here. Then proceed up the road past the Crystal Lake turn-off to the end of Highway 39. Provided the road is open all the way to the end, you will stop at a wide parking area and overlook ( $34^{\circ}18.61'N$   $117^{\circ}51.73'W$  and elevation 5600ft) with a great view west into Bear Creek canyon. Northwards, you can also see the Angeles Crest Highway crossing the slopes of Mount Williamson. Twenty years ago the road ran another 5mi north to a junction with the Angeles Crest Highway at Islip Saddle (elevation 6650ft). However repeated damage due to rock slides forced the closure of this section of the road. We begin this adventure by hiking northwards along the old road.

## Hike

About 0.5mi north of the parking area you come to a place (34°19.37'N 117°51.36'W and elevation 5750ft) immediately to the west of two prominent rock spires that rise precipitously above the road. These have shed many rock slides so that below the road to the west is a long scree slope leading down into a side branch of Bear Canyon. This scree slope provides one of the few places where you can start to climb down from the road into the canyon. Though slow going, it is an easy descent; at the bottom of the scree slope you enter a wash and continue without serious impediment for about 1.5mi. Take note of several junctions that could be confusing if you have to retrace your steps.

This unnamed side canyon is attractive and open for most of its length. However, several major obstacles await when the foliage becomes denser and the sides of the canyon close in. First you encounter a very large rocky obstruction that seems to fill the whole canyon. There are several routes around this; perhaps the simplest is to ease yourself down the narrow slot to the left of the rock. This allows you to lower yourself into a small cave that exits from the base of the rock.

A short way downstream there are two more substantial obstacles. First, in a place where the stream has cut a rather narrow path through the rock you will encounter a small waterfall followed immediately by a larger one. There are few footholds here and the rock is slippery so care must be exercised. You can, however, cross to the right hand side below the first small falls and then climb over a ridge to descend to the main canyon via a small side canyon. Immediately after this obstacle you should follow the use-trail up a small slope over the right rim and drop into a larger canyon that you now proceed to descend. Here many small trees provide minor impediment to rapid progress. Finally, when you imagine you must be very close to the main Bear Canyon you suddenly encounter the most substantial obstacle thus far on the hike. This takes the form of a series of waterfalls cascading down into depths that are hard to estimate from above. Some may choose to rappel down these falls for there are convenient trees to provide anchors but it may be a long rappel. The main problem is that it is hard to see the bottom. An easier route is to follow a faint use-trail proceeding off to the right from the top of the falls. This climbs up a little way and then

contours along a steep slope to a point where further progress seems to be barred by thick vegetation including yucca bushes. Though it is not immediately obvious at this point, the trail continues straight down a steep and shallow gully below you. After descending about 40ft, the use-trail contours to the right for a brief way to a point where you can slide down a steep bank into the canyon bottom. Shortly below this point, at 34°18.92'N 117°52.54'W and an elevation of about 3360ft, you finally reach Bear Creek, recognizable by the large dimensions of the canyon bottom and the substantial (though often dry) creek bed. It seems probable that much of the river runs underground at this point for the stream reappears only a short distance downstream.

The next 2.5mi down Bear Creek Canyon are easy hiking. The canyon broadens and there are large sandy benches covered in boulders that make for more rapid progress. The rim of the canyon is high above you and in places you can spot the closed part of Highway 39 up to the east. To the west there is nothing but miles and miles of the almost impenetrable Devil's Canyon Wilderness Area. It is a beautiful place on a sunny day and you should enjoy the serenity of it for more rugged canyon lies ahead. On several of the large benches, you will find rudimentary camp sites used by past explorers and you might choose one of these to set up camp for the night. The river runs year round so there is no shortage of water. Moreover, there is ample driftwood for a fire.

Setting out in the morning, you continue downstream passing the junction with another large canyon entering from the right. The river from this adds substantially to the canyon flow. Then, as the sides of the main canyon begin to steepen, you can anticipate that there are exciting adventures ahead. First, even before the canyon walls have really steepened enough to suggest that you have entered the Bear Creek Narrows you quite suddenly encounter a waterfall with no easy descent on either side and a large deep pool below. On either side of the falls the drop is vertical but only about 12ft high. We chose to rappel down the rock just to the right of the falls using a convenient and substantial tree as an anchor. A much easier way (should you feel so inclined) would be to jump into the pool for it is certainly deep enough. Even if you rappel you must swim and wade through the pool. These falls are the point of no return for many people would find climbing back up quite difficult.

Below these falls, the canyon walls close in and you enter the spectacular Bear Creek narrows. First you come on a beautiful series of rock pools. There are wide rock ledges that allow easy passage for a short distance but then, quite suddenly, the scale of the canyon increases abruptly. The river roars into a dark defile that turns to the right and then, abruptly, to the left. There is no way for a human to follow the water here but brief exploration will reveal a use-trail that climbs up an earthy slope with root handholds to the top of a rock outcropping on the left side of the canyon. The trail continues across the flat top of this outcropping and reveals a spectacular drop down to the waters below. Follow the use-trail as it contours along the left side of the narrows at this point. The trail proceeds into a shallow gully where you can climb down to the canyon floor without too much difficulty.

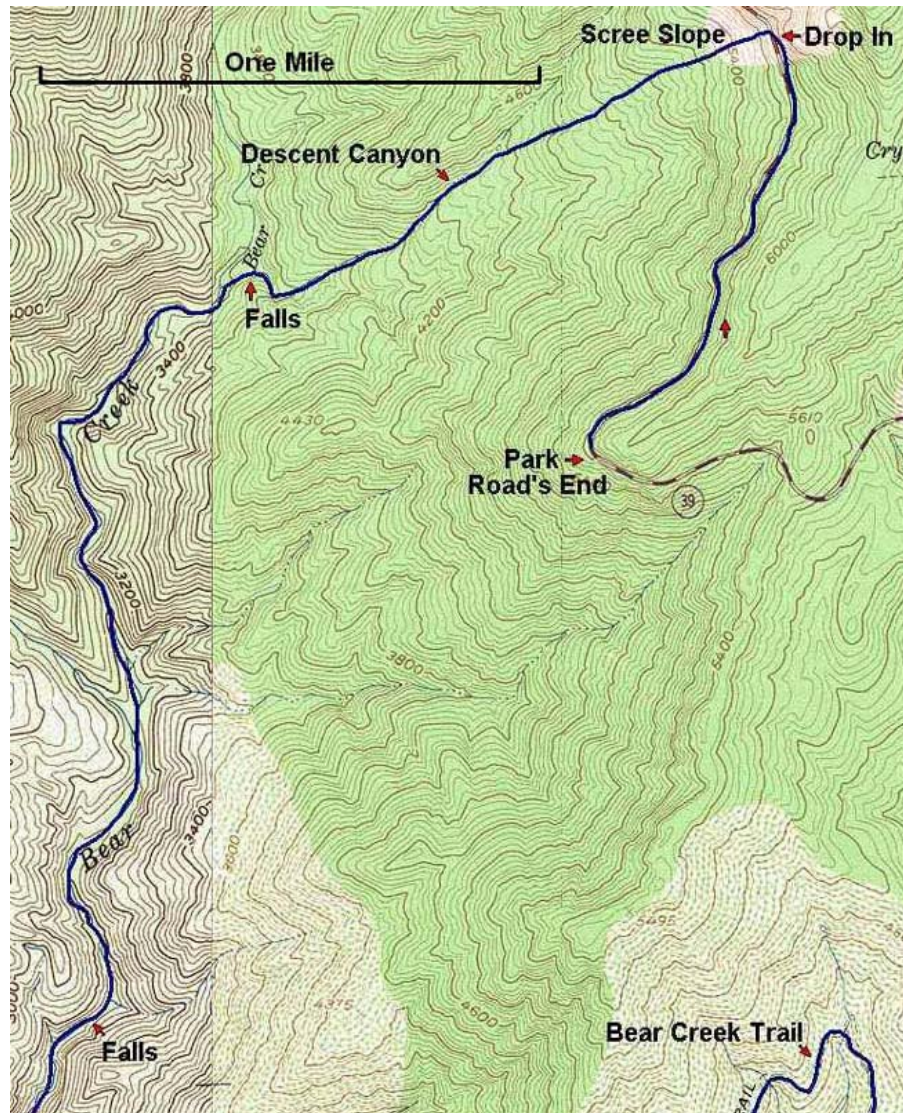
Just downstream from this dramatic corner in the narrows you encounter first a waterfall that is fairly easily passed on the right and then, shortly thereafter, another rockribbed section with a convenient and large shelf on the left. This stretch culminates in a 25ft waterfall that requires a rappel (though we did not explore it there seemed to be trail around this waterfall high up on the east side of the canyon). An anchor for this rappel is not so easy to find; we used two separate rocks wedged into narrow places in the cliff to the left above the falls. Then, it is a pleasant rappel down a steep rock face that is not vertical and could, indeed, be climbed without a rope though not safely. There is a convenient shelf just at the waterline and, from there, you can wade along beside the cliff to the downstream shore.

Though these falls present the last major obstacle on the hike, there are still a number of places along the stretch downstream of the falls where you must clamber or wade. In one place there is a convenient small tree that you can shimmy down; if the tree perishes this could be significantly more difficult and it may be necessary to wade through the pool to the right of the large boulder. And, at the downstream end of the narrows, you will need to ease yourself along a moderately steep rockshelf in order to avoid having to swim or wade through a particularly deep but narrow pool. Finally, you emerge into a more benign wooded canyon and, following this for about 0.7mi, reach the primitive Upper Bear Creek Camp ground (34°16.94'N 117°53.07'W and elevation 2360ft). This is just to the

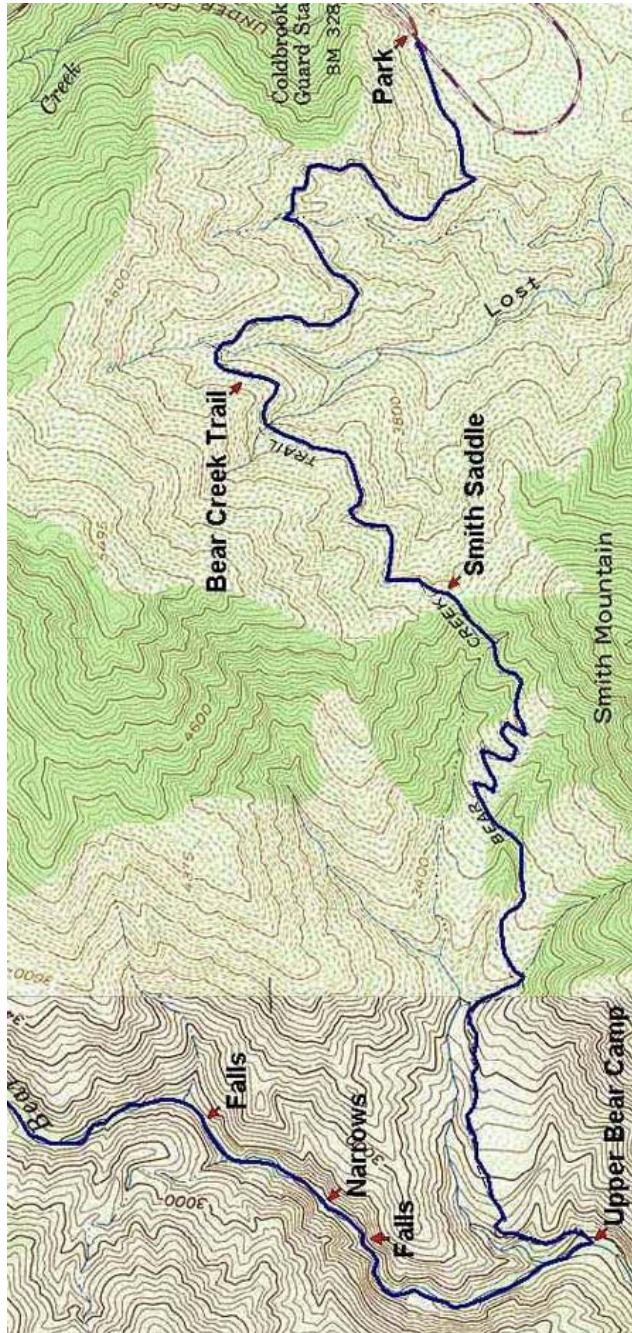


left of the river and can be recognized by the large rocks that separate the small, flat camping area from a little beach by the river. It is important to identify this camp because it is the best way to find the trail leading out of the canyon. The distance you have traveled alongside Bear Creek is only about 5mi but it takes more than 6hrs.

At this point it is wise to change into whatever dry footwear you may have left for it is still a long hike from here back to the road. Having prepared for this and supplied yourself with adequate water you climb up the trail leading up the slope immediately behind the campground. Though initially it does not appear so, this is a maintained trail (9W10) and you rise steadily over a distance of 3mi until you reach Smith Saddle ( $34^{\circ}17.18'N$   $117^{\circ}51.73'W$  and elevation 4290ft) over 1900ft above the river. The last 3mi from the saddle down to the trailhead seem particularly long. But finally you reach Highway 39 at Colbrook and emerge at the parking area where you left the first vehicle ( $34^{\circ}17.25'N$   $117^{\circ}50.55'W$  and elevation 3280ft).



Map of upper section of Bear Creek Hike



Map of lower section of Bear Creek Hike



## 8.2 Upper Soldier Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.4 miles
- Elevation gain: 1130 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: One large 120ft rappel, three small rappels, some downclimbing and much bouldering.
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 150ft recovery cord, rappeling equipment, 20ft webbing and two rappel rings
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Soldier Creek is a beautiful, rugged canyon high in the San Gabriel mountains that offers two marvelous adventure hikes. The lower section is quite easy and is described elsewhere in this book. This upper section is quite dry and a moderately challenging adventure hike with one large rappel and several smaller ones. It is good for anytime from late spring to the fall but may be quite cold in winter.

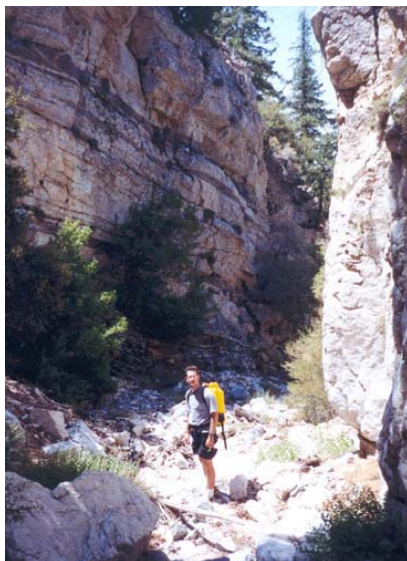
### Trailhead

The hike is best done with a car shuttle, otherwise you will have to walk an additional 2.6mi up the road through the Crystal Lake complex to get back to your car. Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa along the north fork of the San Gabriel river, past Colbrook and Falling Springs to the junction of Highway 39 and the turn-off to Crystal Lake. Just about 100yds before that turn-off there is a closed metal gate on the outside of a long left-hand curve. Turn around at the turn-off and drive back down the road, past the gate to the first pullout on the left past the no parking signs. Leave one vehicle there (34°18.78'N 117°50.04'W and elevation 5000ft) and then turn around again and proceed up to the Crystal Lake area. You may have to pay \$5 to enter the Crystal Lake campground area.

Then proceed up through the campground, veering left as you pass the visitor center. Just beyond the sign that warns of the end of the pavement there is a large, partly dirt parking area (34°19.65'N 117°49.98'W and elevation 5810ft). Park there.

## Hike

The Windy Gap trail starts just to the left of an iron gate on the right or upper side of the large parking area (34°19.65'N 117°49.98'W and elevation 5810ft). The hike begins by following this well-maintained trail as it climbs the northern side of the Crystal Lake bowl. After about 15min it crosses the asphalt road leading to Deer Flats (34°19.88'N 117°49.99'W and elevation 6000ft) and another 15min brings you to the dirt road (34°20.15'N 117°49.76'W and elevation 6490ft) headed to the right for South Mount Hawkins. The Windy Gap trail continues on the other side of this road but you follow the road as it climbs around to the right along the east side of the bowl. It is a very pleasant walk with many good views not only of the Crystal Lake area below you but also of the San Gabriel Mountains to the west. Mount Wilson is readily visible and you should be able to make out Catalina Island far to the southwest.



*Lower section of Upper Soldier Creek.*



Follow the South Mount Hawkins fire road for about a mile as it crosses two steep, rockfilled gullies and approaches the Soldier Creek crossing. This is most readily identified by looking for the place where the dirt road splits to bypass a lone pine tree in the middle of the road. Just after that the road rounds a headland with some great views and then begins to contour into Soldier Creek canyon. The drop-in point ( $34^{\circ}19.37'N$   $117^{\circ}49.20'W$  and elevation 6940ft) is where the road crosses the streambed and you should reach this point 1hr 10min (and 2.2mi) from the start. From here you should be able to discern far below you the long curve of Highway 39 where you left the first vehicle.

The initial descent is steep and rocky but there are several delightful little springs with cool, clean water to refresh yourself on a hot day. About 400ft and 25min from the drop-in point you encounter the first significant obstacle, a small 15ft waterfall that can be downclimbed on either side though care is needed. Immediately below this you come to the first rappel, a straightforward 25ft descent using the tree anchor a short scramble above you on the left. This dryfall can also be downclimbed via a slot on the right but I recommend the safer rappel. Below this rappel it is a short way to another short downclimb, the easiest route being in the center. You should reach this point (elevation roughly 6300ft) about 2hr from the start.

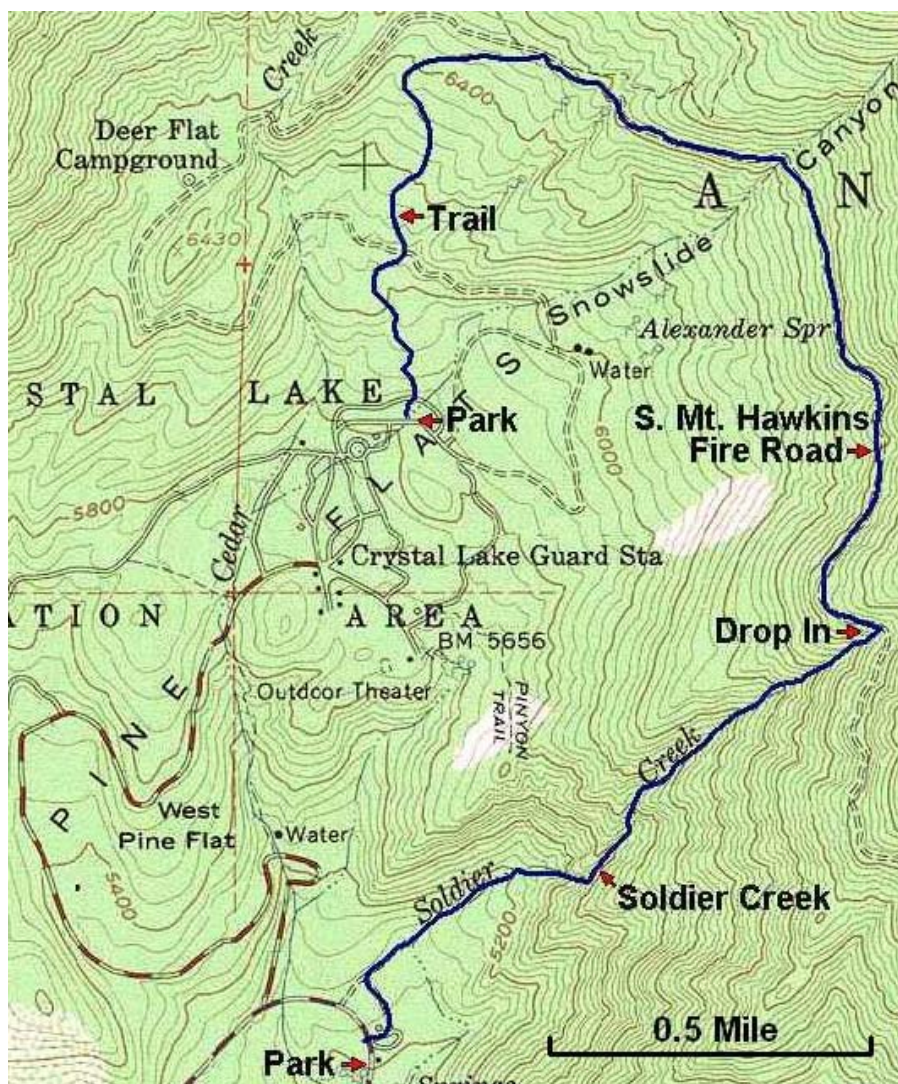
Below this, the canyon levels out somewhat and there is a long section of moderately easy scrambling before you quite suddenly find yourself, at an elevation of 5750ft and 2hr 50min from the start, standing on the lip of the largest drop-off in this adventure. The stream bed drops about 120ft from a broad lip of hard white granite to an open boulder field below. There are two ways to rappel down this obstacle. You can choose the route on the left and, anchoring to the roots of a large bush, descend about 80ft to a side gully from which the main channel is easily accessed. We chose the alternative, a 120ft rappel down the main channel, anchored by the roots of another large bush on the right side of the lip. Watch out for loose, falling rock on both routes.

Just about 100yds below the big rappel you enter a very pretty, narrow section with vertical cliffs walls and some welcome shade on a hot day. This leads to the last two rappels. The first is a 30ft drop down through a rocky slot, anchored by the group of trees at

the lip. You can if you wish downclimb the first 10ft or so to a shelf where the rappel entry is easier. A few yards later you come to the last rappel, a small 15ft drop around a large chockstone. Some may choose to downclimb this by chimneying the slot on the left but a rappel is recommended. The anchor is a large tree trunk just above the lip. You should reach this point (elevation 5380ft) about 4hr from the start. There follows a steep section of bouldering and downclimbing before the canyon suddenly opens up into a relatively flat and broad, wooded boulder field with many branching and dry stream channels. Stay to the right, within sight of right wall. Soon you emerge onto a flat open meadow and pick up an old dirt road that leads back to the gate beside the road and the end of the hike (34°18.78'N 117°50.04'W and elevation 5000ft). It should take a total of 4.5hrs.

### **Extension to Lower Soldier Creek**

Clearly it is possible to combine the Upper and Lower Soldier Creek hikes to create an all-day adventure of about 6.5hrs. The combination is particularly sweet because of the contrast between the rocky, open and dry upper section and the lush, shaded lower section with its lovely stream.



Map of Upper Soldier Creek Hike

## 8.3 Lower Soldier Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 1.7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.0 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: Some boulder hopping and downclimbing, one rappel that could be bypassed
- Special equipment: 160ft rope, rappeling equipment and 10ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 2A I

Soldier Creek is a beautiful, wooded canyon high in the San Gabriel mountains that offers two marvelous adventure hikes. The lower section described here is a moderately easy hike with some downclimbing and one large rappel beside Lewis Falls (that can, however, be bypassed by following a use-trail with some exposure). The other hike is more advanced and is described in detail elsewhere.

The stream runs in this lower canyon all year long, producing a verdant growth and a pleasant, shaded hike for a hot summer day. There are many small pools in which to cool yourself if you so wish. Lewis Falls, that represent the major obstacle in this hike, are a popular venue since they are but a short hike up from the road at the bottom.

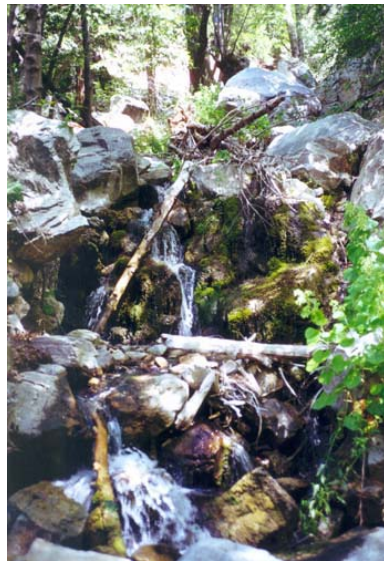
### Trailhead

This hike is best done with a car shuttle, otherwise you will have to walk about 3.2mi back up the road to the starting point. Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa along the north fork of the San Gabriel river and past the campground at Colbrook. After some more switchbacks, the road narrows as it enters a precipitous section with cliffs above and below. You then cross Rockbound Canyon and pass a

gravel dispensing structure on your left. Just 0.3mi beyond this structure, there is a sharp left turn through a tree-shaded glen as the road crosses Soldier Creek. (The sign for the now abandoned resort of Falling Springs is just a few yards up the road. If the sign is still there, you will know you went too far.) Park a vehicle in one of the pullouts here near the crossing of Soldier Creek ( $34^{\circ}18.08'N$   $117^{\circ}50.29'W$  and elevation 3840ft). Then continue up the road in the other vehicle for 3.2mi. Look for a closed metal gate on the right on the outside of a long left-hand curve just before the turn-off to Crystal Lake. Since parking is not permitted at the gate you should turn around at the Crystal Lake turn-off and drive back down to the pullout about 200yds below the gate. Park here at  $34^{\circ}18.78'N$   $117^{\circ}50.04'W$  and an elevation of about 5000ft.

### Hike

You can either drop into the canyon from the pullout, by descending a steep dirt slope or you can walk back up the road to the gate and descend more gently into the canyon. You will encounter the running stream immediately since water flows year round in this part of Soldier Creek because of several springs just upstream. It is a cool and lovely place with many small waterfalls and sparkling



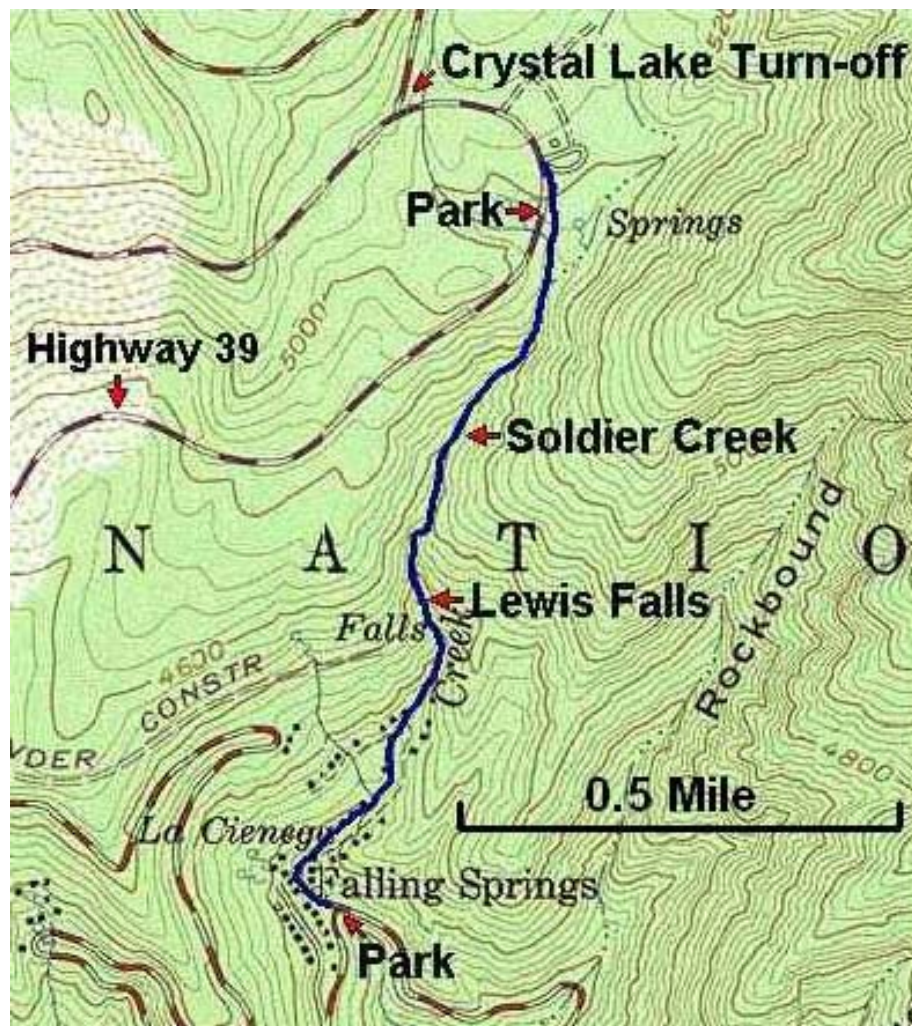
*Left: In lower Soldier Creek. Right: Lewis Falls.*



pools - so take your time and enjoy it for this is a short and fairly easy hike. Initially, the route is straightforward with modest bouldering; benches on the left also ease the descent. However, after about 35min you enter a steeper and more rugged section, starting at about 4500ft with the first cascade, a multi-tiered waterfall flowing over a worn bedrock. The descent is on the right and is easier than it looks since the moss in the shallow water is not slippery. The last step is harder requiring a short climb up to access a dirt filled gully that you then descend to the creek.

Just a short distance beyond this first cascade you come to a second, similar obstacle that can be bypassed via a use trail on the left. This leads to the top of the major obstacle in this hike namely the 60ft Lewis Falls. You should reach this point (34°18.38'N 117°50.19'W and elevation 4300ft) about 1hr 15min from the start. At Lewis Falls the water falls into a deep lateral slot and turns right. It is possible to climb down past the falls using the steep gully on the left by following an exposed use-trail on that side. It is also possible to climb around on the left though that route is not recommended due to the exposure. By far the best choice is to rappel down on either the right or the left side of the falls using one of the several large trees near the lip as an anchor. Once set up, it is an easy, vertical 60ft rappel down a smooth rock face.

Just 200yds downstream from the base of Lewis Falls you will encounter the first cabin in the canyon. There is a well-developed trail on the left side from this point all the way to the road at the end of the hike (34°18.08'N 117°50.29'W and elevation 3840ft). The whole hike should only take about 1hr 40min.



Map of Lower Soldier Creek Hike

## 8.4 Rockbound Canyon

### Characteristics

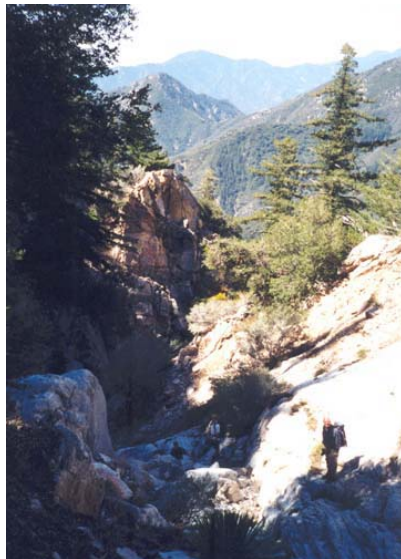
- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5.1 miles
- Elevation gain: 1300 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: One large headwall drop-off of 250ft requiring a two-stage rappel, another smaller rappel and much bouldering and downclimbing
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment including two 200ft ropes, 30ft webbing, three rappel rings, helmets and harnesses
- ACA Rating: 4AR IV

Rockbound Canyon is a beautiful, rugged canyon high in the mountains to the east of Crystal Lake. It is readily accessed from the South Mount Hawkins fire road. Here we describe a descent of almost 3400ft down Rockbound Canyon to Highway 39. This involves much downclimbing and bouldering as well as a challenging two-stage rappel descent of the huge, 250ft headwall. It is a tough and physically demanding hike for the experienced canyoneer. It is recommended for the spring or fall.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa along the north fork of the San Gabriel river. Approximately 1.9mi past Colbrook Campground and just after a narrow section of road where there is a large drop-off on your left, you will come to a place where the road turns sharp left as it crosses the wash of a substantial canyon. This is Rockbound Canyon; park one vehicle in the small turn-out here (34°18.00'N 117°50.00'W and elevation 3770ft). One way to be sure that you have chosen the right turn-out is that there is a large grit hopper just beyond it on the left.

Having parked the return vehicle, you should then drive on up the highway for 3.8mi to the Crystal Lake turn-off. Turn right and continue on through the Crystal Lake Campground, veering left as you pass the little visitor center. Just beyond the sign that warns of the end of the pavement there is a large dirt parking area ( $34^{\circ}19.65'N$   $117^{\circ}49.98'W$  and elevation 5810ft), the trailhead for Windy Gap. It is 6mi from the return vehicle to this trailhead.



*Left: Upper Rockbound Canyon. Right: Descending the headwall.*

## Hike

The Windy Gap trail starts just to the left of an iron gate on the right or upper side of the large trailhead parking area ( $34^{\circ}19.65'N$   $117^{\circ}49.98'W$  and elevation 5810ft). The hike begins by following this well-maintained trail as it climbs the northern side of the Crystal Lake bowl. After about 15min it crosses the asphalt road leading to Deer Flats ( $34^{\circ}19.88'N$   $117^{\circ}49.99'W$  and elevation 6000ft) and another 20min brings you to the dirt road ( $34^{\circ}20.15'N$   $117^{\circ}49.76'W$ , elevation 6490ft and 1.3mi from the start) to South Mount Hawkins. The Windy Gap trail continues on the other side of this road but you follow the road as it climbs around to the right along the east side of the bowl. It is a very pleasant walk with many good views not only of the Crystal Lake area below you but also of the San Gabriel Mountains to the west. Mount Wilson is readily visible and you should be able to make out Catalina Island far to the southwest.

Follow the South Mount Hawkins fire road for 2mi. First it crosses two steep, rockfilled gullies. Then, just before you reach Soldier Creek (at 6940ft and 2.7mi from the start) you will pass a place where the dirt road splits to bypass a lone pine tree. Continue on beyond Soldier Creek for 0.7mi to where the road turns sharp left as it crosses a very prominent ridge, most notable on the right side of the road. About 50yds beyond this sharp turn, at  $34^{\circ}19.04'N$   $117^{\circ}49.06'W$ , an elevation of 7120ft and 3.3mi or 1hr 20min from the start, you will arrive at the drop-in point for Rockbound Canyon. In fact, here you will drop into a small northern branch of Rockbound. There are many other branches that you could choose to follow by hiking further up the road but little is added by doing so.

Drop-in down a steep earth slope and begin descending this branch of Rockbound Canyon. It is a rugged, steep and boulder-strewn canyon. Almost immediately you begin substantial descent with many small downclimbs. There are also larger dryfalls but all of these can be safely bypassed by judicious route finding. After about 45min of canyon travel you will arrive at the junction ( $34^{\circ}18.74'N$   $117^{\circ}49.13'W$ , elevation 6460ft) of this northern branch with the broader, main branch of Rockbound Canyon. Climb over the low ridge on the left for an easy descent into the main canyon where, often, there is flowing water. Downstream of the junction the downclimbs and dryfalls are larger and more dramatic as the canyon cuts through a stratum of hard white granite. But the obsta-



cles continue to be readily descended without technical equipment. Occasionally you begin to catch glimpses down canyon of the road that climbs up to the Crystal Lake area.

Then, 3.5hr from the start at 34°18.56'N 117°49.64'W and an elevation of about 5200ft you will arrive at the top of the huge headwall in Rockbound Canyon. It is the dramatic white rock cliff that you can see in the canyon as you are driving up Highway 39 from the south. Viewed from that distance it seems overwhelming. And it is an advanced challenge in rappeling. But with care and planning it can be descended safely.

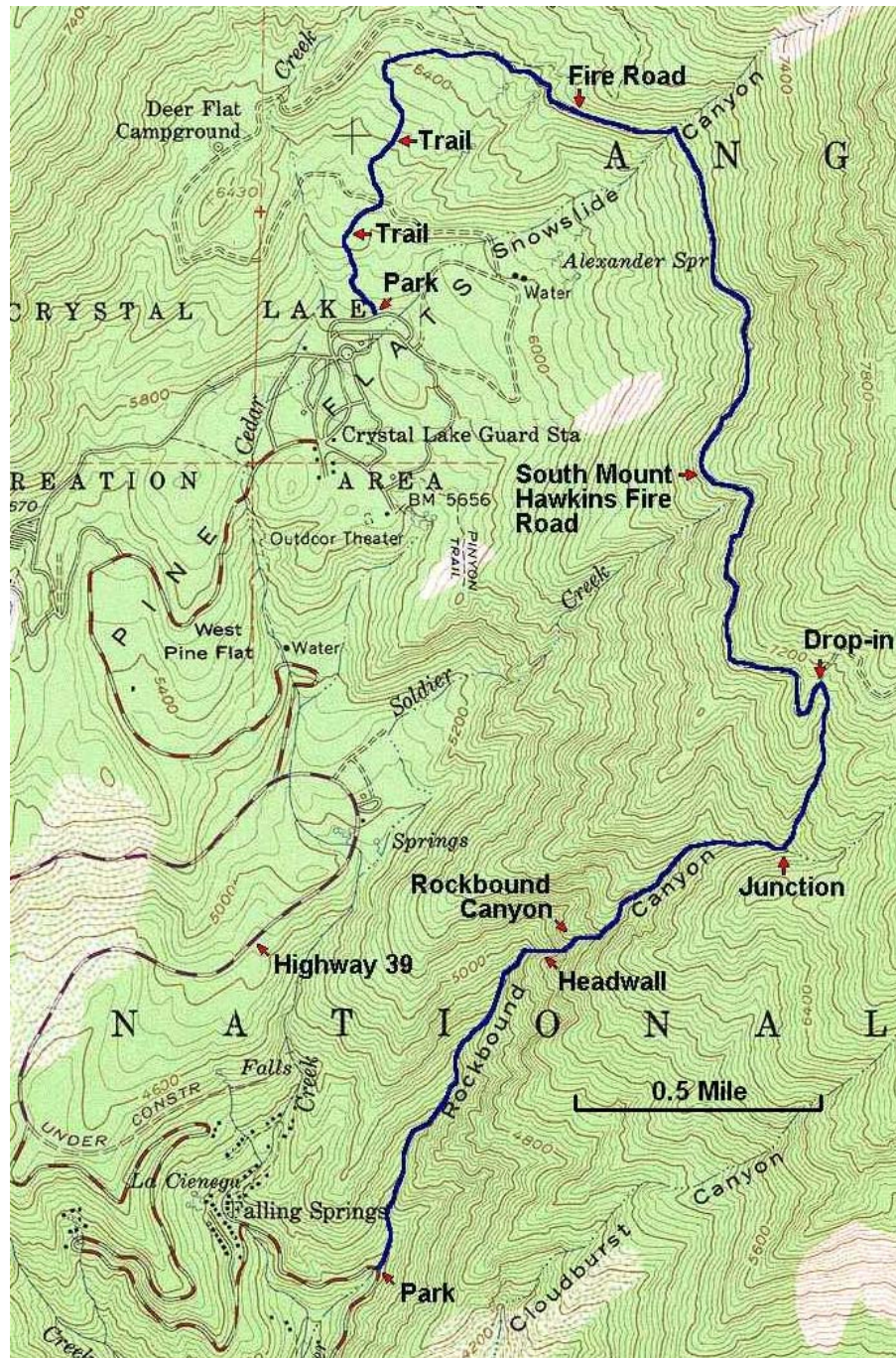
Before you get to the big drop-off there is a moderate rappel about 50yds upstream. Since there are no convenient trees this requires an anchor consisting of a wrap around one of the large boulders. The rappel descends vertically about 30ft. Then a few yards downstream you get a spectacular view of the vertical terrain of the great headwall. The streambed drops about 250ft, almost vertically. Moreover it is hard to see the bottom. Perhaps the best view is from the end of the shelf on the left where you can glimpse the rocky streambed far below.

Below we will describe a descent straight down this vertical drop. But we should also note that, from below, we could see that there may be a number of easier routes (perhaps even a downclimbing route) off to the right or northwest of the streamcourse. This possibility could be explored from the top by climbing over the low rock ridge to right of the streambed.

To descend the headwall directly, find a large trapped boulder at the end of the shelf on the left; with a webbing wrap, it provides a solid anchor for the first part of the descent. Set up a double strand rappel with one of the 200ft ropes and descend about 50ft to a recessed slot with chockstones. Just below this slot on the outside of the rock face is a substantial tree or bush on a small shelf. The first person down should contour over to this bush and set up an intermediate webbing anchor around its base. When the others have descended to the shelf or to the narrow slot about 15ft below the tree, pull the rope and set up a 200ft two-rope rappel from this intermediate anchor. Then descend down the slot (or down the face to the right of the slot) to a large shelf about 150ft below. Climb out of the slot in the shelf and continue the rappel down about 30ft to the bottom of the headwall. Note that the last person down this

180ft descent should take the route down the face to the right of the slot rather than the slot itself since there is a rope-trapping niche in the slot that might make rope recovery very difficult.

You should reach the bottom of the headwall (elevation about 5000ft) about 5hr after the start. The rest of the canyon can be descended without technical gear though route finding is challenging in several places. One of those places is just below the headwall where there is a large dryfall. This can be bypassed by contouring to the left and descending a steep, dirt-filled gully. Another large dryfall follows but can be downclimbed along its sloping center. These obstacles are followed by a long and steep section of bouldering. The reflected heat from the white rock and the lack of shade can make this long section very hot. Eventually, about 1.5hr from the bottom of the headwall you begin to get some shade as the canyon narrows and you pass a huge boulder (actually two boulders) sitting in mid-canyon. Shortly thereafter there is a spring and running water that provide marvelous relief from the heat. From there it is only about 20min to the end of the hike at Highway 39 (34°18.00'N 117°50.00'W and elevation 3770ft). It takes about 2hr to descend from the bottom of the headwall to the highway for a total hike duration of 7hr.



Map of Rockbound Canyon Hike

## 8.5 Upper Little Rock Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 1100 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Waterman Mountain, Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: A little boulder climbing
- Special equipment: None
- ACA Rating: 2A II

One of the most popular rock climbing areas in the San Gabriel Mountains is a large rock just to the west of Mount Williamson on the north side of Little Rock Creek. This hike follows Upper Little Rock Creek down past this rock face and through its transition from a rock-ribbed gorge to a verdant and gentle valley. This is a relatively easy adventure hike that includes a modest climbing challenge not long after the start. It is ideal for a hot summer day when the temperature is significantly cooler than in the basin below.

### Trailhead

The trailhead (34°21.71'N 117°52.22'W and elevation 6610ft) is a large parking area on the north side of the Angeles Crest highway just to the west of Mount Williamson. It is about 38mi east of La Canada Flintridge, 2.4mi east of the Snowcrest Ski area and about 0.25mi west of the highway tunnels through the side of Mount Williamson. If you drive up the Angeles Crest Highway from La Canada Flintridge and come to the tunnels then you should back-track to the first large parking area on the north side of the road.

In order to eliminate a four mile hike back along the Angeles Crest Highway at the end of the day you may wish to set up a car shuttle by leaving a vehicle at the Burkhart Trailhead (34°20.84'N 117°54.75'W and elevation 6450ft) adjacent to the Buckhorn campground before driving to the starting point. To do this when driving

east take the turn-off to Buckhorn campground just 0.25mi east of the Mount Waterman Ski Lift. The narrow, one-way road winds down to the center of the campground. From here, there are signs to the Burkhart Trailhead parking area about 0.2mi north of the campground. After leaving this return vehicle, drive back to the campground and again locate the one-way road that takes you back to the Angeles Crest Highway. Drive about 4mi east on the highway to the previously described starting point.

### **Hike**

Two trails begin at the dirt parking area in the lee of Mount Williamson. One climbs up to the summit of Mount Williamson; the other, the one we want, descends into the canyon of Upper Little Rock Creek. The latter follows what used to be a dirt road, the access to an old dam and pumphouse in this canyon. On the descent you will encounter one fork at the head of a gully where you should continue along a slightly rising dirt road rather than follow the canyon bottom. Soon the road vanishes and the trail descends to the floor of the canyon. Traveling downstream you soon come upon a rocky section where you must clamber and bushwhack a short distance. However, very soon (about 35min from the start) you arrive at the base of the great rock cliff (base elevation 6240ft)



*Climbers in Upper Little Rock Creek.*



that is so popular with climbers. You may wish to stop to watch them scale the walls of the gorge. Many of the climbing routes can be traced by eye by observing the trail of metal bolts winding up the rockface.

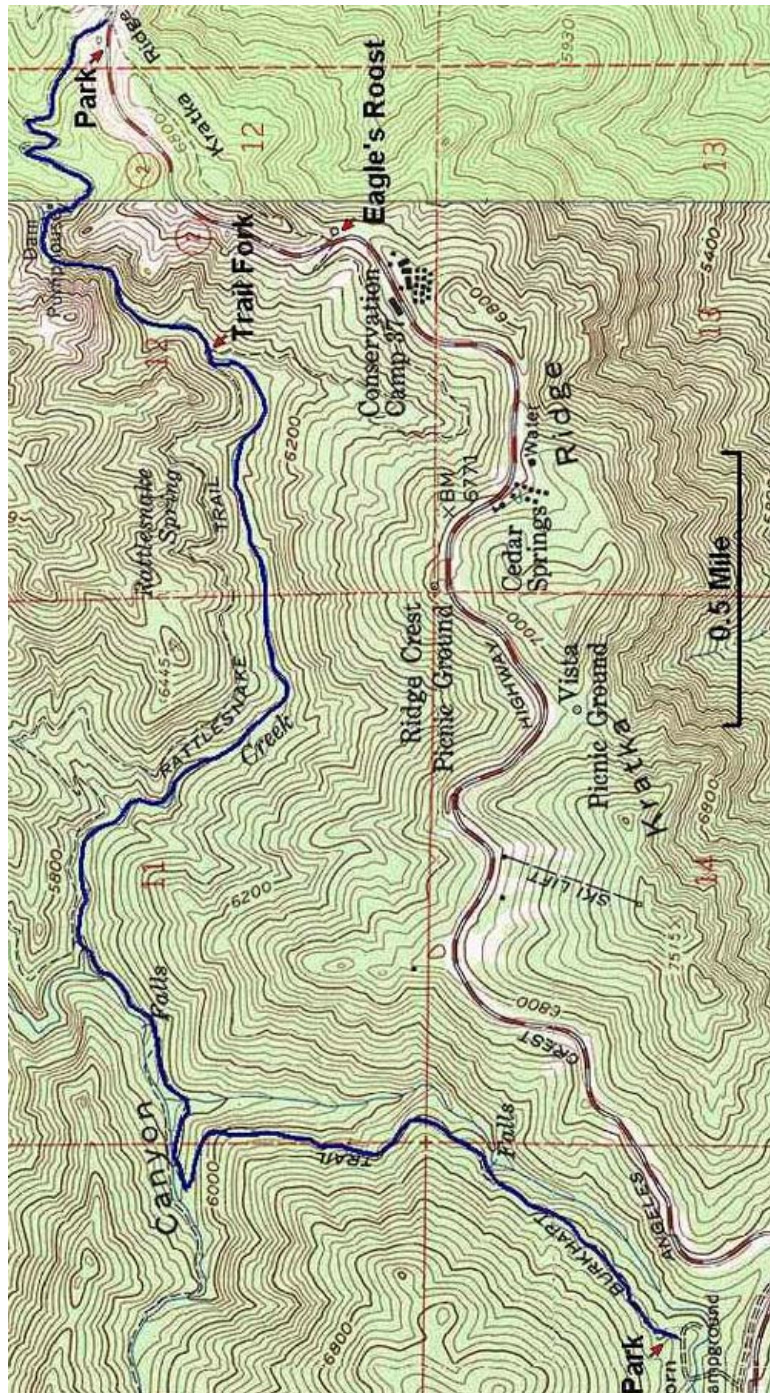
Moving on down the canyon, there are several large boulder obstacles to negotiate before you come to a short section, several hundred yards from the cliff and 70min from the start, where a little special effort is needed. First the stream falls down through a small rock-sculpted gully with a ledge on the right hand side. It is a little tricky to transition from one of the ledges to a larger flat shelf about 5ft below. The first person down can greatly aid the others in this descent. The second section is easily overcome if you take note of a small ledge that climbs about 10ft to a trail that bypasses the small waterfall. Once past these obstacles, it is but 100yds to the place where the Eagle's Roost Trail crosses the canyon bottom. This trail crossing at  $34^{\circ}21.55'N$   $117^{\circ}52.84'W$  and an elevation of 6060ft is about 0.8mi and 1hr 20min from the start.

At this point where the trail crosses the stream, there are three alternative hikes that are possible. If you have had enough at this point you may wish to take the trail to the left up to Eagle's Roost on the Angeles Crest Highway. This maintained trail reaches the road after a climb of about 650ft over about a mile. You can then walk about 0.8mi back along the road to the point where you started. The second alternative is to take the same trail up the other side of the canyon. This is the maintained Rattlesnake Trail that first climbs up the north side of the canyon, then contours along a route traveling downstream below the ridge, finally descending to the canyon bottom again and meeting the Burkhart trail just a few yards before a second stream crossing where you will connect again with the third alternative. From trail crossing to trail crossing, it is about 2.5mi by the Rattlesnake Trail.

The third, or off-trail, alternative is to continue on down the canyon from the first trail crossing. In contrast to the first part of the hike this section is generally wooded and gentle with many fish-filled pools. After about 25min, you will come to a place where the stream has carved a convoluted path through the rock and then drops a few feet into a large pool. This makes a pleasant lunch stop and a great place to bathe. We used the rope attached to a tree overhead to "drop in".

As you continue downstream you will encounter a few places where ready progress is blocked by brush and you must bushwhack your way through. About 30min from the first trail crossing you will pass a place where there is a good campsite under a stand of cedar. Downstream it takes another 1hr 30min before you reach the place where the Burkhart Trail crosses the canyon bottom. Several hundred yards before this you should be able to discern the Rattlesnake Trail gradually descending the north or right side of the canyon. The Burkhart Trail crossing is at  $34^{\circ}21.76'N$   $117^{\circ}53.98'W$  and an elevation of 5690ft. The total hiking time from the start to this point is about 3hr 30min during which you have traveled about 2.4mi.

The rest of the hike consists of following the Burkhart Trail back up to the Buckhorn trailhead. About 0.25mi beyond the stream crossing you reach a fork ( $34^{\circ}21.63'N$   $117^{\circ}54.18'W$ , elevation 5810ft) where the Burkhart trail goes to the left; the right branch is the trail up Cooper Canyon. Take the left fork, the Burkhart trail. This last section on a well-traveled trail provides a most pleasant and attractive hike that starts in the deep woods at the junction where Little Rock Creek and Cooper Canyon come together. It climbs up to the sparser pine woods typical of the slopes on the northern slopes of the San Gabriels. The hiking distance from the canyon crossing (elevation 5610ft) to the Buckhorn trailhead ( $34^{\circ}20.84'N$   $117^{\circ}54.78'W$ , elevation 6450ft) is about 2mi and it can be covered in about 50min.



Map of Upper Rock Creek Hike



## Chapter 9

# EAST FORK

The East Fork of the San Gabriel River and its canyon run almost all the way through the San Gabriel Range from north to south and the first hike in this chapter traverses its entire wilderness length. Also included in this region are Mount San Antonio, known locally as Mount Baldy, and Iron Mountain, both of which encompass a number of challenging adventures.



East Fork region.



## 9.1 East Fork of the San Gabriel

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 11 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 16.5 miles
- Elevation loss: 4560 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount San Antonio, Mt. Baldy, Glendora
- Difficulties: Much boulder scrambling
- Special equipment: Wading shoes, several pairs of socks
- ACA Rating: 1B IV

The spectacular and storied East Fork of the San Gabriel River runs almost the whole way through the San Gabriel range. It starts just below the Vincent Saddle on the Angeles Crest Highway above the town of Wrightwood. From the saddle a trail descends Vincent Gulch into the magnificent Sheep Mountain Wilderness. This adventure is a very long one day hike or a good two day hike along the length of the East Fork. It traverses one of the wildest and most scenic areas in the San Gabriels. The scenery varies from the beautiful wooded section in the upper reaches of the canyon, magnificent in springtime, to the rugged and tortured grandeur of the East Fork Narrows midway through the journey. The hike is, however, a relatively easy one by adventure hike standards and involves no major obstacles though much wading and scrambling over rocks.

**Trailheads** A very long car shuttle is required to set up a one-way trip. The upper terminus at Vincent Saddle is reached either by driving east along the Angeles Crest Highway over the 7901ft Dawson Saddle and down to Vincent Saddle at  $34^{\circ}22.40'N$   $117^{\circ}45.15'W$  and an elevation of 6560ft. Alternatively, you can drive through Wrightwood and up the Angeles Crest Highway to Vincent Saddle. At the saddle there is an ample parking area. The lower end of the hike is the East Fork trailhead ( $34^{\circ}14.21'N$   $117^{\circ}45.92'W$  and elevation 2030ft), the same as described in the Allison Mine Loop.

## Hike

The trail from Vincent Saddle ( $34^{\circ}22.40'N$   $117^{\circ}45.15'W$ , elevation 6560ft) down into Vincent Gulch drops quite steeply toward the Mine Gulch junction. This is rugged, forested country and, during the descent, you enter the Sheep Mountain Wilderness Area, the home of a substantial herd of bighorn sheep and a number of bears and cougars. The forest is a mix of conifers and deciduous trees whose autumn colors create spectacular scenery. The 9399ft Mount Baden-Powell forms a dramatic western wall to the canyon. After a descent of 2000ft over 4.4mi from Vincent Saddle (taking about 2hrs), you emerge onto a flat area of sand and rock at an elevation of about 4500ft. This is Mine Gulch junction ( $34^{\circ}20.60'N$   $117^{\circ}43.50'W$ , elevation 4480ft) where Vincent Gulch, Mine Gulch and Prairie Fork all meet before the sum of their contents plunges into the canyon of the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. Another trail drops down to this junction from the Cabin Flat campground on Prairie Fork.

Shortly after leaving Mine Gulch junction and entering the East Fork canyon, the trail in the canyon bottom disappears, having been obliterated by the winter torrents that crash through this canyon. As you travel downstream the terrain becomes more rugged and



*Left: View of Prairie Fork junction from Big Horn Mine. Right: In East Fork Narrows.*

precipitous. The mountains on both sides close in, forming a canyon with steep walls and a rock-strewn bottom. The river in the canyon is a substantial stream with alternating quiet sections interspersed with chaotic rapids. In many places you encounter small waterfalls and large boulders. It is not easy to keep track of your location for landmarks are rarely visible from the canyon bottom. Glimpses of the 8009ft Iron Mountain immediately to the east of the canyon do, however, allow you to make some estimates of your position.

About 6hr 30min and some 9.5mi from Vincent Gap you reach the junction with Fish Fork ( $34^{\circ}18.34'N$   $117^{\circ}43.94'W$ , elevation 3330ft) that enters from the left or east. Fish Fork starts on the north slopes of Mount Baldy and flows west through a very rugged canyon to meet the East Fork at this junction. The combined waters enter an even deeper canyon that slices through the west slope of Iron Mountain. About a mile further south (and about 8hrs from the start), you encounter another substantial canyon junction where there are clear signs of human activity. This is the confluence with Iron Fork ( $34^{\circ}17.73'N$   $117^{\circ}44.47'W$ , elevation 3120ft) that enters from the west. Here you may identify the flattened area where gold miner George Trogden had his camp at the turn of the century. George was well known for his hospitality to all who passed this way. Occasionally things got out of hand as on Christmas night, 1917, when the gunslinging gold miner John Portwood shot and killed miner Herman Miller after a poker game.

Earlier the East Fork of the San Gabriel river had been the site of a gold rush after the precious metal was discovered there in 1855. Below Iron Fork, the canyon is dotted with mines and the remnants of tailings. Even today several prospectors still live and work in the canyon while a number of weekend panners take out a few dollars worth of the gold for several hours work. There are a number of primitive campsites both above and below Iron Fork that provide suitable places for an overnight camp. There is also abundant driftwood available for a fire.

Below Iron Fork, there is a rudimentary trail in places, sometimes on one side of the river and sometimes on the other. This section between Iron Fork and the Bridge to Nowhere is called the Narrows. It is the deepest gorge in southern California, a place of grandeur with cascades and rockslides everywhere. While slow, the going is nevertheless straightforward with much boulder-scrambling but

no real climbing. You must cross the river many times and this is more difficult early in the summer when the river is fuller. In several places, the trail climbs the west or right wall of the canyon in order to get around small waterfalls or long cascades. A little over 1hr beyond Iron Fork there are two such bypasses one after the other. Keep your eyes open for these trails. The second involves a sharp turn to the right and, as you make this turn, the Bridge to Nowhere suddenly appears before you at  $34^{\circ}16.99'N$   $117^{\circ}44.81'W$  and an elevation of 2760ft.

The Bridge to Nowhere is one of the most bizarre artifacts to be found in the San Gabriel mountains. Back in the 1920s, Los Angeles County planned to build a highway all the way up the East Fork canyon to Mine Gulch Junction. From there the road would climb over Blue Ridge and drop down into Wrightwood. It would be among the most scenic roads in America. Construction began in 1929, most of the work being done by County prison work crews. By the mid-1930s the highway had reached the Narrows. There it was necessary to construct a concrete bridge high above the waters of the gorge. A tunnel was also chiselled out of sheer rock. However, the winter after this difficult construction task had been completed, an unprecedented storm arrived on March 1-2, 1938, depositing many inches of rain on the San Gabriel Mountains. The result was a



*Left: Bridge to Nowhere. Right: Swan Rock.*

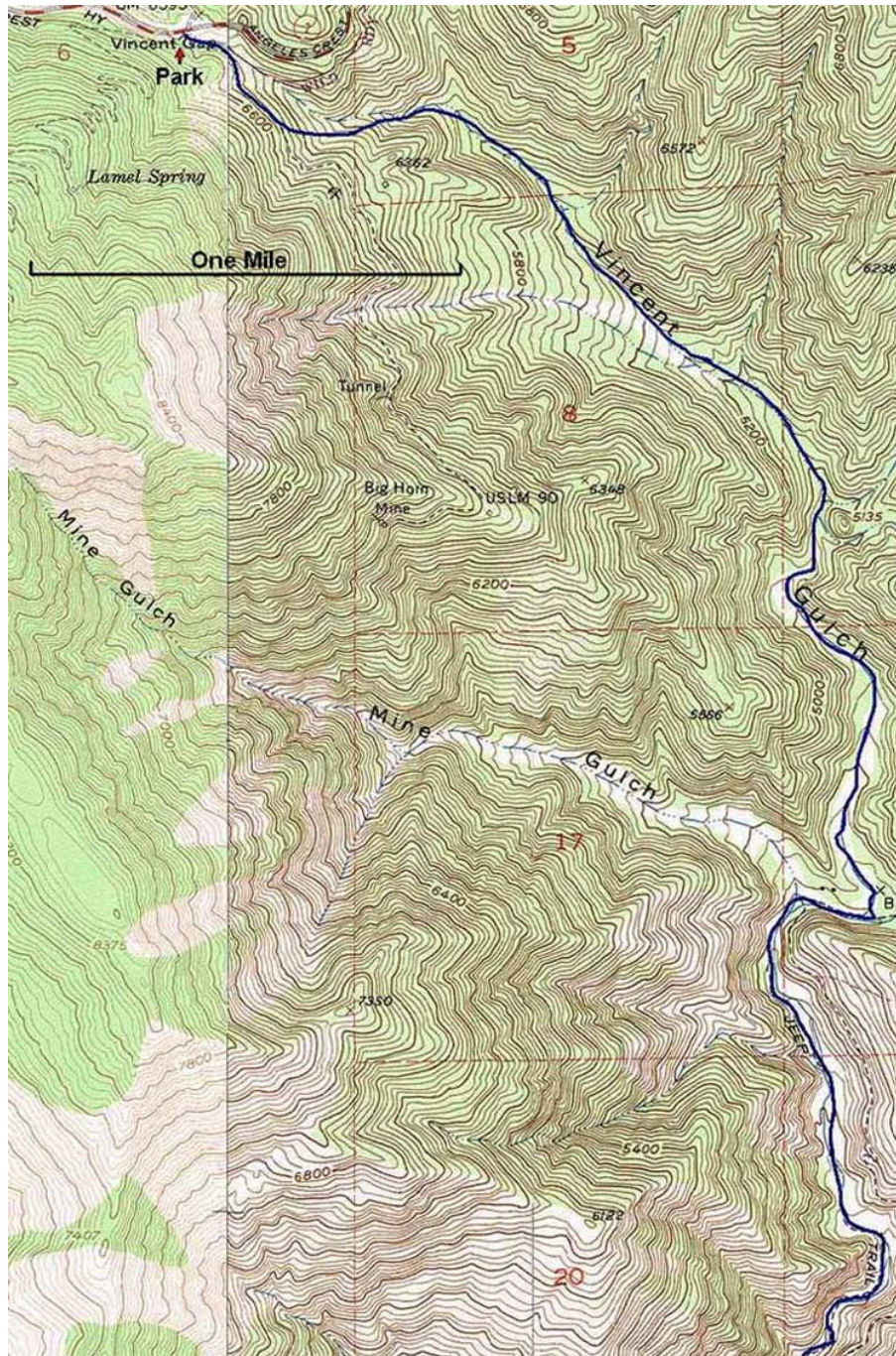
tremendous flood that roared down the East Fork, obliterating everything in its path including more than five miles of the painstakingly constructed highway. Only the bridge was high enough above the waters to be virtually untouched. The futility of the project having been so emphatically demonstrated, the County abandoned their plans leaving a brand new concrete road bridge standing alone in the middle of the wilderness more than five miles from the nearest highway. It became a popular destination for hikers who dubbed it the “Bridge to Nowhere”. Years later the County planned another highway up the East Fork. This time they intended to build it high up on the western wall to avoid a repetition of the earlier disaster. Begun in 1954, this second highway was abandoned in 1969 after only 4.5mi had been built. This second effort left substantial scars up on the western wall. Hopefully that will be the last time man will desecrate this wilderness and it will be left for future generations to enjoy in its nearly natural state.

It is important to find the trail that leads up to the Bridge to Nowhere because the Bridge, in turn, leads to a trail that bypasses a piece of private property in the canyon bottom (to say nothing of a particularly rugged stretch of canyon and one pool that you would have to swim). The trail south of the Bridge to Nowhere is frequently traveled and well-worn all the way to Heaton Flats and the East Fork trailhead. This last section can be covered in about 2hr 15min. Despite its popularity, the frequency with which the trail gets washed out means that it is rough in places. It crosses the East Fork 14 times between the Bridge and the trailhead.

A little under 1hr after leaving the Bridge to Nowhere, you will come to the junction where Allison Gulch flows into the East Fork (34°15.77'N 117°44.79'W, elevation 2410ft); at this point the route of the Allison Mine Loop joins the present itinerary. About 300yds further on, you pass a high cliff on your right composed of patches of white rock on a darker background. One of the white patches is shaped like a swan and hence the name Swan Rock. There are still 10 more river crossings to make downstream of Swan Rock. The last is just below Heaton Flats where gold miner William Heaton set up camp in 1891 and prospected until his death in 1924. A few hundred yards more and you come to the locked gate at the trailhead parking lot (34°14.21'N 117°45.92'W, elevation 2030ft).

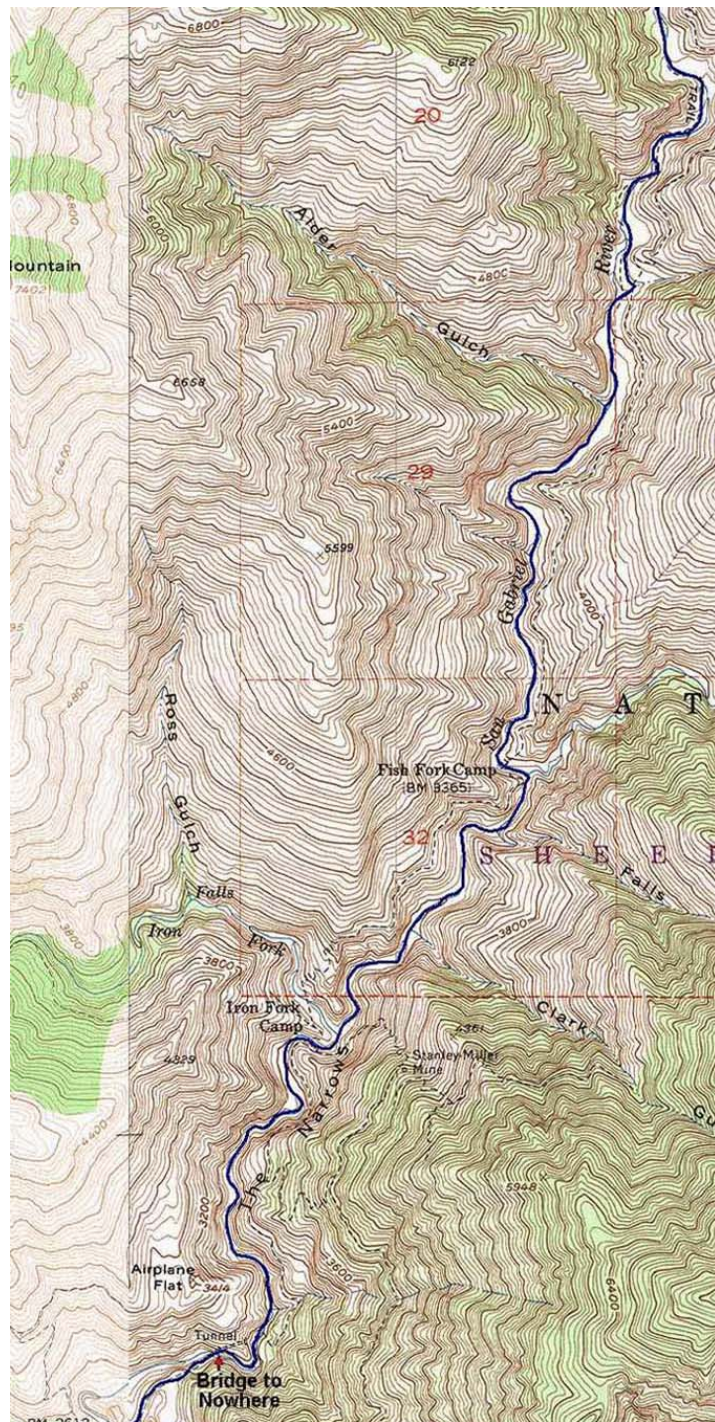


The distance from Vincent Gap to the trailhead is about 16.5mi and it takes about 11hr of travel to complete the hike. It is possible to do it in a long and arduous summer day but it is much more fun as a two day outing. Over two days you have time to do some additional exploring, for example, into the canyons of the Fish Fork or the Iron Fork.



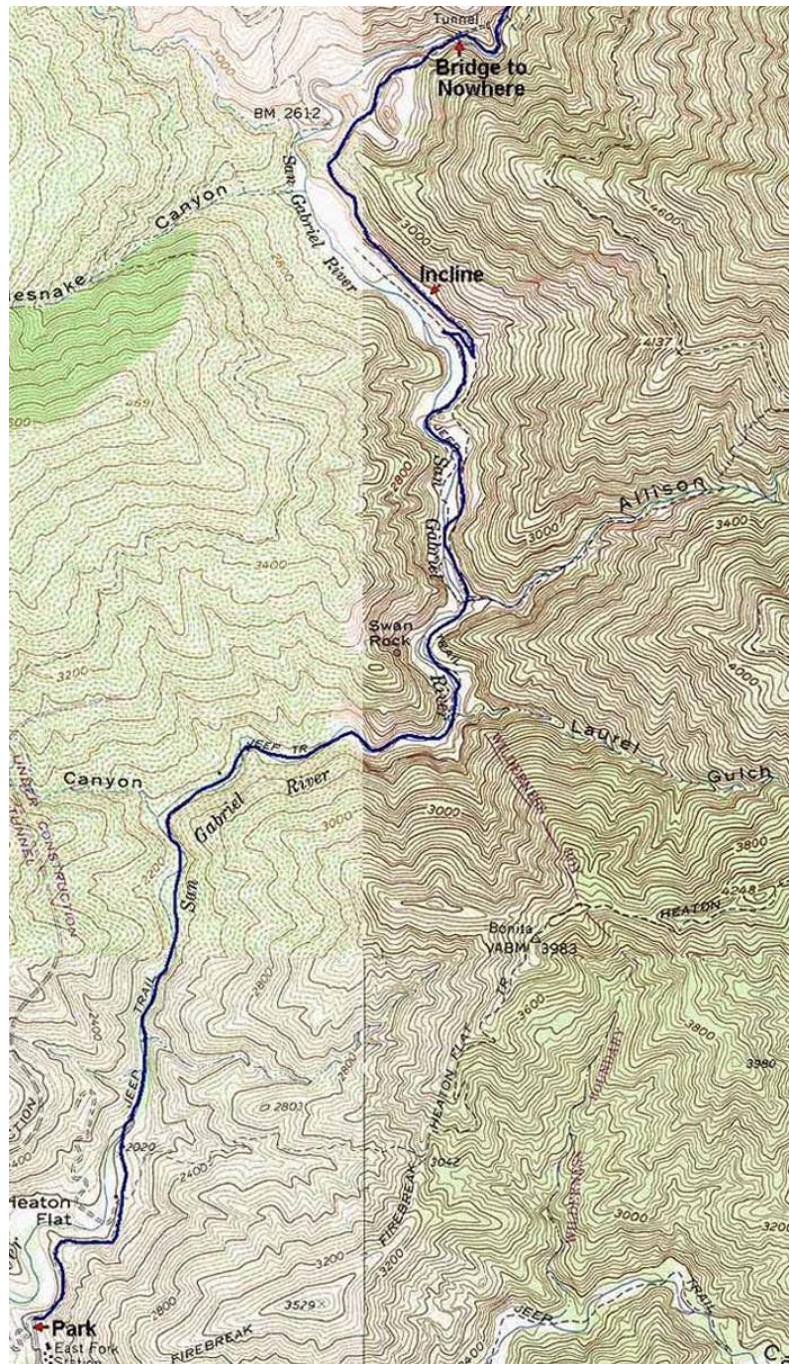
Map of first section of East Fork of the San Gabriel Hike





Map of second section of East Fork of the San Gabriel Hike





Map of third section of East Fork of the San Gabriel Hike

## 9.2 Allison Mine Loop

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.3 miles
- Elevation gain: 2070 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount San Antonio, Mt. Baldy, Glendora, Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: Three rappels of 40ft, 30ft and 80ft, some down-climbing and some difficult route finding
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 200ft rope, 30ft webbing, 3 rappel rings, headlamp
- ACA Rating: 3A III

High in a dramatic scar on the precipitous south face of Iron Mountain is a mine whose proprietors risked life and limb almost daily in an effort to get rich. They built several airy trails to access their mine and this hike follows one of them on the way to the mine. Those daredevil miners were the experienced prospector, John James Allison and his three sons. The Allison mine was worked intermittently from 1915 until about 1942. It is located high up in Allison Gulch, a tributary of the East Fork of the San Gabriel river (the junction is a short distance upstream of a notable feature of the East Fork canyon called “Swan Rock”). There are two alternate routes to the mine, each with their own challenges.

Having reached the mine by one of these two routes, this adventure descends Allison Gulch. Just below the mine you enter a spectacular, vertical gorge whose descent requires three or four rappels including a 80ft drop down the last waterfall. Though not as big as some of the other gorges in the San Gabriels Allison Gulch is one of the prettiest. After the rappels you continue down Allison Gulch to the East Fork of the San Gabriel and return to the East Fork Trailhead.



This adventure hike can be done in a day though you should start early in order to have a little time to explore the mine. Obviously you may choose either of the routes to the mine and any of the three on the return.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the parking area at the end of the East Fork road ( $34^{\circ}14.21'N$   $117^{\circ}45.92'W$ , elevation 2030ft). Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa to a point north of Morris and San Gabriel dams where there is a highway junction. Turn right across the bridge following the signs to the East Fork. The trailhead is about 6mi up this road just past the junction with the Glendora Mountain Road and the bridge over Cattle Canyon.

### Hike

There are two possible routes on the way to Allison Mine and each has its challenges. The preferred route that is described first proceeds up Allison Gulch from the East Fork; it involves a substantial navigational challenge in which an altimeter is almost essential



*Left: In the Allison Mine. Right: Allison Gulch above the rappels.*

for success. The alternate "ridge route" along the Heaton Flats Trail is easier but longer and involves considerable bushwhacking.

Begin the adventure by walking around the locked gate just beyond the East Fork trailhead parking area (34°14.21'N 117°45.92'W, elevation 2030ft). It is 0.5mi north along the dirt road up the East Fork to the small campground at Heaton Flats (34°14.48'N 117°45.68'W, elevation 2050ft). The alternate "ridge route" splits off here to climb the right wall of the canyon but we proceed up the East Fork trail that crosses the river many times (there are usually trails on both banks). These crossings can be quite dangerous in the winter when the river is running full but in summer are usually less than knee deep. It is, however, almost impossible to keep your feet dry even in late summer. The 2.7mi hike to the junction of the East Fork and Allison Gulch follows a pretty, wooded canyon bottom with many nice pools in which to swim. It is a popular place for gold panners.

The first challenge is to accurately identify the junction with Allison Gulch (34°15.77'N 117°44.79'W, elevation 2410ft). This occurs about 200yds beyond Swan Rock, a large cliff on the left side of the East Fork where there is an intrusion of white rock in the shape of a giant swan. At Swan Rock the East Fork makes a sharp right turn and about 200yds further it turns sharp left. Allison Gulch forks off to the right at this left turn. It is a large tributary and easy to find. You should reach this point, 2.75mi from the start about 1hr 20min after starting out. If you have an altimeter, take note of its reading at this point.

There is no trail up Allison Gulch, but is a heavily wooded glen with little brush and therefore fairly easy going as you climb up the rocky streambed. There is usually some water flowing though it goes underground in places. Hike up the Gulch for about 0.75mi until you reach an altitude of 3060ft where you will encounter a gully entering on the left (34°16.01'N 117°44.18'W, elevation 3060ft). It is critical that you locate the correct gully. The altitude is the primary identifier but there are others. The gully you want occurs where the main stream makes a sharp right turn. The gully entrance is well-defined and brush free. There is a substantial tree and a notable vertical wall, both on the left at the gully entrance. A large log with an unusual longitudinal crack also lies across the left side near the gully entrance though it will probably rot away soon. You should

reach this point about 2hr 20min after the morning start having covered 3.5mi.

Note your altitude here for further navigational challenges lie ahead. Then climb up the bed of the relatively brush-free gully for another 550ft of elevation gain, to an altitude of about 3600ft. At that point watch for a fork in the gully with the main branch going left and a steep, scree-filled fork going right. Do not take either fork. Instead transition onto the steep slope on the right where you should find an array of faint, braided trails that switchback up the slope between the bushes. Climb another 3-400ft up this slope veering somewhat to the right. Near the top, as you approach a shoulder off to the right, you should, with a little luck, find a faint trail that begins to contour around to the right at 34°16.19'N 117°43.99'W and an elevation of 3970ft. Follow that trail. In places you have to negotiate a series of yuccas that block the way. But soon you should see the remains of the mine structures on the other side of the canyon. Finally, the trail makes a 100ft steep descent into the woods beside Allison Gulch; it emerges onto a flat area where the mine buildings once stood. You should reach the mine (34°16.28'N 117°43.71'W, elevation 4110ft) about 4hr 15min and 4.2mi from the start of the hike.

### **Alternate Route to Mine:**

The alternate route to the mine is very brushy but easier to navigate than the route described above. As in the first route you follow the East Fork dirt road along to Heaton Flats (34°14.48'N 117°45.68'W, elevation 2050ft). There you leave the road and take the Heaton Flats trail (8W16) that forks to the right and climbs the side of the canyon. This is a well-maintained trail but one that can be hot and hard work in the summer season. For that reason this hike is best attempted in the cooler months. At an elevation of about 2750ft the trail reaches a saddle that allows a good view down into Cattle Canyon. At this saddle turn left and continue along the trail that soon reaches the crest of a long ridge that runs all the way to the slopes of Iron Mountain. From the ridge the 8007ft high Iron Mountain looks deceptively close. In fact, it is a very hard (and waterless) two day hike to reach this summit and return (see Iron Mountain hike).

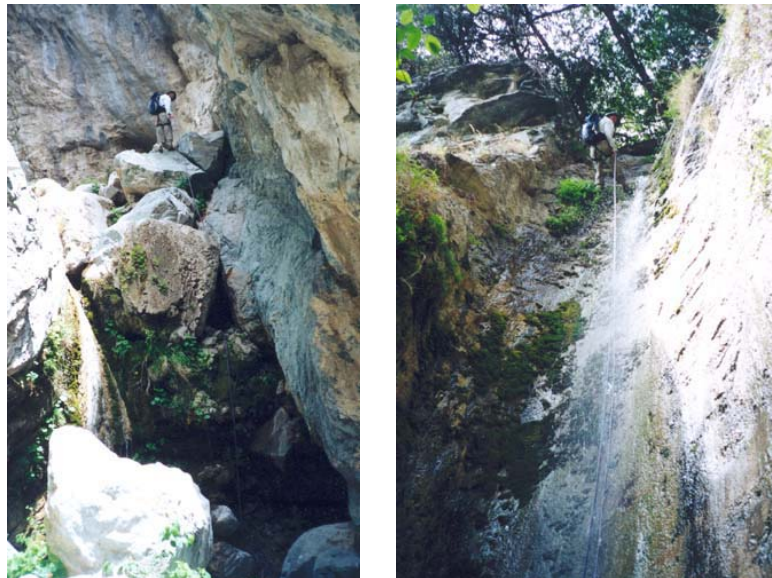
However, the current objective is more modest. The trail rises and falls as it follows the ridge until, 3.4mi from Heaton Flats, the trail descends about 100ft to a prominent saddle at 34°15.53'N 117°43.38'W and an elevation of 4580ft. This is a good rest stop and an important place to identify correctly. Apart from the incoming trail, three other trails emanate from this saddle. One reasonably good trail descends from the saddle to the right or east and goes to the Widman Ranch in Coldwater Canyon, a tributary of Cattle Canyon. Part of the ranch can be seen from the saddle. The trail to the summit of Iron Mountain proceeds directly up the steep incline at the other side of the saddle. The most indistinct and overgrown of the three trails is that which leads to the Allison Mine. This turns left (west) at the saddle and contours along the south face of the ridge that projects to the west and separates Laurel Gulch (directly below the saddle) from Allison Gulch (to the north on the other side of the ridge). A number of yuccas provide awkward obstacles on the first stretch of this trail. Further along you are often pushing through the brush while watching the ground to determine the direction of the trail. Finally you reach the west end of the ridge and the trail contours around to the north side high above Allison Gulch. The brush is particularly thick just before the point where you turn from the spine of the ridge onto the east running trail on the north slope. However, as soon as you make this turn, the vegetation abruptly changes to pine forest and the going is much easier. From the ledges cut into the rock and the occasional rock buttressing, you will recognize that you are traveling on the remnants of the original trail built by the Allisons.

Soon after the turn, stop to survey the dramatic scenery and the topology of the rest of the hike. On the other side of the canyon, you will readily make out the large scar that Allison Creek has cut into the side of Iron Mountain. At the bottom of this gulch, where the creek seems to reach the floor of the canyon below, you should be able to spot a very beautiful, thin waterfall. This is the last rappel during the descent of the Gulch. With your eyes (or binoculars) follow the gulch up above the waterfall and you will conclude that there are a series of obstacles above that waterfall. Look a little further up and you may be able to discern some of the remains of the Allison Mine in a wooded area just to the right of the gulch. This alternate route contours around the head of Allison Gulch to these

remains. The going is relatively easy on the north-facing stretches but, as you get close to the mine, there are several south-facing sections on which the brush is very heavy indeed. On the last stretch before reaching the mine, look out for the trails on the opposite wall of the steep canyon. The preferred route described above follows one of these trails. Finally you reach the readily recognizable remains of the mine some 3mi from the saddle at  $34^{\circ}16.28'N$   $117^{\circ}43.71'W$  and an elevation of 4110ft.

### **The Allison Mine:**

The remains of the Allison Mine are quite extensive. Many horizontal shafts penetrate the steep hillside above the trail to the east of the stream and are best seen from the trail on the west side. Just above the stream on the east side, you encounter the remains of a large wooden tip behind which is a large mine opening to an array of horizontal and vertical shafts. These shafts can safely be explored for a short distance but you need a good flashlight. Also, if you follow the trail down to the right of the wooden tip and then follow a short trail around to the right you will encounter another horizontal shaft that is easy to explore.



*Left: First rappel. Right: Big rappel in Allison Gulch.*

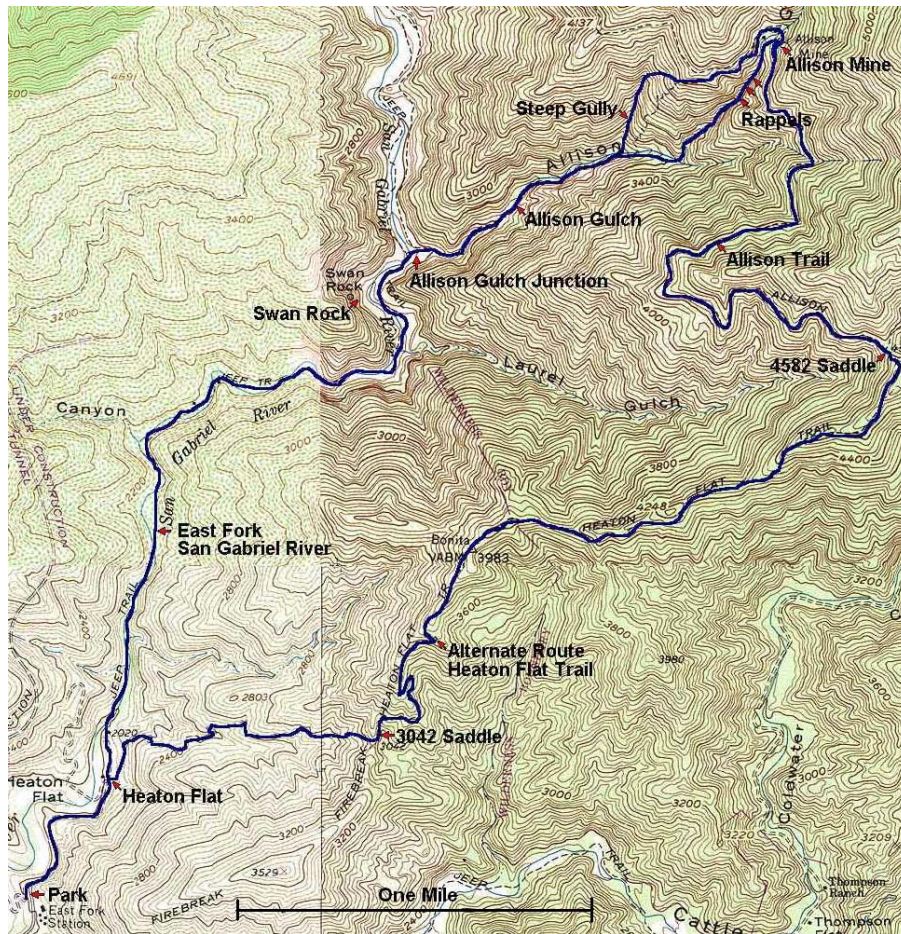


## The Descent:

When ready to begin the return journey just follow the rocky streambed as it descends steeply. About 15min from the mine you encounter the first substantial obstacle, a pretty 15ft waterfall covered in green moss. There is a tricky 15ft downclimb from a shelf on the left side. If you wish to rappel instead, there is a convenient anchor tree just above the shelf. Below this downclimb you enter the most spectacular part of the Allison Gulch, a narrow gorge with towering grey walls that first bend left, then right and then left again. The streambed falls steeply through this defile. You can downclimb for a short distance but soon encounter the first rappel about 45min after leaving the mine at an elevation of 3760ft. This consists of a 40ft drop that is best anchored by a webbing wrap around a large boulder on the left. Several more downclimbs follow but very soon you come to the second rappel, a 30ft vertical waterfall where it is difficult to avoid getting wet. The anchor is a huge rock sitting in the middle of the stream just upstream of the lip; it had a large variety of rope and webbing wraps around it when we passed this way.

Downstream of this second rappel, the gorge broadens and becomes less dramatic. You might expect no further rappels. But quite suddenly, about 1hr 50min after leaving the mine and at an elevation of 3500ft, you come to the top of a dramatic 80ft vertical waterfall that drops into a three-sided rock cavity cut into the rock by eons of flowing water. There is a large tree with a huge branch across the canyon just upstream of the lip and this provides an excellent anchor. It is difficult to avoid getting wet during the descent and there is a small, thigh-deep pool at the bottom. Once at the bottom you can stow the rope and harnesses.

From the bottom of this last rappel, it takes about 30min of scrambling and bouldering to reach the entrance to the gully that you followed on the ascent (34°16.01'N 117°44.18'W, elevation 3060ft). And from that junction it takes another 35min to descend to the East Fork (34°15.77'N 117°44.79'W, elevation 2410ft). You should reach the East Fork just under 3hrs after leaving the mine. The remainder of the hike down to the East Fork trailhead (34°14.21'N 117°45.92'W, elevation 2030ft) follows the trail described in the East Fork Transit hike. This last stretch takes about 1hr 15min; the return trip from the mine covers about 4.1mi in 4hr 15min.



## 9.3 Iron Mountain

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 11 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 15 miles
- Elevation gain: 6000 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount San Antonio, Mt. Baldy, Glendora
- Difficulties: Some steep, rocky slopes
- Special equipment: None needed
- ACA Rating: 1A IV

This is a hike that is more of a challenge to your endurance than anything else. Your reward is the satisfaction of conquering the toughest peak in the San Gabriels and the magnificent and dramatic views from the summit.

It may be possible to climb Iron Mountain in one day though this would require a very early start and a late finish. From the ridge that the Heaton Flats Trail (8W16) follows, the mountain looks deceptively close and it is hard to believe that it could take more than a day to reach the summit and return. In fact, it is a very hard (and waterless) climb. John Robinson has characterized it as the toughest peak in the San Gabriels to reach and my own experience confirmed this. The most important thing to ensure is that you take sufficient water for there is none available anywhere once you leave the East Fork. I recommend at least four quarts per person. Moreover, there is little shade so that the hike is very difficult in warmer weather. Choose a cool spring or fall weekend.

### Trailhead

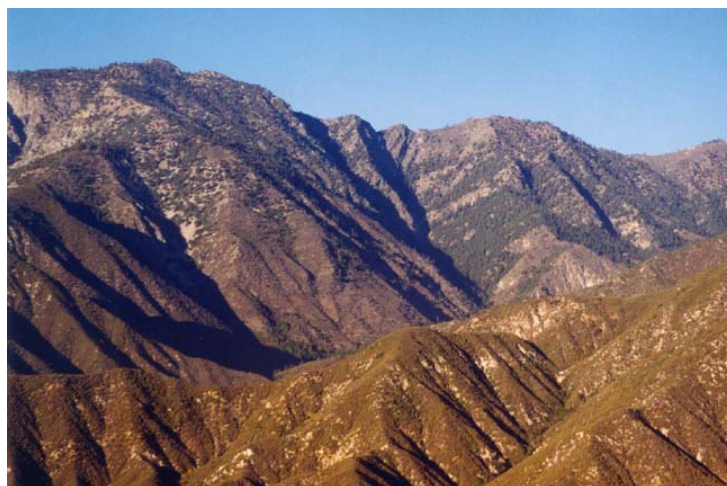
The trailhead of this hike is the same as that for the Allison Mine hike, namely the parking area at the end of the road up the East Fork of the San Gabriel River (34°14.21'N 117°45.92'W, elevation 2030ft). This is about a half hour drive up Highway 39 from Azusa

with a right turn across the bridge and up the East Fork road to its terminus.

## Hike

The first part of the climb is the same as the Allison Mine hike. You proceed up the East Fork about 0.5mi to Heaton Flats ( $34^{\circ}14.48'N$   $117^{\circ}45.68'W$ , elevation 2050ft) and then turn right onto the Heaton Flats trail that climbs up a steep side canyon. This reaches a saddle where the trail turns left and proceeds to the top of a ridge. Follow the trail along this ridge with a number of ascents and descents until you reach a notable saddle at a distance of 3.8mi from the start, at  $34^{\circ}15.53'N$   $117^{\circ}43.38'W$  and an elevation of 4580ft; this takes about 2hr 30min. I recommend this saddle for an overnight stop. There are some pleasant flat places to camp and some brush to provide shelter from the wind. When I climbed the mountain, I hid my overnight equipment here in the bushes and retrieved it during my descent.

This saddle has three other trails that emanate from it, some in better condition than others. As described in the Allison Mine Loop, the best maintained trail descends to the right or east to Widman Ranch and Coldwater Canyon. A very rough trail contours off to the left or west of the saddle on its way to the Allison Mine. Our route lies directly ahead straight up the steep slope on the north side of



*View of Iron Mountain (left) from the Glendora Ridge road.*

the saddle. At this point the hike begins to look much more difficult but, again, appearances are deceptive. In fact, though there are other steep sections requiring some scrambling, the trail to the top of Iron Mountain is in much better shape than might be expected from other descriptions. In 1995 when I made the hike it seemed as though some group had made a substantial effort to clear and maintain long stretches of the trail.

Once the initial climb up from the saddle has been accomplished the trail follows another ridge with three or four minor peaks on it. The vegetation on this section is bush and scrub with some trees. It is fortunate that long sections have been cleared for it would otherwise be a much more difficult hike with lots of bushwhacking. Gradually the vegetation changes as one rises until you emerge on a more consistent open slope with scattered pine trees. Along this stretch, there is a precipitous drop to the left down into the canyon cut into the side of the mountain by Allison Gulch. To the right the land in the foreground is less dramatic but further in the distance it rises dramatically to the ridge running from the summit of Iron Mountain all the way to the top of Mount San Antonio (commonly known as Mount Baldy). This ridge is called the San Antonio Ridge.

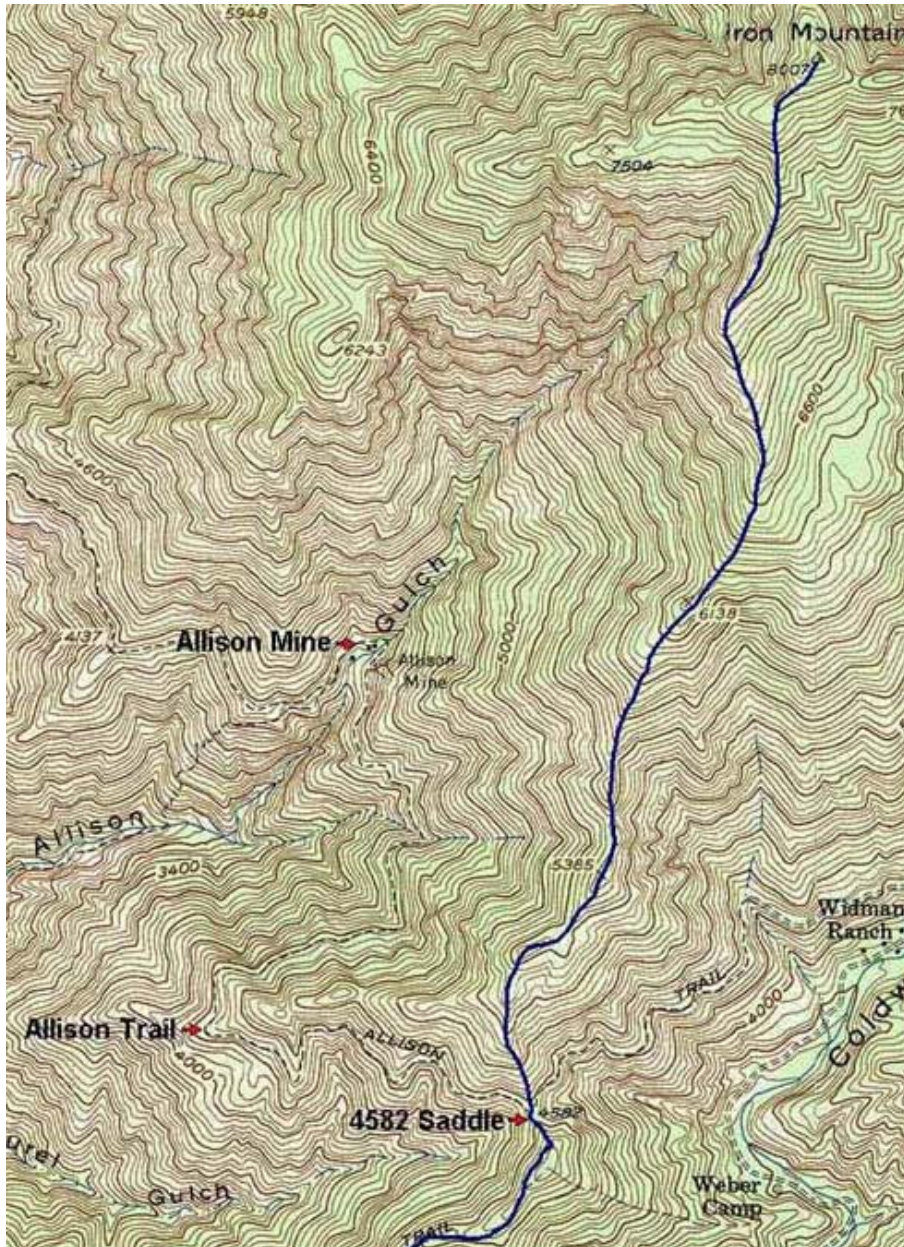
About 3hr 30min after leaving the saddle, you finally reach the last section of rocky trail leading to the 8007ft summit of Iron Mountain ( $34^{\circ}17.30'N$   $117^{\circ}42.80'W$ ). The peak itself is a little strange for it comprises a rectangular area about 20ft by 30ft that someone has flattened and mostly cleared of rocks. Perhaps some group likes to camp there even though it is quite exposed. There is a logbook stored in a cairn in the center and you should be proud to enter your name for it is a significant achievement to reach this peak.

However, what will really hold your attention is the magnificent view (provided, of course, you are reasonably fortunate with the weather). The land drops off precipitously in almost all directions. To the west is the great gorge of the East Fork; the Narrows, described in the East Fork Transit, lie some 6000ft below you. To the north the wild canyon of the Fish Fork runs westwards from the slopes of Baldy to mix with the waters of the East Fork. To the south are the cliffs above Allison Gulch and the steep but shallow ridge we used to reach the summit. But perhaps the most dramatic features are to be seen to the east where the bulk of Mount Baldy dominates the background. San Antonio Ridge can now be seen



winding its way down from the West Baldy summit to where you stand on Iron Mountain. And, if you walk downhill a little way in an easterly direction, you will begin to discern the notches that present the principle obstacles for the hike along the ridge from one summit to the other.

But, on this hike, we are destined to return by the way that we came. The hike back to the trailhead ( $34^{\circ}14.21'N$   $117^{\circ}45.92'W$ , elevation 2030ft) is very long indeed (about 4hr 30min) and the cool waters of the East Fork are very inviting when you reach Heaton Flats again.



Map of upper section of Iron Mountain Hike





Map of lower section of Iron Mountain Hike

## 9.4 Rattlesnake Peak

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7 miles
- Elevation gain: 3500 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Glendora, Crystal Lake
- Difficulties: Much bushwhacking and some trail finding
- Special equipment: Plenty of water
- ACA Rating: 1A III

The only real excuse for including this hike in the book is that Rattlesnake Peak has been called the second most difficult summit (after Iron Mountain) to bag in the San Gabriels. Other than the challenge, this hike has little to recommend it. There is no water and virtually no shade and so, in summer, the heat can be overwhelming. Consequently, choose a cool fall, winter or spring day. There is only an overgrown use-trail for most of the way and therefore careful route and trail finding are needed in order to minimize the bushwhacking. Wear long pants and a long sleeved shirt.

### Trailhead

The trailhead of the hike is the parking area at the end of Shoemaker Canyon Road in the canyon of the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. Drive up Highway 39 from Azusa to the junction north of Morris and San Gabriel dams. Turn right across the bridge following the sign to the East Fork. About 5mi up the East Fork Road, turn left onto Shoemaker Canyon Road. Parenthetically, we note that this dead-end road has a curious history. In the early days of the Cold War it was begun with the idea of creating an escape route from the Los Angeles basin in the event of a nuclear war. Construction was halted when the authorities realized the foolishness of this plan. For present purposes, drive to the end of the road and

park by the locked gate (34°14.12'N 117°46.23'W, elevation 2210ft). Remember that you need a parking permit here.

## Hike

From the locked gate (34°14.12'N 117°46.23'W, elevation 2210ft) follow the dirt road for 1.1mi (about 35min) to the point where the route to Rattlesnake Peak climbs through the brush slope on your left (34°14.96'N 117°45.88'W, elevation 2670ft). This is the critical navigational point on the hike and can be recognized as follows. Begin to take note when the dirt road makes a broad detour to the left into a substantial lateral gully. As you emerge from this detour, the road rounds a headland and, immediately in front of you, you should see a pyramid-like pinnacle just to the left of the road. Just before this pyramid the road crosses a small but deep gully. You should be able to find the remains of an old road that travels up the left-hand side of this gully. (You will also see some road remains on the steep slope on the right of the gully but ignore this.) To reach the old road there is an initial steep climb of about 15ft; several ducks have also be placed here to mark this critical junction.

Having made the initial climb, proceed up the old road and veer right after about 100yds following the old road bed as it crosses to the other side of the gully. After another 100yds, the road reaches



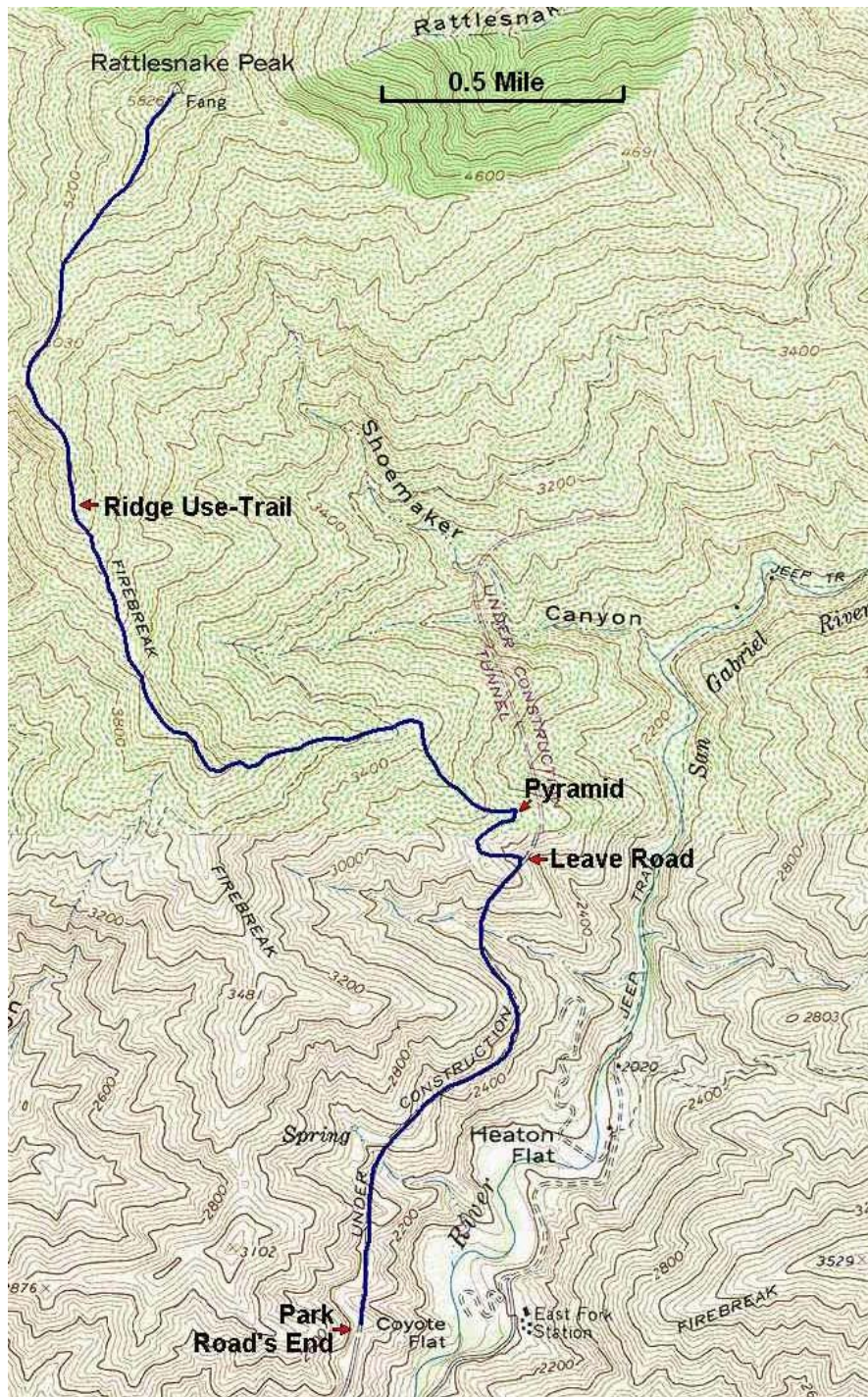
*Flowers on the way to Rattlesnake Peak.*



a saddle in a small cutting just to the west of the pyramid. Here you will recognize a prominent ridge that climbs steeply to the west from the saddle. The route follows a rough use-trail on the apex of this ridge. The use-trail is generally clear but overgrown in some places. At such points my advice is to stick to the apex of the ridge in order to relocate the trail a short distance further on.

The first part of the climb is steep and proceeds in a NW direction. However, at  $34^{\circ}15.19'N$   $117^{\circ}46.10'W$  and an elevation of 3380ft (and about 1hr 30min from the start), the trail reaches a broader ridge and turns westward (left), climbing more gently. Here there are several fields of dense brush and it becomes harder to follow the trail; head for the rocky outcroppings above you on the apex of the ridge. Then, at  $34^{\circ}15.12'N$   $117^{\circ}46.55'W$  and an elevation of 3940ft (and about 2hr 20min from the start) the ridge you have followed merges with a north/south ridge and the trail turns north to follow the latter. It is then a matter of following this ridge all the way to the summit. There are some ups and downs and places where the overgrown brush has obliterated the trail but, 4.5hrs and 3.4mi from the start you will reach the 5826ft summit of Rattlesnake Peak ( $34^{\circ}16.31'N$   $117^{\circ}46.61'W$ ).

The descent should take about 3.5hrs.



Map of Rattlesnake Peak Hike

## 9.5 Peacock Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4.3 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.5 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Baldy, Glendora
- Difficulties: Some downclimbing, one rappel that can be bypassed
- Special equipment: 100ft rope and rappeling gear if desired
- ACA Rating: 3A II

Cattle Canyon runs west from the shadow of Mount Baldy to join the East Fork of the San Gabriel River and, in doing so, creates the east-west Glendora Ridge as its southern wall. Several attractive canyons descend the north slope of Glendora Ridge feeding into the larger Cattle Canyon. Among these are Peacock Canyon and its western neighbor, Dime Canyon. The Glendora Ridge Road runs along the top of the ridge and thus allows access to the tops of these canyons. This easy adventure hike descends Peacock Canyon. It is best in the late fall when the leaf colors make it most attractive.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a car shuttle. From Los Angeles take the 210 Freeway east to the Azusa Avenue exit and Highway 39 northward into the mountains. Once past the Morris and San Gabriel dams, turn right on the East Fork road and drive 5mi to the place where the Glendora Mountain Road starts at a sharp switchback right. Do not take this road yet but proceed straight on for another 50yds to where the East Fork road crosses the Cattle Canyon river by way of a wooden bridge. Park one vehicle close to this bridge (34°13.76'N 117°46.13'W, elevation 1860ft). Then drive up the Glendora Mountain Road. After 4.9mi there is a tee-junction where the road reaches

the ridgetop at Horse Canyon Saddle. Turn left here onto Glendora Ridge. At 4.1mi from the tee-junction you will come to a promontory between Dime and Peacock Canyons. Stop here and look east to where the road rounds the head of Peacock Canyon. Try and identify a place beyond the saddle (Peacock Saddle) where a notable scree slope descends from the road. That is the drop-in point. It is 1mi from your viewpoint at a place just before another promontory. Park in the dirt area on the right side of the road (34°13.12'N 117°44.60'W, elevation 3590ft). The mile marker nearby reads 5.08.

## Hike

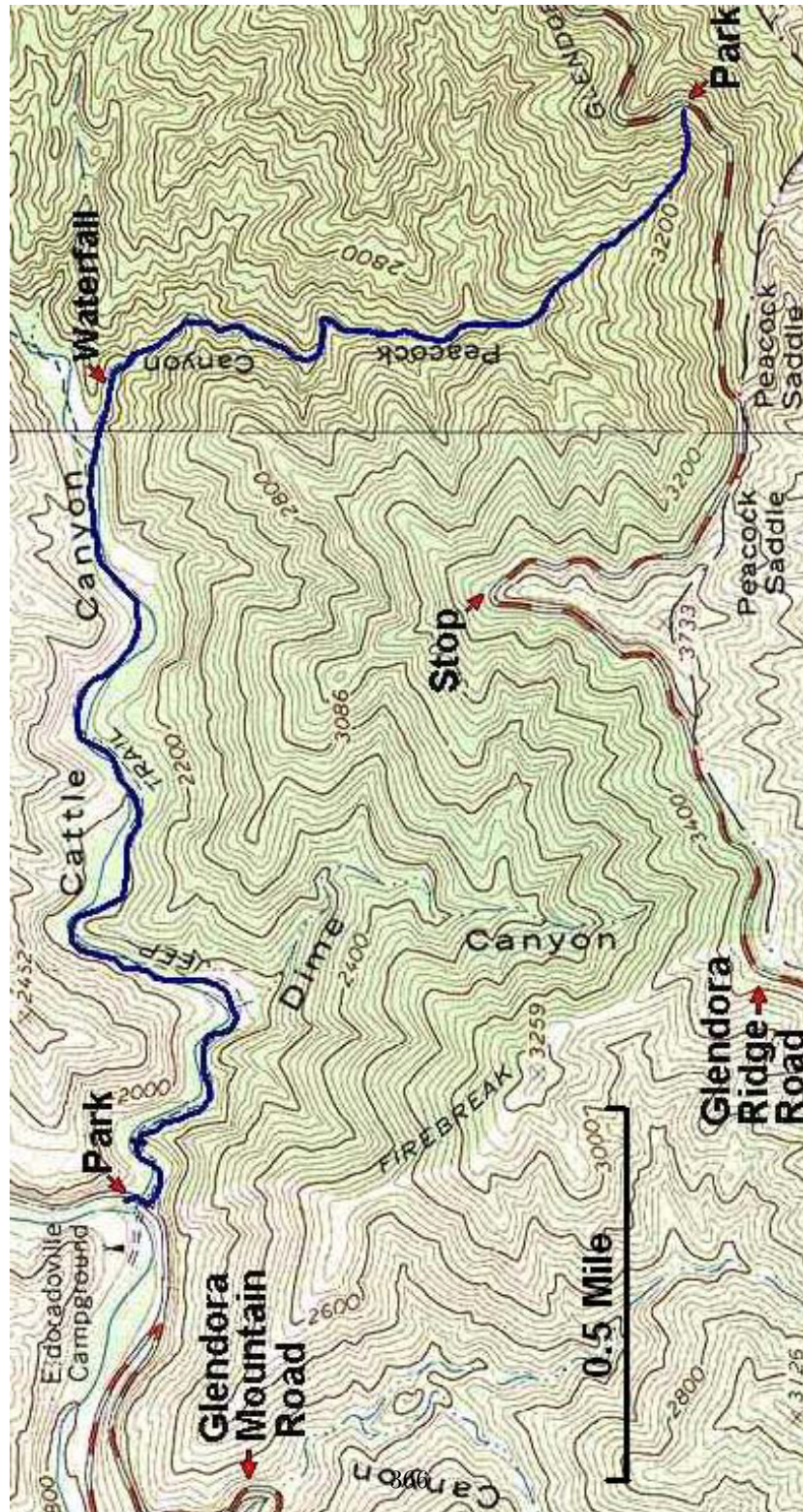
Leave the road (34°13.12'N 117°44.60'W, elevation 3590ft) and start straight down the steep scree slope toward the wooded canyon bottom below. The going is steep but not difficult. Initially the gully is quite open but gradually becomes more heavily wooded. After about 1hr you will encounter a series of small waterfalls, all of which can be bypassed or downclimbed though careful route finding may be needed. Shortly thereafter, at an elevation of about 2670ft, an equally large gully enters from the left and the canyon becomes less steep and the going faster. This is a pretty, bucolic canyon and you should linger to enjoy it. We came this way one dry December day and the fall colors played with the sunlight. Soon you encounter the first substantial waterfall, a 35ft inclined drop at an elevation of 2630ft. However this is fairly easily bypassed on the left.

The canyon continues to descend moderately gently but with some rather brushy sections. However a faint use-trail begins to be evident and eases the way. At 2330ft (and 2hrs 20min from the start) a sizeable branch canyon enters on the right and 10min later you will come to the second substantial waterfall, a 20ft drop that is best bypassed on the right using a narrow use-trail with some exposure. Another 20min beyond this you will come to a small 5ft waterfall that is awkward to manage. It can be downclimbed on the right or you may wish to practice rappeling using a small tree high on the left as the anchor.

Just about 30yds downstream of this 5ft drop at an elevation of 2200ft, you arrive at the largest waterfall in Peacock Canyon. It is a 35ft vertical drop into a knee deep pool. There are a number of small trees that can be used as the anchor; the rappel has an easy entry and is straightforward. However, if you wish to avoid

rappeling there is a narrow and precipitous trail up and around the waterfall on the right. The end of Peacock Canyon is just about 50yds downstream from the big waterfall. You will emerge into the broad Cattle Canyon and its flat, rock-strewn bottom at 34°13.80'N 117°45.03'W and an elevation of 2140ft about 3.5hrs from the start. Cross the river and find the dirt road that traverses Cattle Canyon running here along the north side of the canyon. Turn left and begin the gentle walk back down Cattle Canyon toward the place where the return vehicle was parked. It takes about 40min to cover the 1.4mi to the wooden bridge (34°13.76'N 117°46.13'W, elevation 1860ft). You should complete the hike in about 4.3hrs.





Map of Peacock Canyon Hike

## 9.6 Falling Leaf Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7.5 hours plus 45 minutes back along road
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.9 miles plus 1.7 miles back along road
- Elevation gain: 1300 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: About 6 rappels, one over 150ft, much boulder hopping and one tricky navigational challenge
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, rappeling equipment and 30ft webbing
- ACA Rating: 3A III

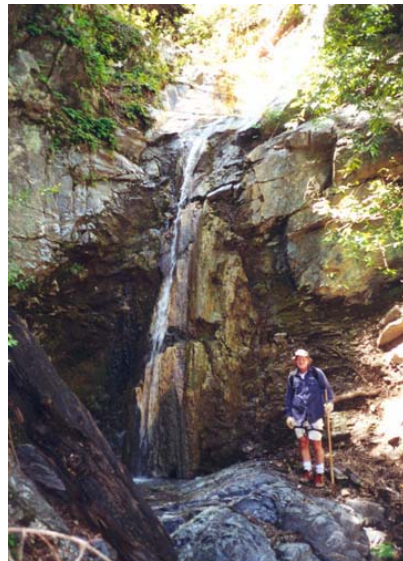
Just west of Mt. Baldy village, a mountain road leads up to the Cow Canyon Saddle and Overlook that provides a spectacular view west into the large region that drains into the San Gabriel River. From this point ridge after ridge of the San Gabriel mountains step away into the distance. In the foreground the deep fissure leading west below you is Cow Canyon as it winds its way toward its meeting with the East Fork of the San Gabriel. Off to your left the Glendora Ridge Road meanders in and out of tributary canyons on its way west. This hike explores a small part of this wilderness. From a point along the Glendora Ridge Road it descends the rugged Falling Leaf Canyon, a descent that involves about 6 rappels and negotiates numerous waterfalls including two large ones measuring about 150ft and 80ft. Eventually you reach the junction with Cow Canyon and trek upstream to a point where there is a steep route of ascent back up to the Glendora Ridge Road. This is a rugged adventure highlighted by the big waterfalls in Falling Leaf Canyon.

### Trailhead

From the cities of Claremont or Upland drive north up Mills Avenue or Padua Avenue to Mount Baldy Road. Follow Mount

Baldy Road into the mountains (San Antonio Canyon) and, as you enter Mount Baldy Village, turn left onto Glendora Ridge Road. A little under a mile up this road and you will arrive at Cow Canyon Saddle ( $34^{\circ}13.69'N$   $117^{\circ}40.24'W$ , elevation 4560ft). Pull into the parking area here to enjoy the view and get your bearings. Then continue another 2.2mi along the Glendora Ridge Road to base of the deep recess cut into the ridge by Falling Leaf Canyon. Leave your vehicle in the small parking area (marked by a trash can) on the south side of the road ( $34^{\circ}13.06'N$   $117^{\circ}41.89'W$ , elevation 4400ft). To confirm that you are in the right place look for two old water tanks a short distance up the wooded slope on the south side of the road.

**Addendum:** At the end of this hike you will climb up to the road at a point about 0.6mi west of Cow Canyon Saddle. There is a dirt pull-out on the north side of the road at this point ( $34^{\circ}13.52'N$   $117^{\circ}40.70'W$ , elevation 4460ft). The pull-out is not easily identified but, from the edge of the road, you can see a long way down the steep scree slope that is the ascent route. If you can identify this point you might wish to deposit a bicycle there so that one person can ride back along the road at the end of the hike in order to recover



*Left: The big waterfall. Right: Second 80ft rappel.*



the vehicle. This will avoid the 1.7mi hike back along the road.

## Hike

From the parking area (34°13.06'N 117°41.89'W, elevation 4400ft), cross the road and start down the stream bed of Falling Leaf Canyon. Water usually flows the whole length of this canyon. Initially the going is easy in a shady wooded canyon with little brush. Consequently it is quite a surprise when, 45min from the start at an elevation of 4120ft you arrive at a spectacular overlook into a deep cliff-ringed bowl that cannot be seen from higher up. A big waterfall drops vertically about 150ft into the abyss below you. Using the tree on the left at the lip as your anchor, there are two alternative rappelling routes to the bottom of this big waterfall. You can single strand rappel directly down the route of the waterfall, a straight drop of about 150ft. This is a wet rappel but could be fun on a hot day. Or you can opt for the easier, dry route down an old channel on the right. This is best done in two stages, first by double rappeling about a third of the way down to a large tree in the center right of the dry channel, and then double rappeling the rest of the way using this tree as anchor. Whichever route you use, take a moment at the bottom to enjoy this magnificent waterfall that is not marked on the topo map.

A small cascade immediately follows the big waterfall but this is easily downclimbed on the left side. Then, just a short distance further downstream you will arrive 1hr 30min from start at an elevation of 3950ft at a second large waterfall, an 80ft cascade spilling down a broad steep rock face. Use the small tree on the left for a dry and straightforward descent.

The canyon continues shady and wooded and, 2hr from the start at an elevation of 3700ft, you will come to a pretty 40ft vertical ribbon waterfall. You might chose to rappel using the tree above some rocks on the right. On the other hand once you surmount those rocks you can discern an easy descent trail on the right. A little further downstream (2hr 20min from start at 3540ft), you will encounter a vertical 60ft waterfall. A trail around on the right bypasses these falls via a tributary that enters on the right immediately downstream of the falls. Note the pretty waterfall in this tributary a few yards upstream. Just a short distance downstream, 2hr 30min from the start and at an elevation of 3520ft there is an awkward 15ft

waterfall without a safe climbing route on either side. Rappel down using the tree on the right.

An uneventful section ends at an elevation of 3280ft when, 3hr 20min from the start, you reach the top of an awkward series of small waterfalls in a slot with a blind corner. It is probably possible to proceed down the slot, downclimbing and perhaps rappeling. But since we could not tell what lay around the blind corner we opted for a safer route, climbing up the slope on the right and then contouring about 20yds through the bushes to where the trees stopped. Using one of these trees as anchor we then rappeled down through the branches into the middle of the slot and from there to the bottom of the lowest waterfall, a total descent of about 60ft. Twenty minutes later you will encounter an attractive 50ft ribbon waterfall with a rough descent trail on the left that involves a tricky friction slope descent at one point.

Finally, 4hr from start and at an elevation of 3100ft, you push through some bushes and arrive at the end of Falling Leaf Canyon where it empties into Cow Canyon ( $34^{\circ}13.79'N$   $117^{\circ}41.98'W$ , elevation 3100ft). At this point Cow Canyon is broad and open with a substantial stream. Turning right and facing upstream, you start on a long, 2.5hr trek up Cow Canyon to the point (the “exit point”) where you will climb out and back up to the Glendora Ridge Road. There is almost no use-trail in Cow Canyon and the best route over most of its length is boulder-hopping in the stream itself. Some



*Left: Third waterfall. Right: Climbing down the chute.*



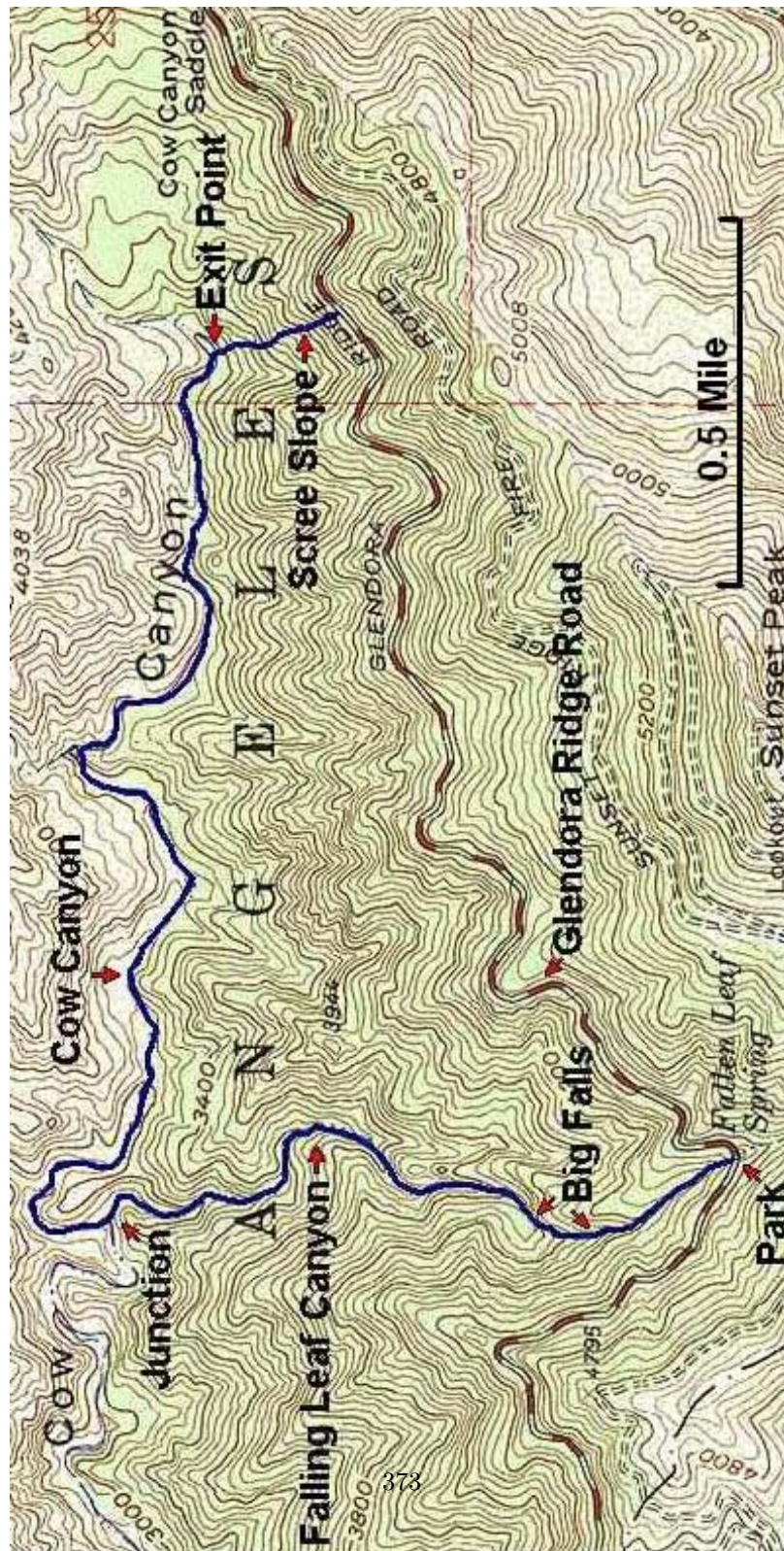
bush-whacking is needed and in several places and you need to be careful to stay in the main canyon.

As you progress upstream, the canyon gradually narrows and becomes more wooded. Indeed, at one point near the end of the trek, it narrows to a slot filled with a series of small pools. You may need to get your feet wet here. Several hundred yards upstream of these identifiable narrows, look carefully for the markers that identify the exit point. You should reach this important way point (34°13.67'N 117°40.76'W, elevation 3880ft) 6.5hr from start of the hike. Obviously it is very important not to miss the exit point. It occurs in a wooded section and the canyon turns left just upstream of the exit point. It is presently marked by a large, stream-bridging log whose root end projects a few feet into the steep chute on the right. That chute is the start of the exit route. On the other, left side of the stream is a broad wooded bench and several large boulders. I left two ducks, one on either side of the entrance to the chute, one on the root end of the log and the other on a rocky shelf on the right side of the entrance.

Pause here and summon your resources for the steep climb ahead. Then proceed up the initially very steep chute, climbing up onto the earthen slope on the left side in several places in order to bypass a number of small dryfalls. Soon the slope of the gully bed eases a little and allows more continuous progress for several hundred yards. But keep a sharp lookout for a large 55 gallon drum embedded in the left bank of the gully. About 30yds downstream of the 55 gallon drum, you should leave the streambed and proceed up a steep scree slope to the left or east of the gully. As you proceed up this slope and emerge from the trees you should find yourself at the bottom of a long and steep, but open scree slope with almost no vegetation. It must have been the track of a major earth slide. Climb straight up this scree slope aiming first for the shade of a prominent conifer tree several hundred feet above you. Above this tree the slope gets even steeper. There are several ways to reach the road that is only about 100ft above you. I recommend veering right across the top of a small cliff and onto a wooded ridge that provides the easiest ascent to the road.

Finally, 7.5hr from start at 34°13.52'N 117°40.70'W and an elevation of 4460ft, you arrive back at Glendora Ridge Road. Turning right (west), it is a fairly level 1.7mi hike back along the road to

the car. If you can roughly locate this exit point during your early morning drive to the trailhead then you could deposit a bicycle here so that the driver can ride back along the road to the vehicle while the others wait for him or her to return.



Map of Falling Leaf Canyon Hike

## 9.7 Lookout Mountain

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.4 miles
- Elevation gain: 2550 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount San Antonio, Mount Baldy
- Difficulties: Navigation
- Special equipment: GPS, topo map

Summit of Lookout Mountain from ridge trail During his distinguished scientific and academic career Albert Michelson, Americas first Nobel Laureate, made some of the most important measurements of the speed of light. Starting about 1920, Michelson began planning a definitive measurement from the Mount Wilson Observatory using a baseline to Lookout Mountain, a prominent bump on the south ridge of Mount San Antonio, some 22 miles away. The measurements used mirrors on the summits of Mount Wilson and Lookout Mountain.

In 1922, the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey began two years of painstaking measurement of the baseline. When this was established in 1924, the experiments were carried out over the next two years led to a published value for the speed of light of 299,7964 km/s. Famous as the measurement is, it was beset by problems, not least of which was the haze created by the smoke from forest fires that blurred the mirror image. It is also probable that the intensively detailed work of the Geodetic Survey, with an estimated error of less than one part in 1 million, was compromised by a shift in the baseline arising from the Santa Barbara earthquake of 29 June 1925 (magnitude 6.3).

This non-technical adventure follows the trail that Michelson and his aides used to reach the summit of Lookout Mountain. The route consists of an unmaintained trail through a pristine canyon and rugged sections of the Sheep Mountain Wilderness where you could encounter Nelson bighorn sheep. It was built originally to access

a USFS lookout on Lookout Mountain but was abandoned in the 1930s. It does not appear on current USGS topographical maps. Today it is a strenuous 10-mile hike up through the West Fork of Bear Creek, a nearly pristine riparian area above Mount Baldy Village. To reach the summit of Lookout Mountain you first follow the Baldy Trail (the original miners trail to the summit of Mount San Antonio) from Mount Baldy Village to a small meadow known as Bear Flat. From Bear Flat you follow an unmaintained trail that originally led to a USFS lookout on Lookout Mountain. My thanks to Wayne Steinmetz who showed me this trail to Lookout Mountain.



*Left: Summit of Lookout Mountain from ridge trail. Right: Contouring into West Fork of Bear Creek.*



## Trailhead

Drive up Baldy Road to Mount Baldy Village. In the center of the village on the left and just before the Forest Service Visitor Center there is a parking lot where you should leave your vehicle.

## Hike

From the parking lot in Mount Baldy village (elevation 4267ft and coordinates 34°14.27'N 117°39.47'W), hike up the steep paved Bear Canyon road past the Community Church and various dwellings to the end of the pavement. Here you cross the stream and start up the maintained Bear Canyon trail. It switchbacks up the right side of the canyon and you should take the right fork at one or two junctions. About 1hr and 1.6mi from the start you will arrive at Bear Flats (5470ft and 34°14.83'N 117°39.27'W). Here the maintained trail crosses over to the left side of the stream and on the other side of the stream is a sloping, grassy area that constitutes Bear Flat though at other times of the year it is covered in ferns. There should be a trail marker just on the other side of the stream.

Here you leave the maintained trail that proceeds on to the summit of Mount Baldy. Instead you need to search for a faint trail that branches off to the left just beyond the stream and proceeds to the left of the trail sign. After it enters the bushes and crosses through a small wooded draw it becomes easier to follow as it contours upwards around a bluff. Prior to the 1930s this was a maintained trail that eventually led up to the Fire Lookout Station on Lookout Mountain. As it continues to climb and contour around the bluff it is clear that some effort was required to cut this trail into the steep rock slopes. Eventually as you leave the open slopes of the broad ridge and descend slightly into the West Fork of Bear Creek you will pass the remains of an old wooden gate put here to form a corral for the horses used at the trail camp further up the canyon. The surroundings now become heavily wooded and, about 2hrs from the start you descend to the side of the perennial stream that flows through the West Fork of Bear Creek. Here there are some very pretty cascades and pools that are delightful on a hot day. As it continues up the right side of the canyon the trail becomes fainter and more difficult to follow. It is best if you can follow it where it switchbacks in several places for the going is easier and a little

faster on the trail. If you lose it just proceed up the right side of the stream bed and you will reconnect with the now quite faint trail.

About 2.5hrs and 2.8mi from the morning start at an elevation of 6020ft and  $34^{\circ}15.39'N$   $117^{\circ}39.99'W$  you should arrive at a fork in the canyon that is important to identify for here you must cross over the small stream and proceed up the left fork. About 15min later at 6200 you may cross the stream again and continue up the draw that is rapidly becoming more open and shallow so the going is easier. There is almost no trail here but you simply continue up, veering left as you ascend the last few hundred feet over open ground to the ridgetop overhead.

You should reach the ridgetop about 3hrs 15min and 3.1mi after the morning start. Here at  $34^{\circ}15.51'N$   $117^{\circ}40.23'W$  and an elevation of 6520ft you are welcomed by a spectacular, almost vertical view to the west down into Cattle Canyon some 2000ft below. The awesome side canyon walls below fall away dramatically toward the gravel bottomed canyon far below. The vertical canyon leading down to it would be a spectacular canyon descent with many huge rappels! Directly below you can see the workings of the Andrew Tungsten Mine ( $34^{\circ}15.38'N$   $117^{\circ}41.00'W$  and 4720ft). The owner, a man called Ron Curtis, has claimed that he could make millions from this mine if it were not for the Forest Service and the conservationists. His fa-



*Cattle Canyon from the ridge top.*

ther staked out the 1500-acre tungsten claim in the 1950s, before the canyon was included in the Sheep Mountain Wilderness Area. It remains to be seen how the dispute between the Federal Government and Ron Curtis will end; meanwhile the workers commute each day down the rough road from Cow Canyon Saddle and up Cattle Canyon to the mine.

From this ridgetop viewpoint you continue left climbing along the apex of the ridge for a few hundred yards until you can see the trail that begins to leave the apex to contour to the south around several intermediate peaks, one labeled 6930ft on the topo map. This contouring trail continues until you come to a shallow saddle in the ridgetop at about 6630ft at which time the top of Lookout Mountain is clearly visible ahead of you. The trail leads through the low Manzanita bushes to the broad, open summit of Lookout Mountain. You should reach the summit at 6817ft and 34°14.93'N 117°40.51'W about 4hrs 15min and 4.2mi from the morning start.

Various scattered artifacts are all that remain of Michaelson's famous experiment and the fire lookout tower that once adorned this summit. Looking in a southwest direction you can see the summit of Mount Wilson where the other part of Michaelson's device was located. However, the views in all directions are spectacular. Mount Baldy looms high above you to the northeast and you can follow San Antonio ridge as it proceeds west from Baldy to Iron Mountain along the way proceeding through several notches including the notorious Gunsight Notch. Off to the east you can look up Icehouse Canyon and Telegraph Peak. Directly across to the east lies the impressive ridge on the east side of San Antonio Canyon with its highest peak, Ontario Peak.

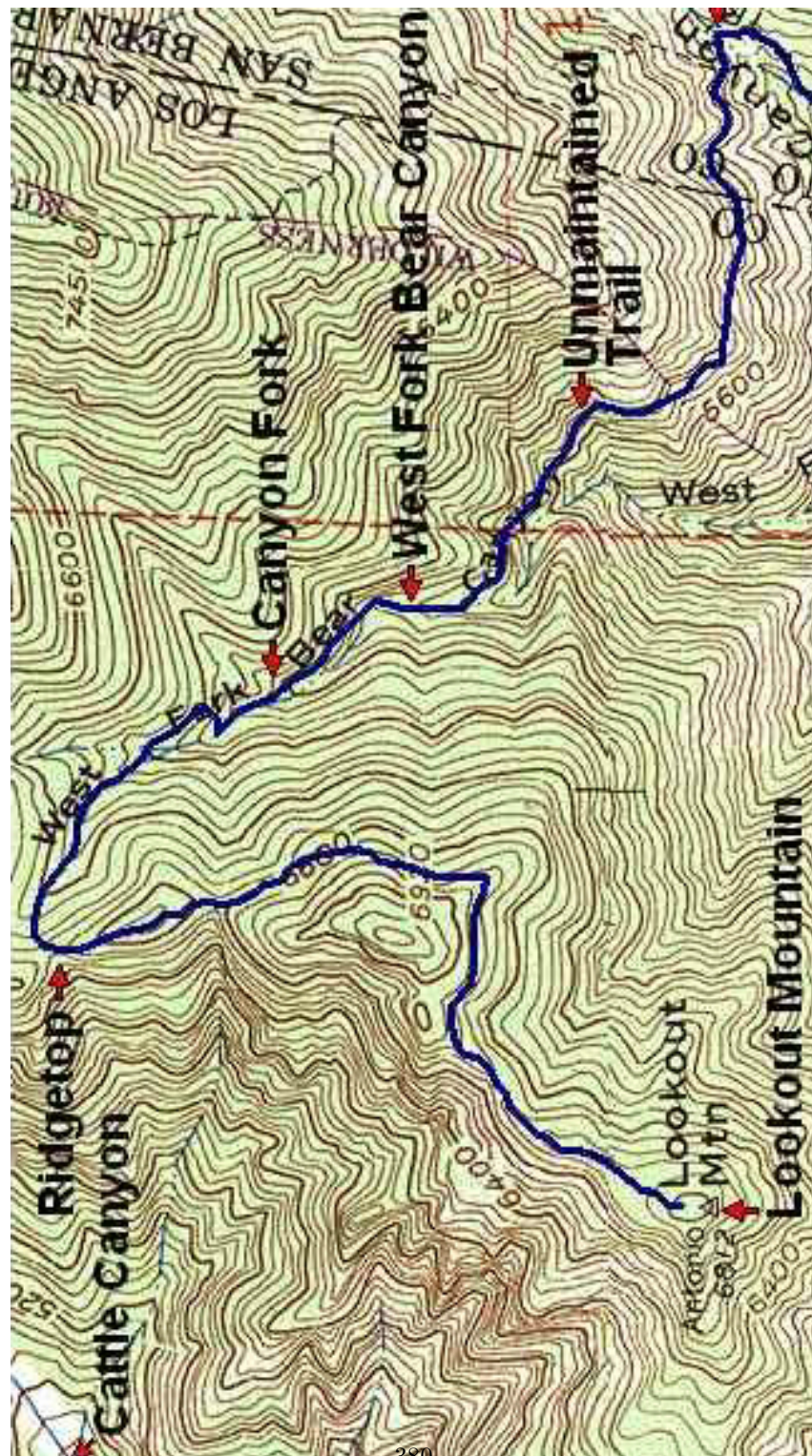
The return hike follows the same route as the ascent and takes about 3.5hrs. There are two important waypoints. First it is clearly important to begin your descent from the ridgetop at the same point at which you ascended to it. Later it is important to make sure and find the trail as it leaves the bottom of the West Fork and begins the traverse across the bluff to Bear Flat. This begins with a gradual climb out of the deeply wooded bottom of Bear Flat at a place just after the stretch with small cascades and nice pools. Once past the remains of the old wooden gate it is easy to follow the unmaintained trail the rest of the way.

The adventure takes a total of 8.5hrs during which you cover about 8.4mi.



Map of first section of Lookout Mountain Hike





380

Map of second section of Lookout Mountain Hike



## 9.8 San Antonio Ridge

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 13.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 13.4 miles
- Elevation gain: 2270 feet up to Mount Baldy summit
- Elevation loss: A total of 10000 feet of steep descent
- USGS Topo Maps: Mount San Antonio, Mt. Baldy, Glendora
- Difficulties: A very long and exhausting hike requiring at least 5 liters of liquid; some scrambling and climbing
- Special equipment: None needed
- ACA Rating: 2A IV

A long and, in places, dramatic ridge runs from Mount San Antonio (Mount "Baldy") west to the 8007ft summit of Iron Mountain. Called San Antonio Ridge, this rugged spine at 7000-8000ft elevations makes for a spectacular but very challenging adventure hike. It begins with an ascent of Baldy and then a descent down along the apex of the ridge. This is the beautiful high country of the San Gabriels and the first part of the traverse is relatively easy going with great vistas off to both sides, and especially abrupt drops into Fish Fork to the north. As you come within a mile or so of Iron Mountain, the going gets much harder. Here the ridge is interrupted by several notches where the terrain falls away awesomely on both sides. Coming from the east, the first of these is called Gunsight Notch. Many parties have turned back here, overwhelmed by the vertical terrain and the loose rock. In fact, there is a fairly easy route across Gunsight Notch (described below). But there remain many more challenges along the rugged ridge to "Big Bad Iron". And once on the summit, you are still faced with a very long and, in places, rough descent to the East Fork trailhead.

The hiking difficulties of the San Antonio Ridge are compounded by two other problems. Most obvious is the need for the long car shuttle between the East Fork trailhead and the Mount Baldy ski

lift parking lot. Much more problematic is the issue of whether to attempt to do it as a day hike or as an overnight hike. In the former case you can travel fast and light but it is almost inevitable that you will have to hike part of the way in the dark. An overnight hike implies maneuvering a heavier pack through some tight and steep places. It also means carrying much more water (perhaps eight quarts per person as opposed to five on the day hike). Note that there is no water available anywhere along the route and almost everyone underestimates the water required on this hike.

Because of the summer heat or winter snow, the hike is probably best in the late spring or fall.

### **Trailhead**

The first step in setting up the car shuttle for this adventure is to drive two vehicles up highway 39 into the mountains north of Azusa. After passing the Morris and San Gabriel Dams, turn right onto the East Fork road and follow this for about 6mi, past the junction with the Glendora Mountain Road and over the Cattle Canyon bridge to the trailhead parking area ( $34^{\circ}14.21'N$   $117^{\circ}45.92'W$ , elevation 2030ft) next to the East Fork Ranger Station. Park the return vehicle here and then drive back to the junction with the Glendora Mountain Road.



*San Antonio Ridge from West Baldy.*

Fork left and follow the Glendora Mountain Road up onto the ridge and east to the junction with the Mount Baldy Road in Mount Baldy Village. Turn left and follow Mount Baldy Road up to the end in the parking lot for the Mount Baldy Ski Area (34°16.20'N 117°37.32'W, elevation 6480ft). Park here near the bottom of the ski lift to the Mount Baldy notch.

## Hike

The first task is to reach the top of Mount Baldy early in the morning and here you are faced with a choice. You can either begin at dawn and hike up the steep trail from the ski lift parking area to Mount Baldy Notch or you can wait for the ski lift to open about 9am (sometimes earlier) thus saving some energy but losing valuable daylight. My own judgment is that it is better to forego the ski lift and get to the Notch before 7am. But the times and distances given below are measured from the Notch.

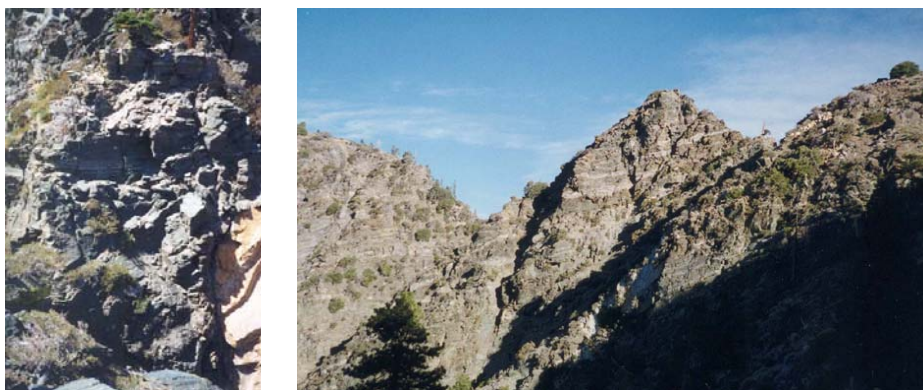
From Baldy Notch (34°16.47'N 117°36.62'W, elevation 7775ft) follow the standard route to the summit of Mount Baldy. First follow the dirt road that crosses and recrosses the ski area up to the top of Ski Lift #4. From there the trail proceeds along the crest of the dramatic Devil's Backbone before traversing around to the south side of Mount Harwood (elevation 9552ft). The trail flattens as it follows the ridge between Harwood and Baldy but then steepens for the final climb up the scree slope to the summit of Baldy (34°17.35'N 117°38.77'W, elevation 10064ft). You should reach this point, 3mi from the start, after 1hr 50min of hiking.

From the summit of Baldy it only takes about 15min to hike the 0.5mi along a use-trail to the 9988ft twin summit known as West Baldy (34°17.21'N 117°39.27'W). You should pause here to recognize Iron Mountain off to the west with the San Antonio Ridge wandering over toward it via a number of saddles and prominences. The route down along the Ridge is easy to identify. A use-trail follows the apex of the ridge and descends quite steeply in places over rocky ground covered with low scrub. The right side of the ridge top tends to be a little easier and less brushy than the left but you should not drift too far from the apex especially as the foliage transitions from scrub to pine forest in which it is less easy to see ahead. About 1hr 15min into the descent you should come to a very clear open saddle just below the pine forest. You should reach this

7772ft saddle ( $34^{\circ}17.61'N$   $117^{\circ}40.39'W$ ), 4.8mi and 3hr 15min from the start.

The next section along a fairly level and open ridge top is easy going. After a brief descent you climb gradually to a low summit (elevation 7903ft) and then descend again to a second saddle (7367ft) about 0.8mi from the first. Beyond this is a slightly more strenuous climb of 400ft to a more prominent high-point. This 7758ft summit ( $34^{\circ}17.46'N$   $117^{\circ}41.72'W$ , 4.5hr and 6.1mi from the start) is an excellent place for an overnight camp should you have decided on a multiday trip. There are flat areas and flat rocks on top to serve as sleeping or eating places.

Beyond campsite peak the ridge descends more steeply to the first major obstacle on the ridge, Gunsight Notch ( $34^{\circ}17.39'N$   $117^{\circ}42.01'W$ , an elevation of 72805ft, 6.4mi and 4hr 50min from the start). Viewed from just above the final steep descent to the low point of the notch, Gunsight appears to be a formidable hurdle requiring technical climbing equipment. Moreover the terrain falls away dramatically on both sides leaving little hope of crossing at lower elevations. In fact the route across Gunsight Notch is relatively easy and can be achieved safely without even a belay. But before attempting the crossing you should carefully assess your condition, the daylight remaining and your water resources. If any are marginal you might seriously consider retreating. There are two retreat options. The most obvious is to go back the way you came and this is the primary recommendation. There is however a second possibility that will take you to water within a few hours. This second escape route



*Left: Gunsight Notch from the east side. Right: Notches from the escape ridge.*

proceeds along the lateral ridge that branches southward from San Antonio Ridge at a point just east of Gunsight Notch. We digress briefly to describe that route.

**Aside: Secondary Escape Route:** The secondary escape route

starts from the east side of Gunsight Notch. First you transition south east and downwards to a scree slope that leads onto the west side of a lateral ridge running southwards. Proceed along the scree slope just below the ridge crest until you encounter the wire cables of the Gold Dollar Mine strewn down the western slope of the escape ridge. Descend along the route of the cables to a main shaft with tipping structure and then continue on down the route of the cables to a wooden shelter with bed and lantern. It is important to locate this hut because the next part is tricky; you must contour along a narrow ledge to the left (south) and locate the trail that was used to access the mine. After paralleling the ridge spine for a short distance, the trail reaches the ridge summit and descends along it for some distance. At a point where the ridge spine steepens, try to find the much less distinct trail that reverses direction and contours along to the north into Coldwater Canyon on the east side of the escape ridge. Eventually this trail peters out and you must find a way to scramble down one of the steep gullies into Coldwater Canyon where there is welcome water. From here proceed down Coldwater Canyon to the Widman ranch and then follow the road all the way to the intersection with Cattle Canyon. Continue downstream all the way to the Cattle Canyon bridge on the East Fork Road. Turn right and walk up the road to the East Fork Trailhead where you left the return vehicle. From Gunsight Notch to this trailhead takes about 7.5hr.

### **Resume Ridge Hike:**

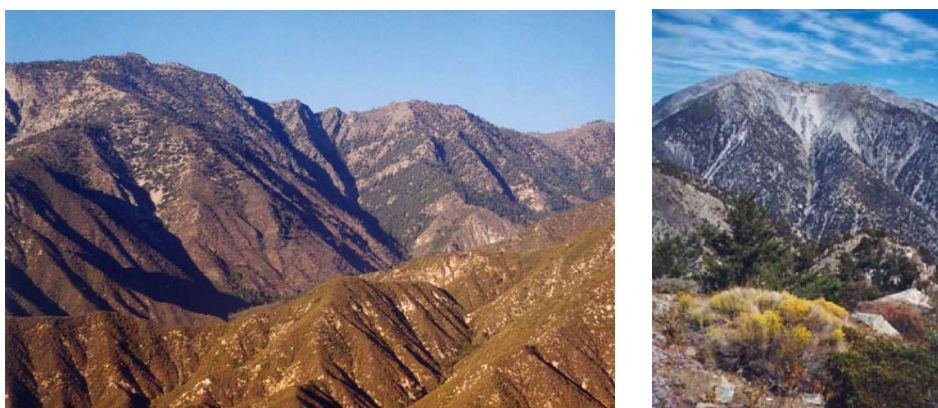
Assuming you have decided to continue along the ridge to Iron Mountain, the following is the route across Gunsight Notch. Descend on the left side of the ridge to the low point of saddle in the Notch. From there, descend to the left on the west side and follow a short shelf to where a steep but readily climbable gully ascends. Climb up this gully to the apex of the rocky ridge beside a large dead tree. Then proceed straight up the rocky apex of the ridge to



the flat top on the west side of Gunsight Notch. The ridge climb is easy but a little airy. The route then follows the flat top and descends directly into the second notch. From the saddle point in the second notch climb up a few feet and contour flat left along a ledge for about 20yds. Then climb up a few feet and ascend diagonally up to the right to the apex of the rocky ridge on the west side of the second notch. Follow the apex of the ridge to the flat top on the west side of the second notch. It will take about 40min to cross both notches.

The rest of the route to the summit of Iron Mountain is simply a matter of following the ridge top, though this gets quite rugged in places. About 5hr 45min from the start you cross a small notch of white rock (7300ft) and 15min later a rugged, rocky ridge top that requires a little climbing to surmount the largest outcropping; I called this the Witches Backbone. Another hour of steep climbing is needed before you finally arrive, 7hr and 7.3mi from the start, at the summit of Iron Mountain ( $34^{\circ}17.30'N$   $117^{\circ}42.80'W$ , elevation 8007ft). It is not for nothing they call this "Big Bad Iron".

The descent from the summit of Iron Mountain to the East Fork trailhead has been described elsewhere in the Iron Mountain hike. It is a long and arduous task. It takes about 2.5hr to descend the 2.3mi to the 4580ft saddle ( $34^{\circ}15.53'N$   $117^{\circ}43.38'W$ ) where the Iron Mountain trail joins the old Allison Mine trail and where you transition to the better-maintained Heaton Flats Trail. If you do



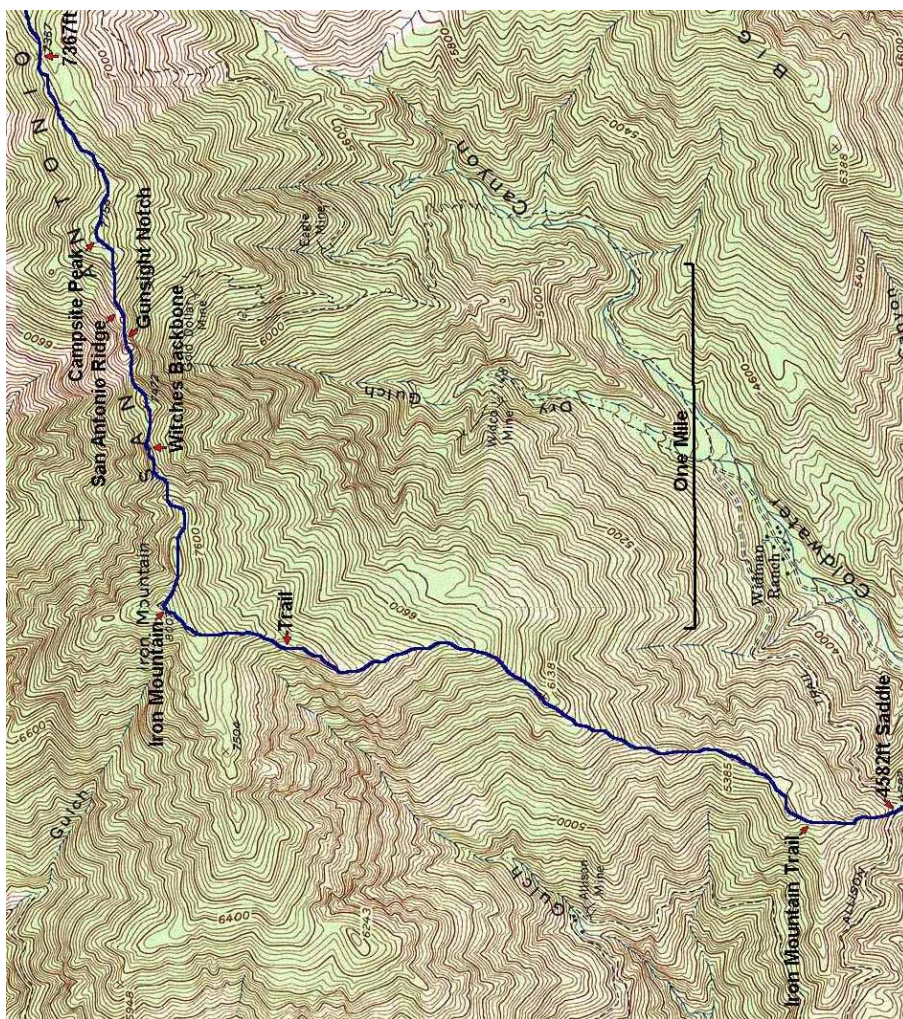
*Left: From the south, Iron Mountain on the left and the notches in the center. Right: Baldy and Ridge from Iron Mountain.*

the San Antonio Ridge as a day hike it is almost inevitable that you will do the last part in the dark so it pays to have hiked the Heaton Flats Trail before. From the 4580ft saddle it is another 3.3mi down the Heaton Flats Trail to Heaton Flats by the East Fork of the San Gabriel River. Turning left you finally hike south along the dirt road to the East Fork Trailhead ( $34^{\circ}14.21'N$   $117^{\circ}45.92'W$ , elevation 2030ft). The total distance for the hike is about 13.4mi and it should take about 13.5hr.



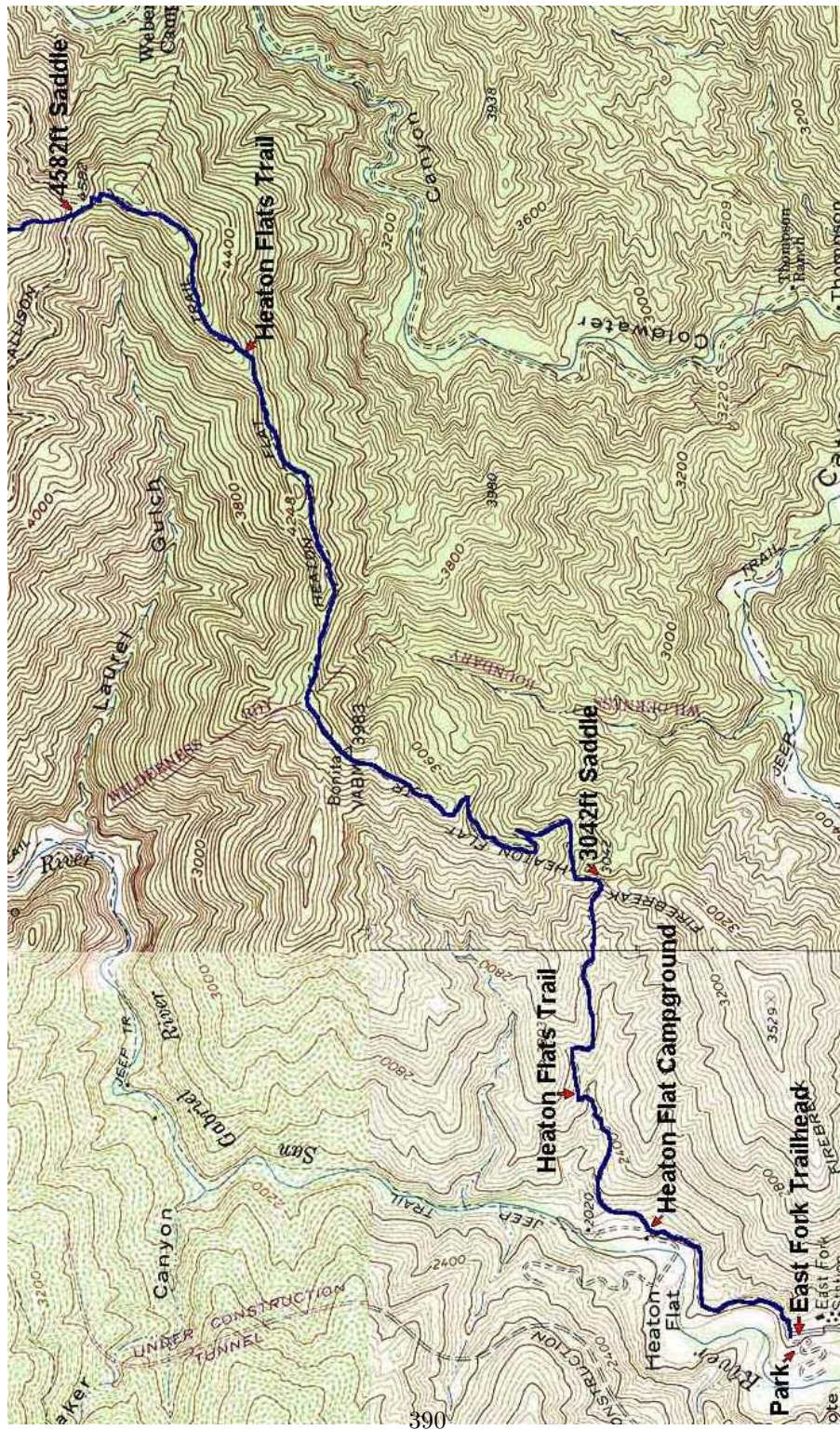






Map of second section of San Antonio Ridge Hike





### Map of third section of San Antonio Ridge Hike



## 9.9 San Antonio Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 7 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4 miles
- Elevation gain: 2000 feet
- USGS Topo Map: Mount San Antonio
- Difficulties: 6 rappels (one in a waterfall) and much boulder hopping
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, rappeling equipment, helmets, 40ft webbing, 3 rappel rings and drybags
- ACA Rating: 3B III

The southeastern flank of Mount Baldy consists of a great rock-rimmed bowl that has attracted skiers and other adventurers for the last century. In the days before ski lifts, the Sierra Club built an alpine hut in the focus of this bowl to shelter the intrepid skiers of those days gone by; and still today hikers and skiers make use of this shelter. San Antonio Creek drains the great bowl, burbling past the steps of the hut as it begins its descent toward the great canyon down below. While steep, the first part of this descent is relatively benign as the stream tumbles down over epochs of boulders. But as it approaches Manker Flats, the stream enters a dramatic vertical gorge where the water flies airborne over four large waterfalls known collectively as San Antonio Falls. The descent of these falls represent the crux of this adventure hike.

### Trailhead

From the cities of Claremont or Upland drive north up Mills Avenue or Padua Avenue to Mount Baldy Road. Follow Mount Baldy Road into the mountains (San Antonio Canyon), proceed through Mount Baldy Village, past the turn-off to Icehouse Canyon and up to the trailhead at Manker Flats (34°15.96'N 117°37.60'W, elevation

6160ft) just a few hundred yards short of the end of the road at the Baldy Notch Ski Area parking lot. The fire road that you will follow branches off to the left, blocked by the ubiquitous steel gate.

## Hike

Proceed up the initially asphalt-covered fire road as it contours into the canyon of San Antonio Creek. After just 15min and 0.6mi from the trailhead, you come to the hairpin bend ( $34^{\circ}16.24'N$   $117^{\circ}37.96'W$ , elevation 6370ft) where you have a spectacular view of San Antonio Falls as they crash down the vertical gorge to the broader boulder-strewn canyon

bottom. Take a few moments to proceed along the use-trail to the base of the falls, paying particular attention to the descent route described later. Once ready, go back to the fire road and continue along it as it climbs out of the canyon of San Antonio Creek again and turns north. About 150yds after that turn out of San Antonio Canyon, 0.4mi from the hairpin bend and 1mi from the start, you will come to the place where the trail leaves the road and climbs the slope on the left. This trail junction ( $34^{\circ}16.10'N$   $117^{\circ}37.70'W$ , elevation 6580ft) is not signposted and is easily missed so be alert as soon as you make the turn out of San Antonio Canyon. There is a



*Left: The first waterfall. Right: Third falls from bottom: Mark about to get very wet.*

trail-log table a short way up the trail that will confirm that you are on the right track. Soon the trail contours back into the canyon of San Antonio creek and there are several marvelous viewpoints where you can inspect the falls from high overhead. Higher up there are other places where you can view the more benign cascades above the waterfalls. In total, the climb to the Sierra Club hut ( $34^{\circ}16.88'N$   $117^{\circ}38.34'W$ , elevation 8150ft) is about 2000ft and it takes about 2hrs to cover the 2.5mi from the trailhead. The green hut is visible from far below and the last part of the climb seems endless as the hut appears closer than it is. Just about a hundred yards before the shelter the trail contours into the channel of San Antonio creek and there are several obvious drop-in points.

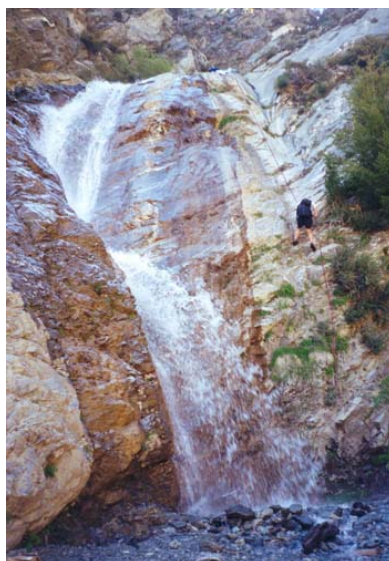
Initially the off-trail descent along the creek is rocky and moderately steep. Then, about 45min from the drop-in point, you arrive at the only substantial obstacle in the upper canyon, a 60ft waterfall that is not visible from the trail on the way up. There are several ways to negotiate this waterfall. We rappelled down to the right of the falls using a wizened old tree to the right of the lip as our anchor. The rock here is very fractured so helmets are recommended to avoid injury from falling rocks. If, however, you would prefer an alternate, there is a gully some distance to the right that can be used to descend. It can probably be reached by backtracking and then contouring and bushwhacking over to the right.

Below the waterfall there is another stretch of rocky descent where a faint use-trail follows the left bank of the stream. About 1hr 30min from the drop-in point, this culminates in a huge scree slope, almost a moraine blocking the canyon. Here you slide alot as you descend some distance to the right of the stream. During this descent, you might note a large and distinctive white boulder in the canyon a short distance downstream of the base of the scree slope. About 15min later, when you get to that point, you will encounter a substantial waterfall cascading down a rockface to the left of the boulder. The way to bypass these falls is to proceed down a sandy slope to the right of the boulder.

After boulder falls, the going becomes more rugged and you encounter a series of small waterfalls that can be negotiated or down-climbed. Then about 2hr 15min from the drop-in point, you arrive at the top of the series of spectacular waterfalls that constitute San Antonio Falls and the primary challenge of this adventure hike. The

first of these waterfalls is a modest 40ft cascade that is really just a continuation of the series you have been negotiating by downclimbing. This too can be downclimbed on the right where there are many good foot and hand holds but a belay is recommended. There are several rocks and small bushes that can serve as anchor for this belay.

A few yards downstream of these first falls you arrive at a natural rock platform where you can overlook the remaining four waterfalls and the dramatic gorge of San Antonio Falls. The canyon bottom can be seen far below you. The 40ft second falls fly off the left side of this platform into a rocky, spray-filled slot or cauldron where they make an abrupt right turn. Following the route of these falls is clearly inadvisable for you would end up in the watery maelstrom at the bottom of this slot. Instead there are two possible descent routes, one to the right and one to the left of the waterfall. The most spectacular would be to rappel off the right side of the platform. The problem here is the absence of a satisfactory anchor. The small stout bushes on the right wall could be used but need the back-up of several pitons. We opted for the much easier but less spectacular route on the left. Cross the stream and follow the use-trail up to the ridge on the left side of the canyon. The large, wizened tree



*Last waterfall.*

on the ridge top can be used to anchor the sloping descent down the rocky ridge that defines the left wall of the stream course at this point. This 90ft rappel (that could also be downclimbed fairly safely) places you below the second falls and just a short distance upstream of the lip of the third falls. However, a small but awkward cascade separates you from that lip. The trick here is to descend via a slot to the right of this small cascade.

You will now have arrived at the biggest challenge of this adventure, the third falls that disappear over a narrow lip and crash 80ft down a vertical, spray-filled slot to a gravel platform far below. The anchor for this descent is a large bush that may require a long piece of webbing in order to encircle its dispersed base. With a 200ft rope you can set up a double-strand rappel. The main problem is that the descent is very wet indeed, and you will be hammered by the falling water during the descent so place all valuables in dry bags and remove any glasses or hats that would inevitably be torn away. I was glad of the helmet that helped deflect some of the crashing water. The initial part of the descent is down a narrow slot to the left but this angles back into the main stream about 20ft below the lip and from this point on the descent is very wet indeed.

The fourth falls follow immediately and are a more modest 50ft cascade. There is a use-trail on the right that can be used to downclimb these fourth falls, following a broken angling ledge to the bottom. However, for safety we set up a simple (and dry!) rappel using the tree at the top of the trail on the right. This then brings you to the top of the fifth and last waterfall, an 80ft drop with a hiccup in the middle. Here there are two ways to descend. There is a ledge or groove to the right of the waterfall that many people use to climb from the canyon bottom to the top of this lowest waterfall. The descent here is a little airy but quite straightforward. However, it is more fun to rappel down the dry face to the left of the waterfall. For this purpose, a large boulder in the center of the stream can be wrapped to serve as the anchor, using a long piece of webbing to encircle it safely. You may well have a substantial audience for these last few rappels for the base of San Antonio Falls is a popular hiking destination for families.

You should arrive at the bottom of the falls about 4hrs 30min from the drop-in point, now high above you. After drying off a little, hike back up the short and well-traveled use-trail on the left side of



the canyon to the hairpin bend in the fire-road that you passed many hours ago ( $34^{\circ}16.24'N$   $117^{\circ}37.96'W$ , elevation 6370ft). It is an easy 15min stroll from there back down the road to the trailhead ( $34^{\circ}15.96'N$   $117^{\circ}37.60'W$ , elevation 6160ft) and the end of a great adventure hike down San Antonio Creek.



Map of San Antonio Creek Hike

## 9.10 Stoddard Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 4.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 2340 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: At least two rappels of 100ft and 40ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment for a 100ft descent along with 20ft of webbing and a rappel ring; a helmet is highly recommended
- ACA Rating: 3A III

Stoddard Canyon parallels the much larger San Antonio Canyon (Baldy Canyon) and joins it just above the entrance to the latter. The head of the canyon is fairly readily accessed from the dirt surfaced Barrett Stoddard road. The descent provides a moderate adventure hike that is notable for two reasons. The upper reaches are characterized by numerous large and luxuriant ferns that give the canyon a tropical flavor. The lower reaches contain one section of narrows that represents the only major obstacles on this hike, namely two sets of waterfalls. The second of these can be easily bypassed but the first set requires two rappels, one of 100ft and the other of 40ft. The waterfalls are lovely and more than repay the effort to reach them.

### Trailhead

Two vehicles are required for this one way hike. Drive up the Mt. Baldy road past the San Antonio Dam and turn left on Mountain Avenue. This descends to and crosses the San Antonio Wash, passes the Forest Service Station and turns south. About 0.6mi from the road junction you will notice a dirt parking area on the left, located just before the bridge over the Stoddard Canyon Wash. You may

also notice a trail sign just beyond the dirt parking area. Park one vehicle here ( $34^{\circ}10.35'N$   $117^{\circ}40.44'W$ , elevation 2440ft) and then backtrack in the other vehicle to the previously mentioned road junction. Turn right and continue north up the Mount Baldy road. About 4.2mi from the Stoddard Canyon exit and just after passing over the Hog Back you will come to the turn-off to the Barrett Stoddard Road, a dirt track that branches off to the right. There are a number of roads here but you want the rough dirt road that descends to and crosses the wash while traveling in a downstream direction. It then climbs the opposite wall of the canyon before turning in toward a wooded recess in Barrett Canyon. About 0.8mi from the main road and after passing several houses in the woods you will come to a closed gate across the road ( $34^{\circ}13.04'N$   $117^{\circ}39.64'W$ , elevation 3920ft). Park near here in a way that does not impede local residents. If you choose not to drive up this rough dirt road but rather to park near the main road, it will add about 0.8mi to your hike.

## Hike

Passing through the gate ( $34^{\circ}13.04'N$   $117^{\circ}39.64'W$ , elevation 3920ft), continue on up the Barrett Stoddard Road as it climbs along the



*Left: High falls in Stoddard Canyon. Right: Second set of falls.*

side of San Antonio Canyon, high above the highway. After 45min or 1.75mi, a 4450ft saddle is reached and, traversing this saddle, you pass out of San Antonio Canyon and into the head of Stoddard Canyon. From this saddle, the trail to Stoddard Peak (4624ft) branches off to the right but we stay on the dirt road. The relatively flat area just after the saddle is known as Stoddard Flat. A few hundred yards beyond this you should pause to look down into the brushy gulch that is the start of Stoddard Canyon. While you could drop into the canyon here, I recommend that you continue on along the road to a point about 0.5mi from the saddle. There, just before a prominent rocky outcropping (at 34°11.90'N 117°39.49'W, an elevation of 4280ft and 1hr from the start), a steep and boulder-strewn wash crosses the road and descends into the main canyon. Water often flows in this wash. More important, it provides a slightly less brushy means of dropping into the canyon. As you descend you will know you are on the right route when you pass the skeletons of two vehicles, one an old Toyota Landcruiser.

This first part of the off-trail route is slow going because it entails much bushwhacking. But these upper reaches are quite beautiful in places with large verdant ferns and a year-long stream. Soon the bottom gradient levels out, the canyon becomes more open and wooded and the going becomes easier and faster. Hopefully you will take time to enjoy this lovely, gentle canyon. About 2hr 30min from the trailhead and at an elevation of 3440ft a large gully enters from the left but this is not readily identifiable on the topo map. A little further downstream, the canyon bottom becomes more overgrown for a brief stretch and a section with many brambles is particularly nasty. Near here you will discern the substantial mass of the 4198ft Frankish Peak directly ahead. Shortly thereafter, the canyon turns west. At 3hr 30min from the trailhead and at an elevation of 3080ft another large gully enters from the left. This is the fork on the topo map that descends from the saddle between Stoddard and Cucamonga Canyons (and could potentially be used to access Stoddard Canyon from the 4WD road that climbs up from Cucamonga Canyon to Frankish Peak).

About 25min beyond this junction, the canyon narrows markedly and you suddenly arrive at the first of the big waterfalls in Stoddard Canyon (34°10.76'N 117°39.78'W, elevation 2980ft). This is a dramatic drop into a wooded abyss; from above it is very difficult

to see the bottom and gauge the height of the drop. A narrow ledge trail leads around the right corner above the falls but, a few yards around the corner, the trail becomes quite dangerous and unstable. We did not proceed further but set anchors around two sturdy bushes above the trail for the purpose of descent at this point. An alternative would be to continue further along the hazardous trail (best done by roping into our anchors to provide protection) to where several old ropes are hanging. Descending there may avoid some of the dangers ahead.

From the location of our anchors, the height of the descent cannot be judged since the bottom is not visible. In fact it is a 100ft descent. The rappel itself is quite straightforward and dry but the rock about 20ft from the top is fractured and unstable and creates a serious danger from falling rocks. For this reason, a helmet is strongly recommended. But, as you descend, take time to enjoy the falls and the watery grotto they have created. At the bottom a small ledge beside a beautiful circular pool allows you to pause and unhook from the rappel. However, because of the danger from falling rock, you should cross to the other side of the 3ft deep pool before pulling down the rope.

The water from the pool immediately flows down another falls and this second step requires a 40ft rappel using as anchor one of the trees on the left side of the pool. The rappel is a little awkward in that you will want to stay to the left to avoid the waterfall and this risks a pendulum into the falls. We reached the bottom of this two-stage waterfall a little over 5hr from the trailhead.

About 15min downstream, you arrive at an abrupt left turn into a rocky chute that is readily descended and leads to the top of the second set of falls in Stoddard Canyon. This consists of two or three waterfalls and could be directly descended. The first stage is a 35ft drop into a deep pool; a lone tree some distance above and behind the lip of the falls is the only readily available anchor. But, there is a way around this set of waterfalls and we took advantage of this bypass. It begins at the abrupt left turn at the top of the chute. Directly ahead of this turn you will have noted a notch about 12ft above the canyon bottom. Climbing up to this notch, you will come to a rocky groove that descends about 150ft to the canyon bottom below the waterfalls. It is reasonably safe to free climb down this groove though you can also sling a rope around one of several bushes



on the left if you are uncomfortable. The bottom of the groove is at an elevation of 2760ft and about 5hr 35min from the trailhead. After the descent you may wish to make your way a short distance upstream to the bottom of the falls before continuing downstream.

There are no more major obstacles in Stoddard Canyon. About 10min downstream of the groove a large gully enters from the left and a well-worn trail leads downstream from this junction to the roadway (34°10.35'N 117°40.44'W, elevation 2440ft) after a 35min hike. The total duration of the hike is about 6.5hr.



Map of first section of Stoddard Canyon Hike



Map of second section of Stoddard Canyon Hike





## Chapter 10

# ICE HOUSE

The Ice House region includes the canyons that are accessed using the Ice House Canyon trailhead and trail. These include several that descend the north slope of the Ontario Peak ridge, three that together comprise a complete exploration of Cucamonga Canyon and one in the Deer Canyon drainage, namely Bull Canyon.



**Ice House region.**



## 10.1 Falling Rock Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 8 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 7.7 miles
- Elevation gain: 3800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: Much bouldering
- Special equipment: None
- ACA Rating: 2A III

Icehouse Canyon is one of the most attractive and popular hikes in the San Gabriel mountains. Each weekend, at almost any season of the year, you will encounter others enjoying the beautiful stream, the many sparkling pools and the mature pine trees for which Icehouse Canyon is justly famous. Many hikers follow the well-trodden trail all the way up to Icehouse Saddle and some even venture beyond to conquer one of the three peaks on the rim to the south (Cucamonga Peak, Bighorn Peak and Ontario Peak) or one of the other row of peaks to the north (including Timber Mountain and Telegraph Peak). Few venture off the trails in this rugged and precipitous high country.

But the rim to the south provides several spectacular canyoneering adventures for those who are so inclined and this book features two adventures in canyons that drop down Icehouse Canyon's precipitous southern wall. One of these, Sheep Canyon, features a spectacular 260ft drop and is, perhaps, the most technically challenging descent in this whole book. The other, Falling Rock Canyon, is the subject of this adventure; it is relatively easy and can be descended without technical equipment. It is also a beautiful hike, ideal for the late spring or fall. In the summer, the climb can be very hot. In the winter and early spring, the snow lying at the higher elevations makes it much more difficult.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the Icehouse Canyon parking area (34°15.00'N 117°38.11'W, elevation 4990ft), 1.5mi north of Mount Baldy Village in San Antonio Canyon. The access road to this parking area proceeds straight on at a fork where the road continuing up to the ski lift makes a sharp left turn.



*Left: View West from Ontario Peak. Right: Falling Rock Canyon below waterfall.*

## Hike

From the parking area (elevation 4990ft), proceed up the well-marked Icehouse Canyon trail that parallels a sparkling, year-long stream. There are many cabins in the first mile or so, and also ruins of cabins that were destroyed by a flash flood in 1938. As you progress along the first mile, take a few moments to glance up at the cliffs on the right or south side of the canyon. The high peak directly to the south is Sugarloaf Peak (6924ft) but it seems almost inaccessible from this vantage point. Initially the cliffs on the south side are almost unbroken and so it is quite simple to identify the first real side canyon ( $34^{\circ}14.92'N$   $117^{\circ}37.73'W$ , elevation 5260ft), that has its entrance just under a mile from the start. This is Falling Rock Canyon by which we shall make our descent. If you look closely you will be able to discern a faint use-trail that branches off to the right from the main trail just before a large ruin. This use-trail proceeds up Falling Rock Canyon.

Continuing up the main trail, the cabins and the incense cedars soon disappear and you enter the Cucamonga Wilderness as the landscape becomes more rugged and open. The trail steepens as it switchbacks up the north slope of the canyon and 3.5mi and 2hr from the start you finally reach Icehouse Saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.35'N$   $117^{\circ}35.66'W$ , elevation 7550ft). Several trails come together at this point but you should identify the trail to Kelly's Camp and Ontario Peak. This doubles back along the south side of Icehouse Canyon, traveling in a westward direction. It rises gently as it traverses the wooded northern flank of Bighorn Peak and, after 0.7mi, arrives at the former site of Kelly's Camp ( $34^{\circ}14.03'N$   $117^{\circ}36.33'W$ , elevation 7840ft), marked only by a group of cabin foundations. This is a favorite camping site as you can tell from the remains of several fireplaces. The trail then switchbacks up to the top of a long east-west ridge that you follow all the way to its end at Ontario Peak ( $34^{\circ}13.66'N$   $117^{\circ}37.45'W$ , elevation 8693ft), some 2.3mi and 2hr from Icehouse Saddle. On a clear day the view from this rocky peak is magnificent. To the south there is a precipitous drop of several thousand feet into Cucamonga Canyon and, in the distance, you may be able to see Catalina Island and, beyond that, San Clemente Island. It is a beautiful place to eat lunch.

After lunch, you should backtrack along the trail for a short distance. As you do so look carefully at the canyons that begin below

you to the north of the trail. The canyon directly north of Ontario Peak is Cherry Canyon. Immediately to the east of Cherry Canyon is the canyon you seek, namely Falling Rock Canyon. To make certain that you have chosen the right canyon, locate the ridge between Cherry Canyon and Falling Rock Canyon that begins about 200yds back along the trail from Ontario Peak. This ridge descends slowly and is easy traveling for the first few hundred yards. You will be able to see Cherry Canyon turning to the west and, far below, the area near Mount Baldy Village. On the other hand, Falling Rock Canyon proceeds directly north in the direction of Mount Baldy. Once you have double-checked your navigation, it is easy to transition to the east down into Falling Rock Canyon and begin serious descent. (On one expedition, we misjudged the situation and inadvertently traveled too far east along the trail, dropping into Sheep Canyon by mistake. About 2hrs down canyon we were shocked to encounter the huge 260ft drop of the Sheep Canyon headwall. We were fortunate to find a way to contour along to the west above the cliff and to descend through a small canyon called Fir Draw, some distance to the east of Falling Rock Canyon. For further information please see the Sheep Canyon adventure.)

Falling Rock Canyon soon begins to descend more steeply but the going is fairly easy, particularly along the dirt and rock covered north-east slope of the canyon. After some wandering, the canyon turns northwest and soon the ridge leading to Sugarloaf will become visible ahead of and below you. About 2hr after starting the descent you arrive at the first of two attractive and rocky waterfalls at an elevation of about 6600ft. The first falls had substantial water when we hiked this way early in the summer. But the water disappeared just a short distance downstream. There is a straightforward route around the first falls on the left side. A little further down canyon, you encounter the second and normally dry falls. From above you might be tempted to climb straight down. Do not do so for the rock steepens near the bottom. Instead there is an easy bypass up and over the low ridge to the left and down the Cree slope on the far side.

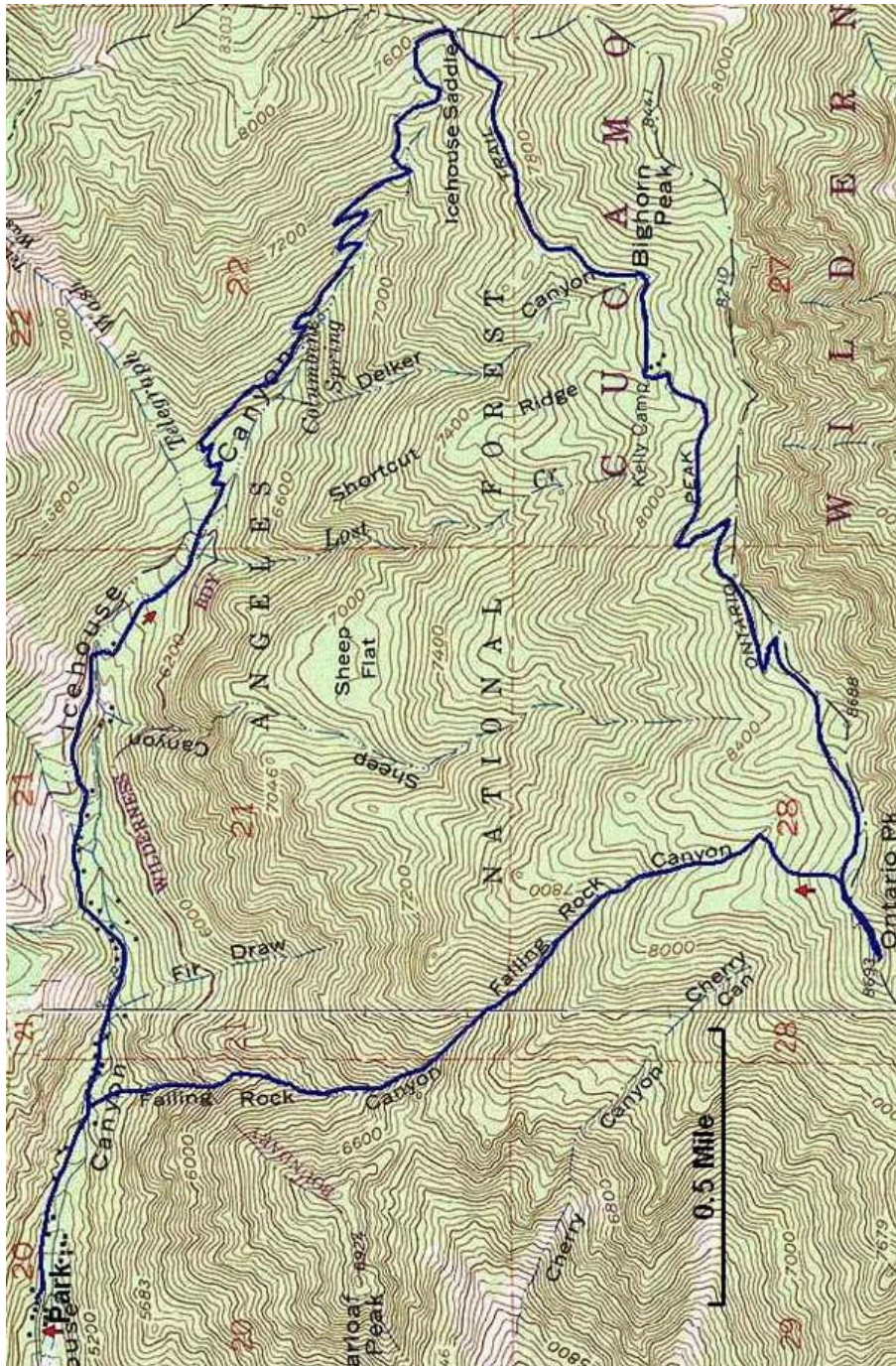
A short distance down the canyon from this second waterfall, at an elevation of about 6000ft, you encounter a large Cree slope on the left. This is topped by a ridge and saddle that are only about 600ft above the canyon bottom. A rough use-trail climbs up the loose Cree

slope to the saddle ( $34^{\circ}14.42'N$   $117^{\circ}37.79'W$ , elevation 6690ft). If you are feeling particularly energetic you might like to take a side trip up to this ridge and from there to the summit of Sugarloaf Peak. Your reward for the exhausting climb is a quite spectacular view of Mount Baldy Village and San Antonio Canyon. You can follow the trail along the ridge, proceeding first in a northwesterly direction and then in a southwesterly direction and thus reach the summit of Sugarloaf Peak (6924ft). The climb to the top of Sugarloaf takes about 1hr 15min. The descent is a great deal easier and faster (35min), particularly if you slide back down the Cree slope into Falling Rock Canyon.

From this point it takes about 1hr to travel down Falling Rock Canyon to the point where it meets Icehouse Canyon. The going is mostly boulder-hopping though there are some places where some clambering is needed. Toward the end of this descent, it becomes very clear why this chute is called Falling Rock Canyon for the sidewalls are fractured and unstable and the canyon bottom is littered with rockslides. The only significant obstacle is a small, 20ft waterfall near the bottom of the chute. Contour along one of the ledges above and to the right of the falls and you will easily locate one of several use-trails through the bushes that will allow you to continue downhill. After this, the chute broadens into a small boulder field that merges with the bottom of Icehouse Canyon ( $34^{\circ}14.92'N$   $117^{\circ}37.73'W$ , elevation 5260ft). After you reach the Icehouse Canyon trail again, it is only about 10min to the parking area at the entrance to Icehouse Canyon ( $34^{\circ}15.00'N$   $117^{\circ}38.11'W$ , elevation 4990ft).

Note that this hike could also be done in reverse. Note also that Falling Rock Canyon could be ascended to access the top of Sheep Canyon.





Map of Falling Rock Canyon Hike

## 10.2 Sheep Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 9 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 8.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 3800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: Large 260ft headwall descent requiring three-stage rappel; much bouldering
- Special equipment: Rappeling gear, two 60m ropes, 35ft webbing, 3 rappel rings, personal belay loops
- ACA Rating: 4AR IV

Icehouse Canyon is one of the most attractive and popular hikes in the San Gabriel mountains. Each weekend, at almost any season of the year, you will encounter others enjoying the beautiful stream, the many sparkling pools and the mature pine trees for which Icehouse Canyon is justly famous. Many hikers follow the well-trodden trail all the way up to Icehouse Saddle and some even venture beyond to conquer one of the three peaks on the rim to the south (Cucamonga, Bighorn and Ontario Peaks) or one of the other row of peaks to the north (including Timber Mountain and Telegraph Peak). Few venture off the trails in this rugged and precipitous high country. But the rim to the south provides several spectacular canyoneering adventures for those who are so inclined and this book features two adventure hikes in canyons that drop down Icehouse Canyon's precipitous southern wall. One of these, Falling Rock Canyon, is relatively easy and can be descended without technical equipment (see the Falling Rock Canyon adventure). The other, Sheep Canyon, features one spectacular 260ft drop, perhaps the most technically challenging descent in this whole book. It is also a beautiful hike, ideal for the late spring or fall.

### Trailhead

The trailhead for this hike is the Icehouse Canyon parking area (34°15.00'N 117°38.11'W, elevation 4990ft), 1.5mi north of Mount Baldy Village in San Antonio Canyon. The access road to this parking area proceeds straight on at a fork where the road that continues up to the ski lift makes a sharp left turn.



*Left: Sheep Canyon Headwall. Right: Lower Sheep Canyon.*



## Hike

From the parking area (34°15.00'N 117°38.11'W, elevation 4990ft), proceed up the well-marked Icehouse Canyon trail that parallels a sparkling, year-long stream. There are many cabins in the first mile or so, and also ruins of cabins that were destroyed by a flash flood in 1938. About 1.5mi from the trailhead you will come to a place where the trail crosses from the left to the right side of the stream. Just before this point you should be able to identify Sheep Canyon descending the steep, south wall of Icehouse Canyon to meet it about 34°14.91'N 117°36.98'W at an elevation of 5890ft.

Continuing up the maintained trail, you soon pass the sign for the Cucamonga Wilderness as the landscape becomes more rugged and open. The trail crosses back to the left side of the stream and steepens as it switchbacks up the north wall of the canyon. At 3.5mi and 2hr from the trailhead you finally reach Icehouse Saddle at 34°14.35'N 117°35.66'W and an elevation of 7550ft. Several trails come together at this point but you should identify the trail to Kelly's Camp and Ontario Peak. This doubles back along the south side of Icehouse Canyon, traveling in a westward direction. It rises gently as it traverses the wooded northern flank of Bighorn Peak and, after 0.7mi, arrives at the former site of Kelly's Camp (34°14.03'N 117°36.33'W, elevation 7840ft), marked only by a group of cabin foundations. This is a favorite camping site as you can tell from the remains of several fireplaces. The trail then switchbacks up to the top of a long east-west ridge that you follow all the way to its end at Ontario Peak (34°13.66'N 117°37.45'W, elevation 8693ft), some 2.3mi and 2hr from Icehouse Saddle. On a clear day the view from this rocky peak is magnificent. To the south there is a precipitous drop of several thousand feet into Cucamonga Canyon and, in the distance, you should be able to discern Catalina and, beyond that, San Clemente Island.

The canyon directly north of Ontario Peak is Cherry Canyon. It turns to the west and descends toward Baldy Village. Immediately to the east of Cherry Canyon is Falling Rock Canyon; the ridge between Cherry and Falling Rock begins about 200yds back along the trail from Ontario Peak. (Note that on the trail this ridge between Cherry and Falling Rock is not very prominent.) The head of Sheep Canyon is the next one to the east of Falling Rock. Consequently to access Sheep Canyon you should backtrack about 0.4mi around the

head of Falling Rock Canyon and over the ridge separating it from Sheep Canyon.

Contour part of the way around the head of Sheep Canyon to about 34°13.78'N 117°36.93'W and an elevation of 8550ft, drop in to it and follow the streambed as it develops. Soon Sheep becomes a quite bucolic, wooded canyon. The going is usually easiest a short distance up the earthen slope on the right or east side of the canyon. This allows you to bypass a number of boulder problems in the streambed bottom of the canyon. The fairly gentle descent continues for about 1.2mi.

At an elevation of about 6600ft and 2hrs from the drop-in, you will therefore be hiking down a pleasant wooded canyon when it makes a small left turn. Suddenly and quite unexpectedly you arrive at the top of an awesome drop at the bottom of which you can see the Icehouse Canyon bottom about 1000ft below you. You have arrived at the top of the Sheep Canyon headwall at about 34°14.69'N 117°36.98'W, a substantial rappelling challenge that should be attempted only by experienced climbers or canyoneers. The streambed first drops about 30ft into a gully, but this first minor obstacle is readily (though not obviously) overcome by clambering about 10ft up onto the rock ridge on the left. On the other side of this ridge is a steep scree gully that can be descended, bypassing that first obstacle. This takes you down to a platform at the top of the huge 260ft Sheep Canyon headwall. At this point you should not proceed unless you are confident of the skills needed to tackle the headwall. If you do decide to bail out, you can take the alternate descent route through Fir Draw. To access this, climb back up the scree gully and then ascend the apex of the ridge that climbs up and back from the lip. Initially steep, the gradient eases after several hundred feet and, by following the ridge through the woods, you should be able to locate the rim-trail (see Alternate Access Route below) that contours around the head of several steep canyons and then drops into a branch of Fir Draw that can be descended all the way to Icehouse Canyon bottom without the need for technical gear.

But for those with experience and skill, the descent of the Sheep Canyon headwall is a spectacular adventure. The first step is to thoroughly inspect the headwall drop from all the vantage points at the lip. Note first the route of the streambed that veers right near the cliff on that side. About 90ft down there is a lip that



prevents you from seeing what lies below. You will also see a deep gully cut into the cliff off to the right, a watercourse that joins the streambed somewhere out of sight below the lip. Though you cannot see into that gully there are several small platforms down its length and one of these is the second staging point for this descent. Most importantly you should be able to identify a small to medium-sized pine tree growing out of the cliff approximately 90ft below you and midway between the streambed and the right wall. That tree is the first stop on the descent.

There are several possible anchors at the top; we used a wrap around a large boulder in the streambed close to the lip but there is also a large tree a little further back. Using the full length of a 60meter rope you can descend to the pine tree using a double-strand rappel. Team members should each have prepared a personal belay loop before they begin the descent so that they can tie in to the tree when they get there. Also, in order to reach the tree it is necessary to rappel down the streambed groove to a point where you can climb about 5ft up onto a slab to the right of the groove. Rappeling down the slab brings you to the pine tree anchor point. The alternative is to bypass the pine tree anchor by carrying two 60meter ropes, a plan that is necessary if the team numbers more than three. Otherwise, the second anchor is the tree and from there you first descend about 15ft to a broad shelf (not visible from above) and, from there, continue down into the aforementioned deep gully, landing on a broad platform in the gully bottom. This second rappel also requires the full length of a 60meter rope. The third stage is anchored from a large boulder on the gully-bottom platform. From there you first rappel down about 25ft to a larger platform and then continue the rappel down another 20ft drop to the bottom of the headwall. Here you can stow the rappeling gear since the rest of the descent does not require technical equipment.

You should reach the bottom of the headwall (elevation about 6250ft) about 3.5hrs after the drop-in and 7.5hrs after the morning start. While there take time to enjoy this spectacular place. Unusual for the San Gabriels, the rock of the headwall is quite solid and could provide interesting rock climbing opportunities. This solid granite is in marked contrast to the crumbling rock of neighboring Falling Rock Canyon. Note especially the great monolith adorning the left-side of the headwall; it would be interesting to know whether it has

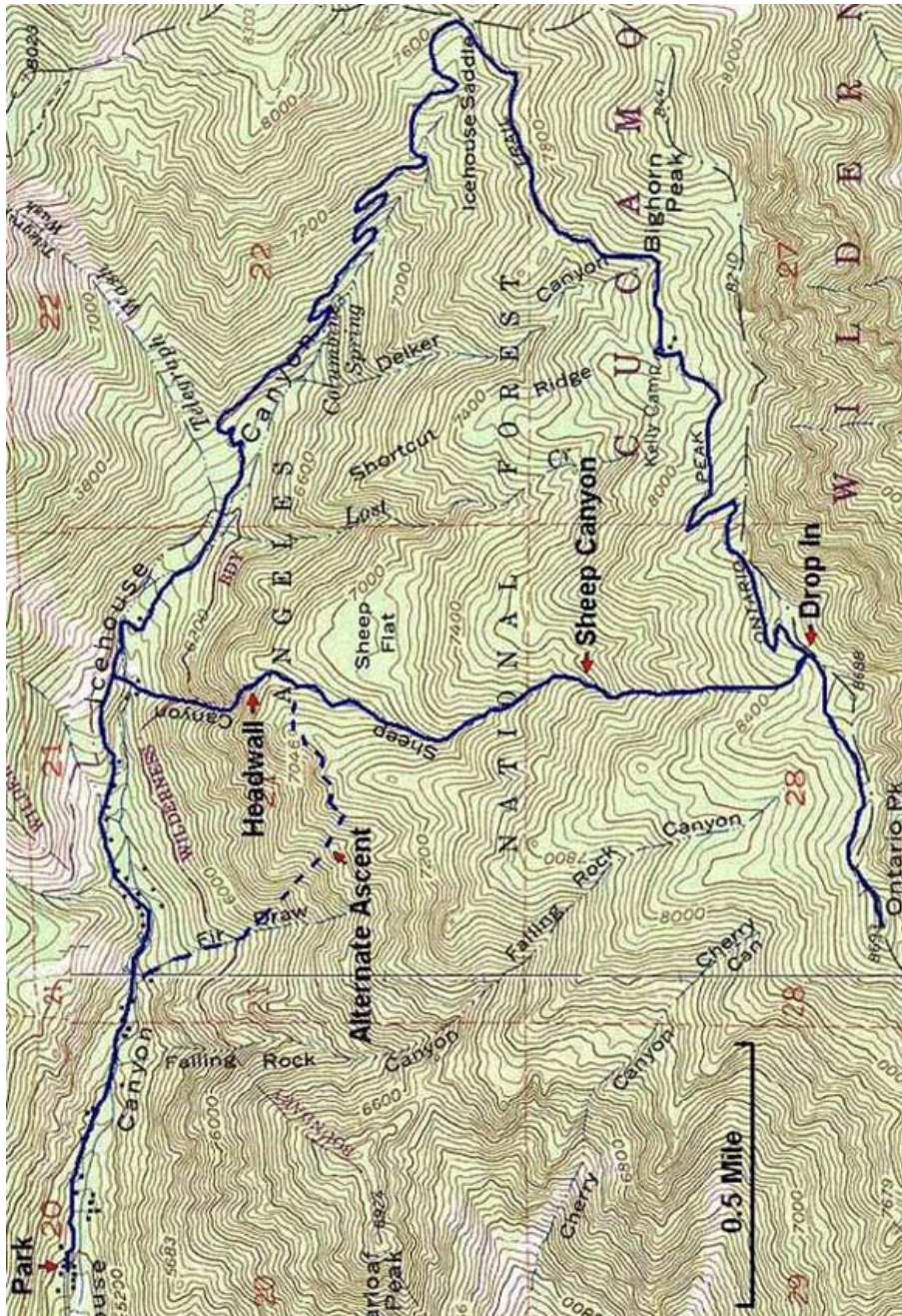
ever been summited.

The descent from the bottom of the headwall to the stream in Icehouse House canyon takes about 35min; it is quite straightforward with only a couple of places where careful downclimbing is needed. The going is a mixture of scree, boulder-hopping and bedrock walking; there is virtually no brush barring the way. You cross the stream and clamber up to the Icehouse Canyon trail at a point about 1.5mi from the trailhead ( $34^{\circ}14.91'N$   $117^{\circ}36.98'W$ ) at an elevation of 5890ft. Hiking down the well-worn trail you arrive back at the Icehouse Canyon parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.00'N$   $117^{\circ}38.11'W$ , elevation 4990ft) about 30min later.

### **Alternate Ascent Route**

It is possible to access the top of the dramatic headwall in Sheep Canyon by a different and shorter route, but one that demands some careful navigation. This route proceeds up a canyon called Fir Draw that is just east of Falling Rock Canyon. Fir Draw is best located by hiking up the Icehouse Canyon trail while closely inspecting the cliffs on the south side. The first opening in these cliffs is Falling Rock Canyon ( $34^{\circ}14.92'N$   $117^{\circ}37.73'W$ , elevation 5260ft); it is about 0.5mi from the start and quite obvious despite the difficulty of peering through the trees. Fir Draw is the second opening about 0.7mi from the trailhead and at  $34^{\circ}14.89'N$   $117^{\circ}37.57'W$  and an elevation of 5410ft; it is obscured by heavy brush and so can easily be missed. If you can you should enter Fir Draw on the right side where the brush is less thick but by no means absent. However, it peters out as you climb and the going on the boulders in the streambed becomes much easier. Having climbed about 400ft up Fir Draw to an elevation of 5800ft, you arrive at a large cliff-like obstacle in the canyon center. Take the left fork and continue to climb up the steep gully that is part scree and part boulders. A short way beyond the divide, the draw forks again and you should fork left again. Though this second fork may not be easy to recognize, you should proceed left only when the way, though steep, seems quite clear and straightforward. There are several possible steep gullies that you can follow here, the leftmost being bounded by a ridge with a precipitous drop on the other, eastern side. After a steep and exhausting climb all of these gully routes lead to a wooded rim and, in particular, to a rough animal/human trail that contours around the head of the

gullies. You should reach this trail at 34°14.54'N 117°37.24'W and an elevation of 7010ft about 2hrs after leaving the trailhead. Follow this sometimes braided trail as it contours east around the head of several gullies until you arrive at Sheep Canyon, readily recognized as a deep wooded canyon cutting through this rough tableland. It is easy to descend about 300ft to the streambed in Sheep Canyon. At this point you will be several hundred yards above the lip of the headwall. This alternate access hike should take about 2.5hrs and therefore cut about 3.5hrs out of the hike. The difficulty is principally in navigating your way up the Fir Draw gullies to the rim use-trail.



Map of Sheep Canyon Hike

## 10.3 Upper Cucamonga Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 13.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 9.1 miles
- Elevation gain: 2800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: Four rappels, ranging in height from 15ft to 80ft, much bushwhacking
- Special equipment: Rappelling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 120ft rope, 60ft of webbing, 4 rappel rings and dry bags.
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

Cucamonga canyon is the main watercourse that drains the precipitous south face of the Bighorn/Ontario ridge, a prominence that includes Ontario Peak and Bighorn Peak. In another chapter, we describe a easy adventure hike that explores the relatively benign lower section of this wild and rugged canyon. The present hike follows the entire upper course of Cucamonga Canyon from its origin at a saddle behind Cucamonga Peak, down through several vegetation zones and two narrows to finish where that earlier hike began. It is a strenuous, two day adventure hike with some spectacular scenery and several challenging rappels. It is best undertaken during the summer or early fall when the river is not swollen with run-off. It becomes much more challenging when the snow comes to the high country.

### Trailhead

The hike requires a car shuttle, for which one four wheel drive vehicle must be stored at the end of a rough dirt road that accesses the bottom section of Cucamonga Canyon. To get there from the west drive east on Foothill Boulevard to Euclid Avenue in the city of Upland. Turn north and, some distance up Euclid, turn right



onto 19th Street and then left (north) on Sapphire. At the northern end of Sapphire, turn left on Almond and then immediately right on Skyline. Skyline rapidly narrows to a single lane as it climbs into Cucamonga Canyon. There is a small parking area where the asphalt ends and the dirt road begins. The dirt road continues to climb for about 0.3mi at which point the road forks. Take the left fork that descends again toward the canyon bottom and crosses the river at a concrete ford just before a large clearing that is the final destination of this hike. There are many places to park here (34°10.86'N 117°37.80'W, elevation 2680ft).

Having deposited the return vehicle, you then proceed back down Sapphire and west along 19th Street to Euclid. Now, however, you turn right (north) and proceed up Euclid to the intersection with 24th Street. Here you jog left and follow the signs for Mount Baldy along the winding road toward the northwest. This becomes Mountain Avenue and enters San Antonio Canyon where it joins the main Mount Baldy Road just beyond a Ranger Station. Drive on up the Mount Baldy Road in San Antonio Canyon to the parking area for Icehouse Canyon (34°15.00'N 117°38.11'W, elevation 4990ft), 1.5mi north of Mount Baldy Village. The access road to this parking area proceeds straight on at a fork where the road continuing up to the ski lift makes a sharp left turn.

## Hike



*High in Cucamonga Canyon.*

From the parking area (34°15.00'N 117°38.11'W, elevation 4990ft), proceed up the well-marked Icehouse Canyon trail that parallels a sparkling, year-long stream. There are many cabins in the first mile or so, and also ruins of cabins that were destroyed in a flash flood in 1938. The main trail has mile markers. The cabins and incense cedars soon disappear and you enter the Cucamonga Wilderness as the landscape becomes more rugged and open. The trail steepens as it switchbacks up the north slope of the canyon and 3.5mi and 2hr from the start you finally reach Icehouse Saddle at 34°14.35'N 117°35.66'W and an elevation of 7550ft. Several trails come together at this point but you need to identify the trail to Cucamonga Peak. This proceeds along the right hand slope on the other side of the saddle. It soon forks and you must take the right fork that reaches Cucamonga Sadddle (34°13.75'N 117°35.49'W, elevation 7654ft) about 2hrs 45min from the start.

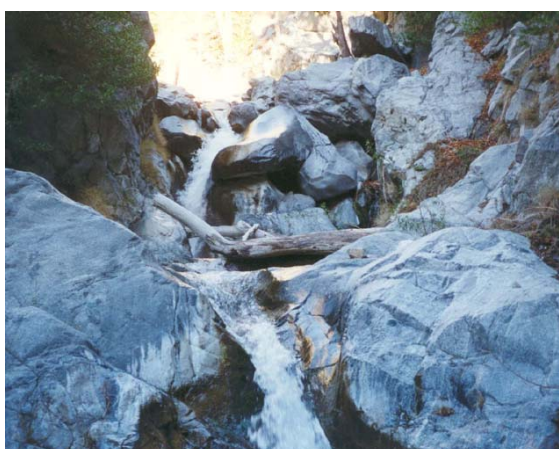
The entry to the Cucamonga canyon from the saddle is moderately steep but broad and open. Mostly scree with scattered pine trees, it is quite easy going and the wide canyon allows spectacular views of the southern cliffs of the Ontario/Bighorn ridge. As you lose elevation, the trees increase and, for a brief spell, the footing remains fairly easy though the canyon begins to narrow. At an elevation of about 5700ft several large side canyons enter from the north and, shortly thereafter, about 2hrs 15min from Cucamonga Saddle (5hrs from the start), the canyon makes an S-bend and suddenly narrows. This narrowing has two consequences. First, the going becomes significantly slower with small waterfalls and many boulders to negotiate. But, as if to compensate, this is also where you will encounter running water for the first time, at least in the dry summer months. Both consequences result from the same increase in the hardness and imperviousness of the rock.

About 2hrs downstream of the S-bend (or 7hrs 30min from the start), the canyon deepens again and you enter the Upper Narrows, the most dramatic gorge in Cucamonga Canyon. With the steepening walls, you begin to anticipate larger and more precipitous waterfalls and, at about 4600ft, the first substantial obstacle you encounter is a small, 15ft waterfall. This milestone is readily identifiable because you can climb down through a slot to the right of the falls. Shortly after this there is a slide that is negotiated using a log that runs through it. This is immediately followed, at an elevation

of about 4500ft, by the largest waterfall of the adventure, the Upper Cucamonga Falls with a vertical drop of about 65ft to a large pool in a deep, flat-bottomed ravine. The good news is that there are excellent anchors in the form of trees near the lip and the entry is relatively easy. The bad news (good on a hot day with low stream flow) is that, for the first half of the descent, there is no alternative but to rappel down in the waterfall itself. Further down you can veer to your left and out of the stream. However, the pool at the bottom was waist deep when we passed this way.

The Upper Narrows continue downstream of the big falls. A large tributary enters from the north via a waterfall that is usually dry in the summer. About a hundred yards further on (about 8hrs 15min from the start) you come to the second of the two rappels in the Upper Narrows, a small vertical drop of about 20ft into a waist deep pool. Again there are several trees that provide anchors, Though it is difficult to avoid descending in the water, this is a straightforward rappel.

Judging by the lack of signs of human passage above these falls, they represent the furthest penetration made by hikers coming from below since, though small, they would be very difficult to ascend. Downstream there are several places that would be comfortable for an overnight camp. Two of these have the remains of rock-ring fireplaces constructed by previous adventurers. One of these is a short distance downstream of the second rappel at a point where



*Left: Big falls in Cucamonga Canyon. Right: In the Lower Narrows.*

the Upper Narrows end and the canyon broadens somewhat.

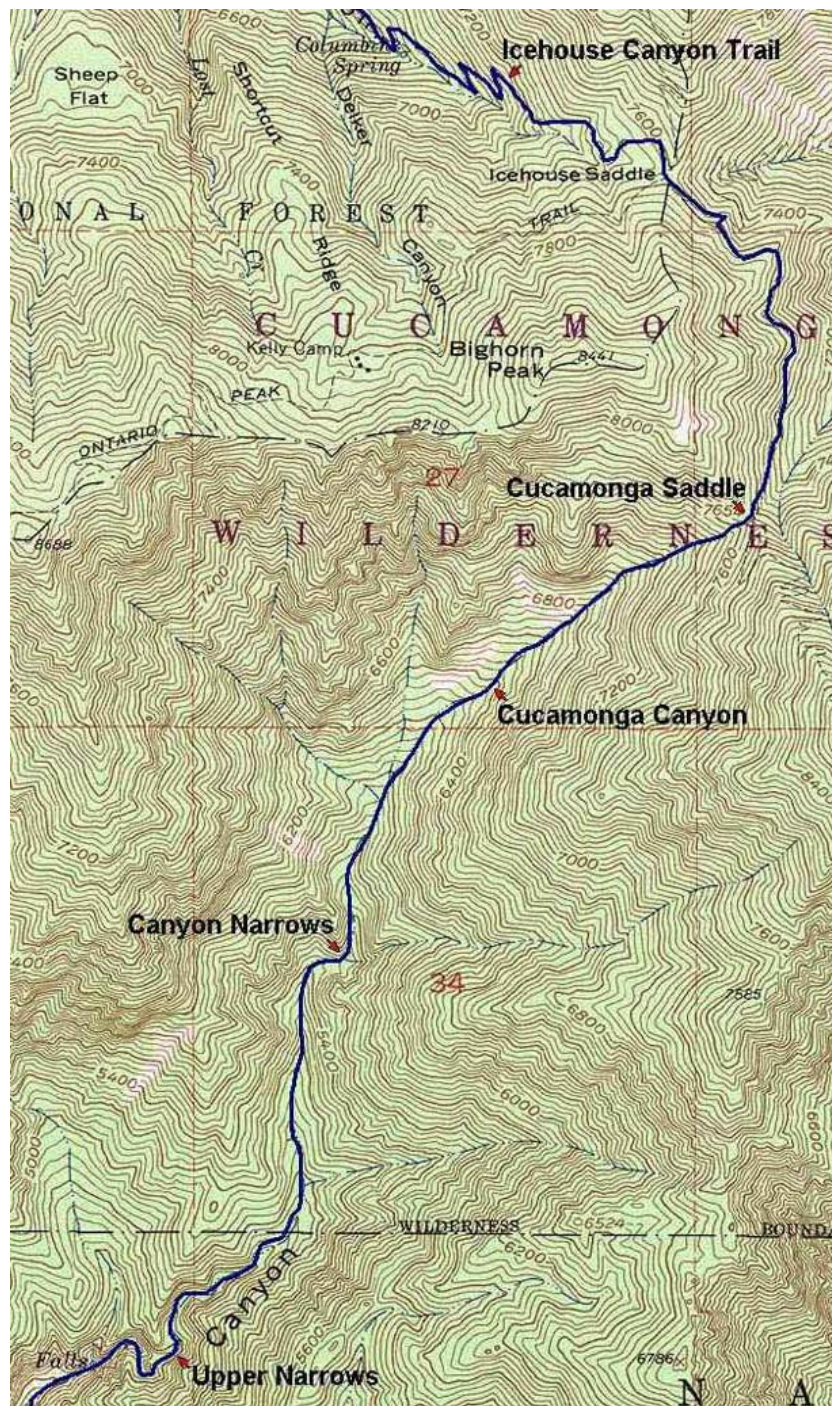
It is about another 1hr 30min to the start of the short but steep and rugged Lower Narrows (34°11.84'N 117°36.92'W, elevation 3860ft). They begin with two broad 25ft waterfalls, both formed by the accumulation of large boulders. The first of these is readily climbed on the left. The second could also be climbed via a damp earth and rock slope round to the left but it is safer and easier to rappel down using as your anchor the large tree in the left center. Below this point the Cucamonga Creek crashes over a series of cascades as it makes its way through a very rugged gorge. Almost immediately there are several small waterfalls that are awkward to negotiate.

A short distance downstream you come to the Lower Cucamonga falls (34°11.83'N 117°36.99'W, elevation 3790ft), a 50ft vertical drop through a narrow cleft into a small, dark pool. A horizontal log spans the canyon a short distance upstream of the falls and this could be used as an anchor. But it is easier to follow the well-traveled route around to the left of the waterfall. To do so find the trail up the dirt slope a short distance upstream of the lip. This leads to a narrow ledge and then to the spine of a ridge that projects out into the canyon above and to the left of the falls. A tree just below and to the right of the spine provides an excellent anchor for the rappel down the left side of the ridge along a well-worn climbing route. It is about a 90ft descent down quite irregular terrain with some overhang. Several old ropes hang down along the rappel route and I strongly recommend that you place no reliance on these. The rappel ends at the top of an earthy slope among trees in an area just around the corner from the Lower Cucamonga falls. This point should be reached about 11hrs 30min from the start.

Downstream from the bottom of this last rappel at an elevation of about 3700ft, there is short, rugged section before the canyon walls diminish and, about 15min from the falls, the main canyon widens to form a large and interesting boulder field, about 0.5mi long. Note that there is a well-used and sheltered campsite in a grove of trees on the left just before the boulder field and, just beyond this on the right, is a pretty waterfall where a tributary canyon drops into the main canyon from the left. This smaller canyon seems to drop straight down from the precipitous south face of Ontario Peak.

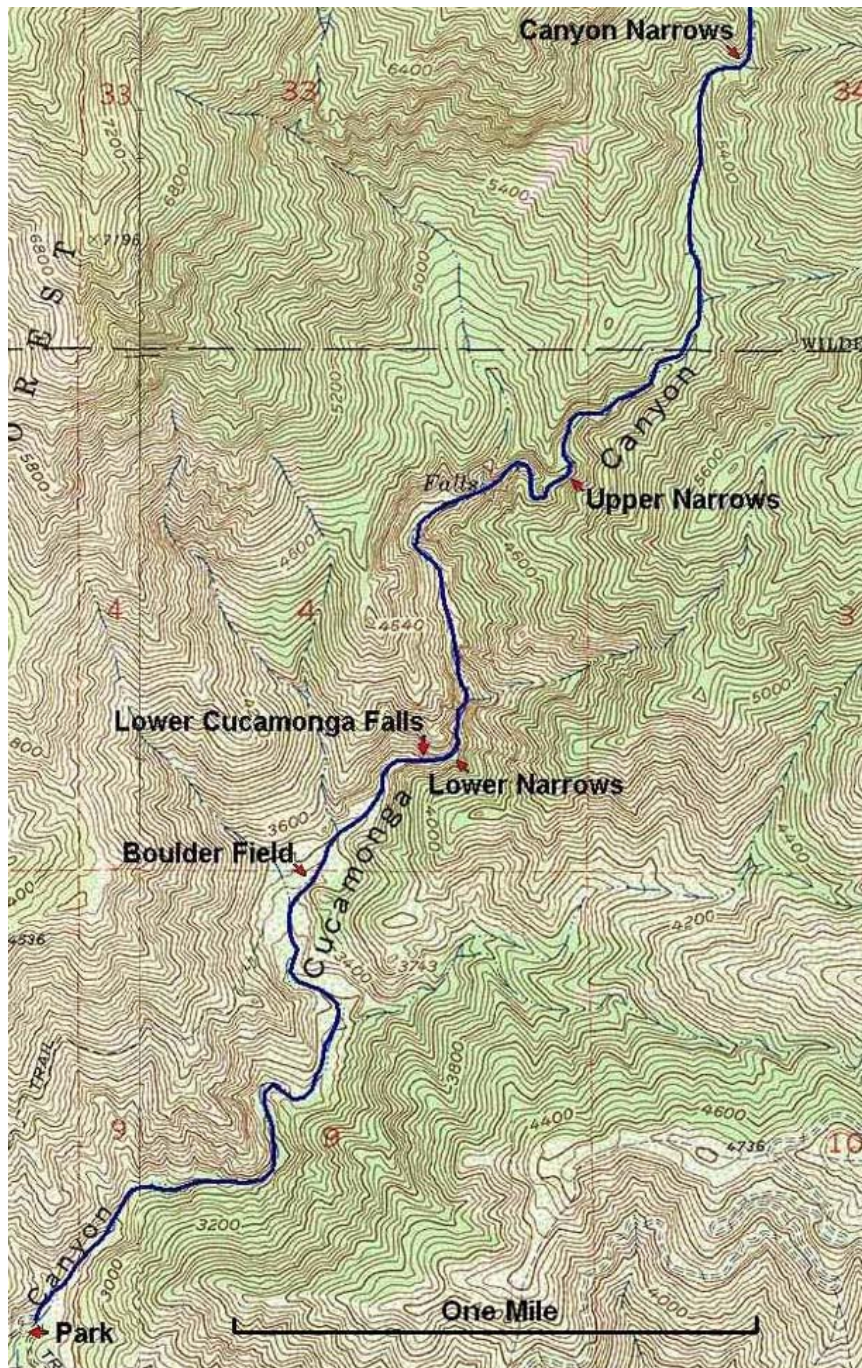
To negotiate the boulder field stay on the left initially but transfer to the use-trail on the right below the rocky promontory that juts out into the boulder field on the left. It is only about 1.5mi (1hrs 30min) from the end of the boulder field to the parking area where you left the return vehicle. Along the way you will encounter several beautiful pools with fish. Roughly 40min below the boulder field, there is a particularly attractive pool that makes for a delightful summer swim. The hiking along this stretch is relatively undemanding though there are many stream crossings. A use-trail becomes more evident as you get closer to the end. The canyon is narrowest during the very last section and, just before the end, you encounter a canyon-spanning pool that requires wading. It is shallowest (about 3ft deep) along the right wall. A short distance south of this pool you reach the parking area where you left the return vehicle (34°10.86'N 117°37.80'W, elevation 2680ft). The total hiking time from the start is about 13.5hrs.





Map of first section of Upper Cucamonga Hike





Map of second section of Upper Cucamonga Hike

## 10.4 Middle Cucamonga Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 5.5 miles
- Elevation gain: 800 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Mt. Baldy
- Difficulties: Some modest bouldering and some bushwhacking
- Special equipment: None
- ACA Rating: 2A II

East of San Antonio Canyon a lofty rim consisting of Ontario, Bighorn and Cucamonga Peaks dominates the southern skyline of the San Gabriel Mountains. The peaks form a catch basin, the run-off from which gets funneled into the wild and rugged Cucamonga Canyon. Because of the difficulty of access this is one of the less well known of the major canyons of the San Gabriels. But, for those with a four-wheel-drive vehicle it makes a spectacular and fairly easy adventure hike with features ranging from a beautiful, shaded canyon with some great swimming pools to rugged waterfalls and rock-ribbed canyon. It is also a hike that is readily adjusted to the available time and energy. Best undertaken during the summer or fall when the river is not swollen with run-off, the canyon can become much more difficult to negotiate during the winter and spring.

### Trailhead

The trailheads for this hike are deep in the middle section of Cucamonga canyon. They are reached from the west by driving east on Foothill Boulevard and turning north on Euclid in the city of Upland. Some distance up Euclid you turn right onto 19th Street and then left (north) on Sapphire. At the northern end of Sapphire, turn left on Almond and then immediately right on Skyline. Skyline rapidly narrows to a single lane as it climbs into Cucamonga Canyon.

There is a small parking area where the asphalt ends and the dirt road begins. Those without a four wheel drive vehicle would be well advised to park here for the dirt road is often in quite poor condition just a short way beyond this point. You can proceed on foot to the trailhead though this adds about another three miles to the hike.

The dirt road continues to climb for about 0.3mi at which point there is a fork ( $34^{\circ}10.49'N$   $117^{\circ}37.44'W$ , elevation 3150ft). Take the left fork that descends again toward the canyon bottom and crosses the river at a concrete ford just before a large clearing where there are many places to park ( $34^{\circ}10.86'N$   $117^{\circ}37.80'W$ , elevation 2680ft). If you decided to proceed up the canyon bottom, park here. If you decided to make the round trip via the West Fork Trail then you should drive on past this parking area. The road (in good condition here) climbs to the left up a side canyon; after about 0.5mi you come to a place ( $34^{\circ}10.94'N$   $117^{\circ}38.13'W$ , elevation 2930ft) where the road turns left to cross this side creek. Park in the trees at the first clearing you encounter just before this crossing. You should be able to spot the West Fork Trail climbing back up the slope above the last section of road you drove in on. From the asphalt to the trailheads takes about 15min in a vehicle.



*Left: At top of the boulder field. Right: Lower falls in Cucamonga Canyon.*



## Hike

There are two versions of this hike. The round trip version I recommend follows the overgrown West Fork Trail that contours along the west side of Cucamonga Canyon before dropping into the canyon bottom after about 2.3mi. From this point you can proceed up the canyon as far as you wish. On the return I suggest you follow the canyon all the way down to the large parking area described above. You will then have to hike a short way up the road to return to your vehicle. In the second version of the hike, you follow the canyon bottom both coming and going. The disadvantage of the West Fork Trail is that it is very overgrown in places and occasionally difficult to follow; better to wear an old, long sleeved shirt and long pants for this trail. The advantage is that you are treated to quite spectacular views you cannot get from the canyon bottom.

The West Fork Trail (7W05) starts at 2930ft and climbs steadily as it traverses the western wall of the canyon. As you snake in and out of the gullies in this wall you get increasingly marvelous views of the rugged wilderness between you and the 8500ft rim of mountains to the north. Due north is the 8693ft Ontario Peak that features in another, more advanced adventure hike, Falling Rock Canyon. After about 50min, you arrive at the high point on the West Fork Trail, a small saddle at 3600ft. The brush is particularly thick just before and just after this saddle, but begins to be less obstructive as you descend from the saddle toward the river. It takes about 25min to descend so you reach the river ( $34^{\circ}11.56'N$   $117^{\circ}37.25'W$ , elevation 3290ft) about 1hr 15min from the start. In case you wish to return that way, it would be wise to fix in your mind the point where the West Fork Trail reaches the canyon bottom for it could otherwise be difficult to find.

At this point the main canyon widens to form a large and interesting boulder field, about 0.5mi long. As you proceed upstream stay on the left initially but transfer to the right side as you approach the end of the boulder field. Here, about 10min north of the West Fork Trail you pass by a waterfall where a tributary canyon enters on the left. This smaller canyon seems to drop straight down from the precipitous south face of Ontario Peak. A few yards further upstream, the main canyon suddenly closes in and there is a pleasant campsite under the trees on the right. It is only about 15min from here (or 1hr 45min from the start) to the Lower Cuca-



monga Falls that you encounter rather abruptly after the walls of the canyon steepen and narrow. These falls drop vertically about 50ft from a narrow cleft into a deep pool. They represent the terminus of this hike. However, those with rock-climbing expertise might like to tackle the route around the falls that begins just downstream of the falls and just around the corner on the right or east side. You will find several old ropes hanging down a cliff with many hand and footholds but you should not be tempted to trust your life to such old ropes that are often rotten.

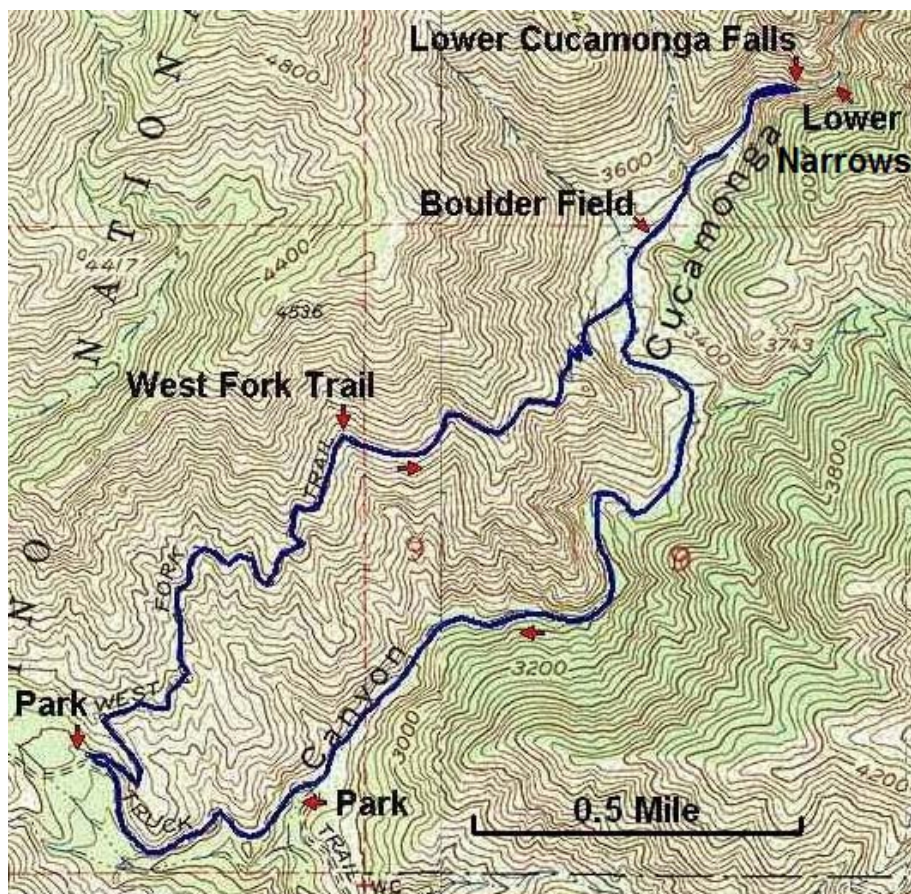
Given the right equipment and experience, the climb is fairly straightforward and proceeds as follows. From the top of a small recess, you climb up a series of small ledges and footholds veering to the right and then turn a corner to reach an incline that traverses back to the left. The narrow spine of the ridge is about 100ft above the starting point and a tree just over the other side provides an excellent anchor. It also has a rope that hangs down the other side near a fallen tree trunk that spans the gorge above the main falls. Do not descend via this rope. Instead follow the faint trail up the spine of the ridge for a short distance and, just past a small tree, you will find a much easier trail that descends to the canyon bottom.

Before this descent, take a moment to enjoy the spectacular view from the top of the ridge. Below you the Cucamonga Creek crashes over a whole series of waterfalls as it makes its way through this magnificent gorge. After the descent, you can travel a short distance upstream, climbing over smaller cascades, before encountering another larger waterfall that is difficult to negotiate. But, I emphasize that the climb and the upper canyon are only for the experienced adventure hiker with climbing skill, equipment and experience.

From the bottom of the climb, the return journey involves retracing your steps to the boulder field and the point where the West Fork Trail descends to the canyon bottom. But on the return, I suggest you continue on downstream. It is only about 1.5mi (1hr 30min) from the West Fork Trail junction to the dirt road crossing that marks the end of the canyon transit. Along the way you will encounter several beautiful pools with fish. About 40min below the West Fork Trail junction, there is a particular attractive pool that makes for a delightful summer swim. For almost all the way, the hiking is relatively undemanding though there is some bouldering and many stream crossings. A use-trail becomes more evident as

you get closer to the end. This is a beautiful and shady canyon; I traveled this way one lovely fall day and the colors were quite marvelous.

The canyon is narrowest during the very last stretch and here you encounter the only significant obstacle in this lower section. Specifically, about 50min below the West Fork Trail junction you come upon a pool across the whole width of the canyon. If you feel nimble you can climb around this pool using a ledge on the left (east) about 6ft above the water. Otherwise the pool is shallowest (about 3ft deep) along the right wall. A short distance south of this pool you emerge in the parking area described as the first trailhead ( $34^{\circ}10.86'N$   $117^{\circ}37.80'W$ , elevation 2680ft). The time from the West Fork Trail junction is about 1hr 30min (or 3hr 45min from the start). If you left your vehicle at the beginning of the West Fork Trail you must hike up the dirt road on the right for another 20min or so.



Map of Middle Cucamonga Canyon Hike

## 10.5 Lower Cucamonga Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 1.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.6 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak
- Difficulties: One 50ft rappel, one small chute, some bouldering
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with 100ft rope
- ACA Rating: 2B I

This is the second of three adventure hikes that, combined, explore the full length of Cucamonga Canyon, all the way from its origins in the shadow of Cucamonga Peak to the large wash that it has created in the valley below. It is a short hike with only two significant obstacles, a 50ft rappel that allows passage around an interesting waterfall and a small, awkward chute that leads to a necessary swim. The canyon itself is verdant and shady except for the last section down the open wash. Indeed it would be a very attractive short hike were it not for vandals who have scattered trash in many places and spray painted many of the rocks. The battered remains of many automobiles also litter the canyon, having apparently been jettisoned off the dirt road high above the east side.

### Trailhead

This is a one way hike down and out of Cucamonga Canyon, starting at the point where the Middle Cucamonga Canyon hike ends. Though there are several ways to set up the hike, perhaps the easiest is a car shuttle using two four-wheel-drive vehicles.

The hike is accessed as described in the Middle Cucamonga Canyon hike. From the west and driving east on Foothill Boulevard, turn north on Euclid in the city of Upland, then right onto 19th Street and left (north) on Sapphire. At the northern end of Sapphire, turn

left on Almond and go all the way to the end of Almond where there is a dirt parking area overlooking the Cucamonga wash (34°9.71'N 117°38.05'W, elevation 2220ft). A dirt road leads northward from this area into the wash but further vehicular progress is prevented by a locked gate. Park one vehicle here and then go back east on Almond and turn left (north) on Skyline. Skyline rapidly narrows to a single lane as it climbs into Cucamonga Canyon. It then turns into a rough dirt road for which four-wheel-drive is sometimes necessary. After about 0.3mi the dirt road forks; take the left fork that descends and crosses the river at a concrete ford just before a large clearing where there are many places to park (34°10.86'N 117°37.80'W, elevation 2680ft).

## Hike

Proceeding downstream from the concrete ford, you can follow a use-trail that mostly proceeds along the left side of the river. The stream that joins from the right very shortly after the start comes down from the Frankish Peak off-road vehicle area. Then, just 10min from the start, the canyon suddenly narrows and the river crashes into a steep, narrow and winding gorge (34°10.76'N 117°37.78'W, elevation 2630ft), cascading into a large rock-walled pool that is hard



*Troy driving up canyon!*



to see from above. When we passed this way, kids had constructed a makeshift coffer dam from a tarp and logs in order to deepen the pool, presumably so they could jump into it. Our means of descent was much less dangerous; a rock ledge above the falls on the left leads to a place where you can rappel down 50ft to the bottom of this series of waterfalls. A stout iron shaft (complete with cog wheel) embedded in the rock at the end of the ledge provides a solid anchor for the rappel. Other ropes hang down from this anchor but it would not be wise to use them. Rockclimbers may notice the bolts and webbing installed in places in the rock wall to the right of the waterfall. Someone has clearly found good climbing here.

A short way downstream (45min from the start) the canyon narrows again and you encounter a small and awkward chute descending into a deep pool. Usually there is a moderate stream flow in this canyon and the difficulty at this chute is to avoid being overwhelmed by this flow, strengthened by being funneled into the chute. Here again there are several old ropes to aid in the descent (or ascent?) but I recommend locating a small bolt set in the rock at the top of the chute and using a rope or length of webbing around this bolt to control your descent. You will have to resign yourself to getting wet for the pool is deep and you will need to swim. There are no more major obstacles downstream of this point.

In several places you will have noticed the carcasses of automobiles that were dumped off the dirt road to crash down to the canyon bottom. The worst stretch of canyon, littered with about a dozen wrecks, occurs about 70min from the start and just upstream of the concrete remains of the gaging station ( $34^{\circ}10.44'\text{N}$   $117^{\circ}37.89'\text{W}$ , elevation 2450ft) that is marked on the topo map.

About 5min further downstream you arrive at the small dam that directs most of the stream flow into a water supply conduit. You circumvent the dam on the left where a dirt road begins and leads on down the canyon. It is a simple matter to follow this road all the way to the parking area where you parked the first vehicle ( $34^{\circ}9.71'\text{N}$   $117^{\circ}38.05'\text{W}$ , elevation 2220ft). This you will reach about 1hr 30min from the start.



## 10.6 Bull Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 9 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.8 miles
- Elevation gain: 3060 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak
- Difficulties: 7 rappels ranging up to 140ft in height.
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with a 160ft rope, a 160ft recovery cord, 60ft of webbing, 7 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A IV

The precipitous southern cliffs of Cucamonga Peak tower nearly 9000ft over the city of Rancho Cucamonga in the eastern San Gabriel valley and provide a majestic background for those in the valley below. Up near the summit the cliffs are awesome but highly fractured, making climbing very difficult and dangerous. Lower down the slopes are more stable, the canyons older and more weathered. Two canyons in particular dominate, namely Deer Canyon and Day Canyon and these carry most of the run-off from the southern slopes of Cucamonga Peak. Indeed during major storms, these canyons become raging torrents of water, mud and rock. As a result, they are broad boulder-filled washes during the rest of the time. This adventure takes you up the boulder highway of Deer Canyon to where an old road crosses the wash. This now-abandoned dirt road used to allow off-road travel from Cucamonga Canyon, across the south face of Cucamonga Peak and down to Sevaine Flats and thus to Lytle Creek. It is now so damaged that it is unlikely to be made passable again. But it allows easy hiking and from the Deer Canyon crossing we hike east for several miles to the head of Bull Canyon. The descent of Bull Canyon provides an exciting and challenging canyoneering adventure for it contains a series of spectacular waterfalls, usually dry or with a trickle of water. The final series of large rappels, 100ft and 140ft in height are particularly exciting. At the

bottom Bull Canyon exits into Deer Canyon and you return to your starting point. The hike is good at any time of year though, in the summer, it may be too hot.

## Trailhead

From the 210 freeway in Rancho Cucamonga, exit at the Haven Avenue offramp and drive north on Haven to where the road narrows to a single lane. If the single lane road is closed park here. If not, continue up the single lane road to a point just past a turn to the left where there is a large dirt parking area on the left side of the road ( $34^{\circ}10.31'N$   $117^{\circ}34.52'W$ , elevation 2550ft). Park here. Note the gated asphalt road that forks off to the northeast that is the route for the start and end of the hike.

## Hike

Start the hike up the gated narrow asphalt road ( $34^{\circ}10.31'N$   $117^{\circ}34.52'W$ , elevation 2550ft) that passes several water towers and then climbs over the west end of the wide debris dam at the mouth of Deer Canyon. Turning north, after 0.5mi you will pass another



*Left: Second rappel (photo by Bob Shear). Right: Penultimate 100ft rappel (photo by Nathan Wozny).*

pair of water tanks (note these as a landmark for the return hike) and the road becomes a rough dirt track that has been well chewed up by storm runoff. After another 0.25mi look across the wash and you should be able to readily identify the mouth of Bull Canyon. Deer Canyon turns sharp left and the back to the right. You will find stretches of the old rough track on the left side of the wash but interspersed with new boulder deposits and run-off trenches. After 1hr 50min and 2.5mi you will arrive at the obvious junction where Calamity Canyon joins Deer Canyon from the west (elevation 4430ft). Continuing up Deer Canyon (the right fork) and changing over to the easier right side of the wash you will arrive after 2hr 20min and 2.9mi at the place where the old Cucamonga/Lytle Creek road crosses the Deer Canyon wash at  $34^{\circ}12.14'N$   $117^{\circ}35.13'W$  and an elevation of 4950ft. There is not much sign of it left in the wash itself so watch for the road off to the right side.

The hike to the east up the gently rising road is easier than the climb up the wash. You cross two major drainages where the road has been deeply eroded away and a number of other smaller slides and erosions. After another 1.5mi you will arrive at a point where the road rounds a major ridge at an elevation of 5490ft, 3.5hr and 4.4mi from the start. From this vantage point look east and you should be able to easily discern the low ridge that forms the east side of the Bull Canyon watershed. Hike another 10min or so along the road to  $34^{\circ}11.87'N$   $117^{\circ}33.92'W$ , and an elevation of 5620ft looking for an obvious steep slope that drops down into the Bull Canyon drainage. Up here there are several branches of Bull Canyon that you can follow but they all merge before too long. After dropping several hundred feet you will probably find it easier to follow the hard rock of the streambed rather than the slopes to either side. After a number of small downclimbs and bypasses we came to a long downclimb on solid rock that brought us down to the junction with another fork coming in on the left (elevation 4600ft, 4hr 20min from the start). The canyon is now wider and deeper and just a short distance beyond the junction you come to the first rappel at about 4600ft. This is a 25ft drop from a tree anchor on the right; though downclimbing is possible here, a rappel is much safer.

In this section, you can see the valley far below you as the canyon drops down through a long series of steps in mostly solid granite. Most of the steps are just downclimbs. However, at an elevation



of 4480ft and 5hr 10min from the start you should rappel the 30ft vertical dryfall rather than try to downclimb the loose material in the gully on the left; the anchor is a stout bush on the left. Shortly thereafter you arrive at a more challenging drop that requires a 70ft rappel from a tree on the left; overhanging rocks mean that a small piece of this is free rappel. Down canyon a trickle of water may appear before you come to a small 15ft drop that still requires a rappel using a tree anchor on the right. Then, just a short distance downstream at 4010ft elevation and 6hr 20min from the morning start, you come to perhaps the prettiest rappel in the canyon, a 70ft vertical drop from a broad shelf. Use the anchor around a boulder in the streambed center for a good view of the falling water (if any).

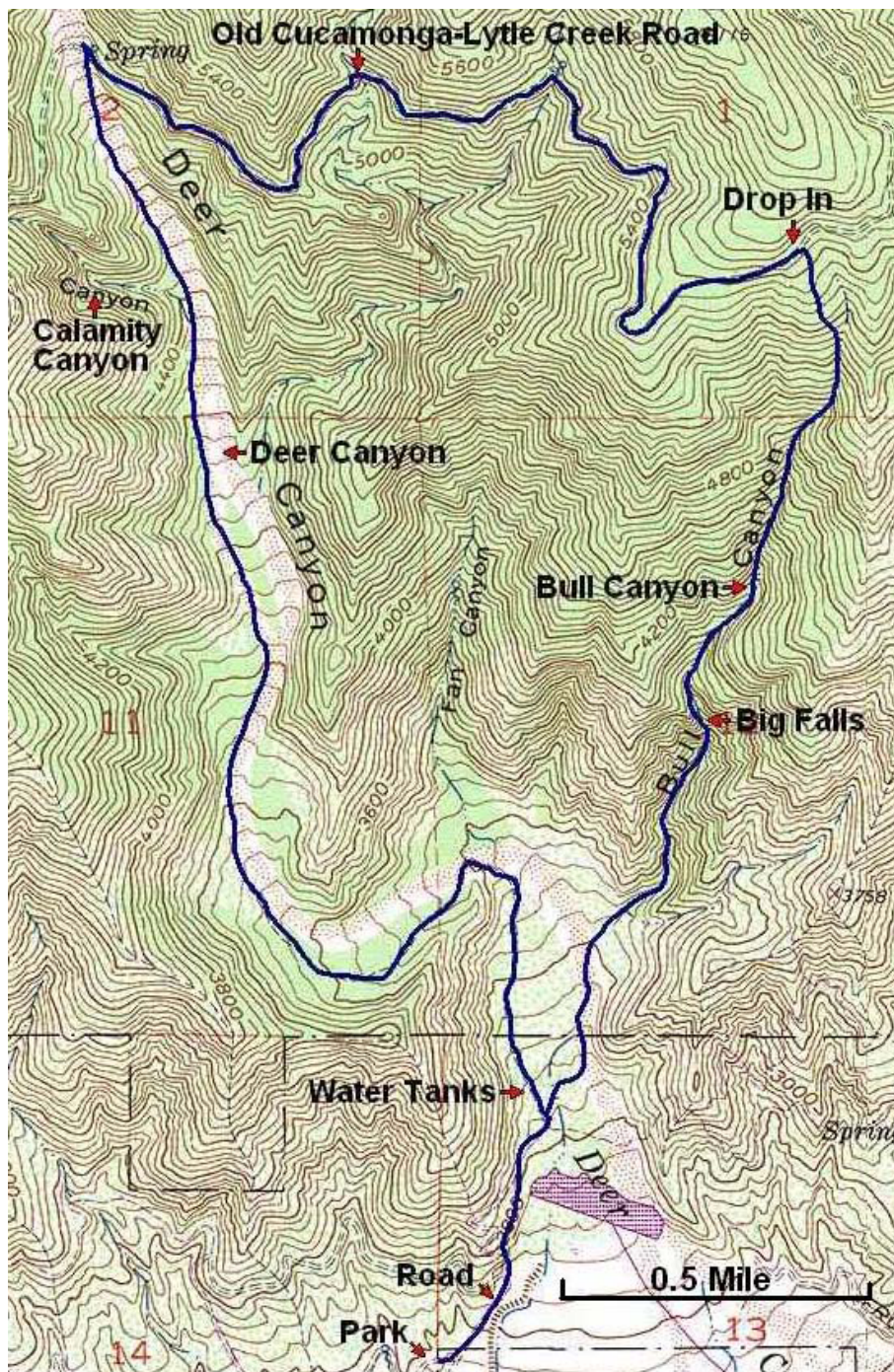
Another short hike brings you to the edge of the final, big drop-off ( $34^{\circ}11.22'N$   $117^{\circ}34.09'W$ , elevation 3770ft) consisting of a 30ft downclimb followed immediately by rappels of 100ft and 140ft. From the top this presents an awesome prospect. The first 30ft drop does not have an obviously safe rappel anchor but provided there is not much water flowing it is fairly easy and safe to downclimb by chimneying down the slot where the water flows (the alternative would be to build a deadman anchor). This downclimb brings you to a broad flat place that ends in a dramatic 100ft drop. A tree



*Last 140ft rappel (photo by Bob Shear).*

on the right side of the lip provides a good anchor for this vertical rappel down to another flat place where the canyon turns sharp right and arrives at the top of the final precipitous 140ft rappel. A large boulder near the middle of the lip makes a good anchor for this exciting final descent.

You should reach the bottom of this last rappel (elevation 3500ft) about 8hr and 5.6mi from the start. Here you can stow your gear for there are only a few short downclimbs between this point and the mouth of Bull Canyon. At the mouth (elevation 3120ft), turn left and hike Deer Canyon wash to the remains of an old gauging station(?). From here cut across to the right to the twin water tanks you noted in the morning and follow the asphalt road down to your parked vehicle (34°10.31'N 117°34.52'W, elevation 2550ft). You should complete the 6.8mi hike in about 9hr.



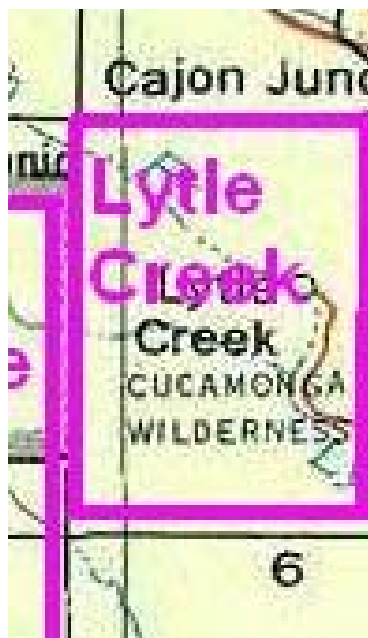
Map of Bull Canyon Hike



## Chapter 11

# LYTLE CREEK

Lytle Creek consists of three major branches, the North, Middle and South Forks that drain the east end of the San Gabriel Mountain Range. Of these the Middle and South Forks present two classic canyoneering adventures, the Middle Fork itself and Bonita Canyon that drops into the South Fork.



Lytle Creek region.



## 11.1 Middle Fork Lytle Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6.5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 6.6 miles
- Elevation gain: 2000 feet
- USGS Topo Maps: Telegraph Peak, Cucamonga Peak
- Difficulties: 4 rappels including 3 large single strand rappels of 160ft, 110ft, and 110ft
- Special equipment: 200ft rope, 160ft rope, 200ft rope recovery cord, 4 rappel rings, 40ft webbing, harnesses, and dry bags
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The Middle Fork of Lytle Creek is one of the prettiest canyons in the San Gabriels and for this reason the trail that leads up the canyon is popular with hikers. Many hike the two miles up to the base of a spectacular set of waterfalls in a large tributary off the main canyon. Few go further though the trail eventually climbs through the Cucamonga Wilderness all the way up to Icehouse Saddle. Beyond the base of the waterfalls, the trail switchbacks up the side of the main canyon before contouring back into the tributary. This allows the adventure hiker to access the upper reaches of the tributary and then descend two sets of beautiful waterfalls that involve four challenging rappels, 3 over 100ft and one in which you will get very wet. It is a marvelous adventure hike complete with escape routes for those frightened by the rappels. Due to the high altitude (about 5000ft) it is best for the summer or early fall. In winter the rockfaces are often covered in ice.

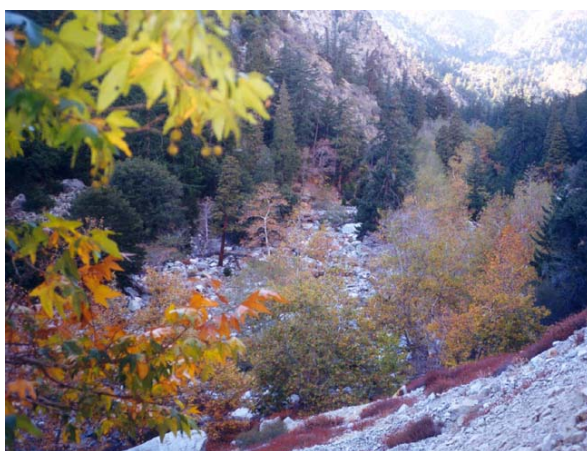
### Trailhead

From Los Angeles take the 210 or 10 Freeway east toward San Bernadino and the 15 Freeway north toward Barstow. About 3mi before the intersection of the 15 and 215 Freeways in Devore, exit

the freeway at Sierra Avenue following the sign for the Lytle Creek Recreation Area. Drive north past Nealey's Corner toward Lytle Creek. You will pass the Lytle Creek Ranger Station (on your right) and the turn off to the South Fork of Lytle Creek (on your left). Just 0.3mi further on look for the Middle Fork turn off on the left that is about 6.5mi from the freeway. The road proceeds through the small village of Scotland and then up the Middle Fork of Lytle Creek. The asphalt soon turns to dirt but the going is fairly smooth except for a few rough stretches near the end. The trailhead parking area ( $34^{\circ}15.21'N$   $117^{\circ}32.42'W$ , elevation 3980ft) is at the end of the road, 2.8mi from Scotland.

## Hike

The trail is well marked and frequently used. It begins by climbing steeply up the right side of the canyon in order to breach a saddle on a ridge that juts out into the main canyon. At this saddle there are two alternative routes, the high road and the low road. The low road dips down into the canyon bottom in order to access the Stone House campground. The high road climbs gradually as it ascends the canyon and is the preferred route on the way in. The two trails meet up again a few hundred yards upstream of the campground. It takes about 40min to reach this junction that is 1.1mi from the trailhead at 4500ft. Just a short distance upstream of the junction, a sign tells you that you are entering the Cucamonga Wilderness.



*Left: Middle Fork below falls. Right: Rappel in upper set.*

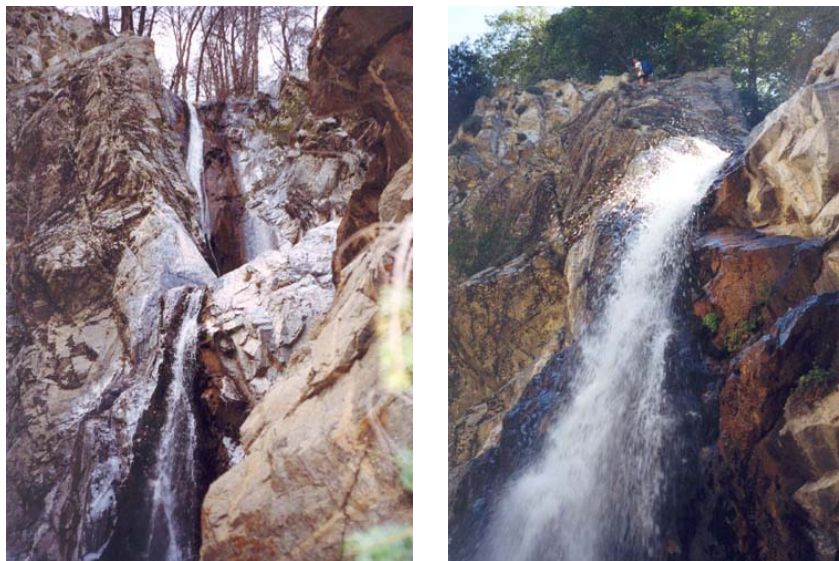
The trail then proceeds up the canyon at some height above the stream on the north side. There are some very lovely vistas of the canyon along this stretch, especially during the fall. After about 1hr 30min and 2.2mi you will come to the junction of the Middle Fork with an unnamed tributary that enters from the south. Before you arrive at this point it will be evident that this unnamed tributary exits from a dramatic gorge and it is easy to anticipate that the gorge is where the excitement lies. There is a broad open area to the west of the junction ( $34^{\circ}15.24'N$   $117^{\circ}34.20'W$ , elevation 5120ft) with several rough camping areas. The trail crosses to the south side of the Middle Fork and here you could leave your pack and the trail to explore a short distance up the unnamed tributary gorge. About 200yds into the gorge, after surmounting two minor cascades, you will be stopped by a very impressive set of three consecutive waterfalls crashing down from high overhead. These measure about 70ft, 60ft and 100ft in descending order. You will note the trees at the top that anchor the 130ft rappel down a cliff to the left of the top two waterfalls. That rappel will deposit you on a shelf where there are several trees to anchor the second rappel down the side of the lowest waterfall.

After this preview, that adds about 30min to the duration of the hike, you return to the trail where you left your pack and continue along it as it climbs along the south bank of the Middle Fork. Soon it begins a switchbacking ascent of the steep wooded slope to the south. As you near the top of this climb, take note of a large fallen tree trunk around which the trail switchbacks. The top of the ridge is about 50ft above you at the top of a scree slope. If you choose to follow the shorter version of this adventure and access the top of the lower set of falls via the lower drop-in point then you should leave the trail and climb to the ridge top ( $34^{\circ}15.12'N$   $117^{\circ}34.37'W$ , elevation 5500ft). Then descend the wooded slope on the other side of the ridge. Follow the faint use-trail that veers to the right until you reach the top of a rock and earth slope at a point where it is obvious that you can descend to the canyon bottom. This lower drop-in route will bring you to a point about 30yds upstream of the lip of the lower set of waterfalls. We will resume the description of the canyon bottom hike a little later.

If you opt for the whole adventure then, back at the log, you should continue up the switchbacking trail that soon reaches the

top of the ridge and transitions into the valley of the unnamed tributary. As you make that transition, look down into the canyon bottom upstream of the lower set of falls. At this point the canyon briefly broadens. However, looking upstream, it is clear that this broadening is brief and the canyon narrows just a short distance upstream. Continuing on up the trail, you will soon be able to discern in these narrows another, upper set of waterfalls that you can glimpse through the trees. Follow the trail as it climbs over the bluff on the right side of these upper narrows. After reaching the top of that bluff, continue on along the trail for about 70yds to a place where you can clearly see the canyon bottom below you at the bottom of a moderate earth slope. This is the upper drop-in point ( $34^{\circ}14.93'N$   $117^{\circ}34.58'W$ , elevation 5840ft). You should reach this point 35min after leaving the Middle Fork or 1hr 45min from the start. It is quite easy to descend the earth slope through the trees to the canyon bottom. You are then just a short distance upstream of the upper set of waterfalls.

Proceeding down the canyon, you soon arrive at the top of the upper set of waterfalls (elevation 5740ft) about 2hr 10min from the start. The first waterfall is a small set of cascades that funnel around the left side of a large boulder. Do not descend this cascade. Instead



*Left: Upper part of lower set. Right: Middle falls of lower set.*

note a prominent bluff on the right that is above the second falls at the same elevation as your present location; there are several small trees growing on top of that bluff. Then contour around the scree slope on the right to the top of the bluff and, using one or more of those small trees as anchor, rappel about 40ft down the far side of the bluff to a flat area below the second falls. You will now be at the top of the large waterfall in this first set. This descends about 15ft to a small shelf and then plunges about 80ft into a beautiful, crystal clear circular pool drilled into the rockface by this marvelous waterfall. The pool is surrounded on three sides by vertical cliff and, on the fourth, by a shelf that ends in another 15ft drop to the canyon bottom. It is a challenging 110ft single rappel in which you cannot avoid getting wet. Consequently, this is the time to put all your not-wettable gear in the dry bag.

The best anchor for this single rappel is a stout tree growing out of the rockface a short way above the lip on the left. It is a good idea to set the anchor about 4ft up the trunk of this tree in order to minimize rope recovery problems with the sharp rock lip ahead of the tree. The first 15ft of the descent to the small shelf is quite easy. Then I suggest edging across to the other side of the stream and descending the main waterfall on the right (as you look downstream). This way you can avoid the principal stream though you will inevitably get wet as you near the circular pool. It is likely that the pool depth varies considerably with time. When we came this way it was about 3.5ft deep at the point of descent but more like 4ft deep at the far side where you clearly want to scramble out of the water onto the shelf. Incidentally, this scramble has few hand or foot holds and might be quite difficult if the water were deeper. Once on the shelf continue to rappel down the easy, 15ft slope to the canyon bottom (elevation 5540ft). You should arrive here about 3hr 15min from the start. It is a spectacular spot to have lunch.

A short way down the canyon, you arrive at a minor waterfall that can be bypassed a short distance up the earth slope on the right. Just downstream of this is an excellent campsite on the left complete with fire ring and log seats. Continuing downstream, you negotiate a stretch of about 200yds of wooded, boulder-strewn canyon before arriving at the lower drop-in point and the top of the lower set of waterfalls. If you have had enough at this point or if you would rather not tackle the lower set of falls, then it is relatively easy to



return to the trail by backtracking up the canyon about 30yds to a loose earth slope. Climbing this slope and veering right you will access the ridgetop and be able to find the developed trail just down the slope on the other side of this ridge.

As described earlier the second set of waterfalls consists of three dramatic, vertical drops measuring about 70ft, 60ft and 100ft in descending order with beautiful pools in between. The lip of the uppermost of the three is to the left side of the canyon. The falls drop further toward the left into a circular pool on a shelf that has no anchors. Do not rappel into this pool for you will be completely stuck if you do. The discharge from that pool plunges down the second waterfall that returns the water toward the center of the canyon. On the right side of these upper two falls there is a quite vertical cliff that drops about 130ft to a large shelf at the bottom of the second waterfall.

This is the descent route and requires a single rappel of about 130ft. The entry to the rappel and the rope recovery are made awkward by a sharp, rocky battlement about 12ft high on the right side of the lip at the top. Just behind this battlement are some large trees. Using one of the large trees as anchor we hung the webbing and rappel ring over the rocky battlement and then climbed over



*Last rappel.*

the rock and used some small footholds on the far side to begin the rappel. Note there are several small trees on the way down where the rope may get hung up.

Having rappelled down onto the shelf at the bottom of the second waterfall, you will need to pull the rope in order to set up for the second rappel. Because you will be trapped if you have difficulty with this rope recovery, I suggest that the team carry a second, 160ft rope in order to single rappel to the bottom if the upper rope gets hung up. But before you continue, take a little time to admire this magnificent, cathedral-like place with towering walls of rock all around. The spray from the lovely second waterfall dances rainbows with the sun. It is one of those very precious perches in the San Gabriel mountains that are only reachable by the adventure hiker but richly reward all of the efforts along the way.

The second rappel is a drop of about 110ft down the right side of the lowest of the three waterfalls that make up this lower set. This requires another single rappel. The best anchor is a small, stout tree near the edge on the right. I recommend using a moderately long piece of webbing so that the rappel ring can be seen from the bottom. The 110ft descent is dry and relatively easy.

You will now have come to the point at the bottom of the second set of waterfalls that you may have reconnoitered earlier in the day. From here it is only about 200yds to the end of the gorge, though there is one small downclimb on the way. As the gorge opens up stay to the left so that you intersect the main stream of the Middle Fork. You may even need to proceed a short way up the Middle Fork in order to reach the trail where it crosses that stream. From there it is a pleasant 1hr hike back down the canyon to the trailhead (34°15.21'N 117°32.42'W, elevation 3980ft) and the end of a really challenging adventure hike.



Map of Middle Fork of Lytle Creek Hike

## 11.2 South Fork of Lytle Creek

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 5 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 3.7 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Devore
- Difficulties: Three rappels ranging in height up to 80ft and several downclimbs.
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with one 200ft rope, 50ft of webbing, 3 rappel rings, harnesses and helmets.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The eastern end of the San Gabriels is riven through by the three forks of Lytle Creek that have created some rugged and beautiful canyons in this section of the mountains. The South Fork of Lytle Creek runs due east from the forested slopes of Cucamonga Peak and then suddenly and precipitously drops down a fractured headwall to a broad, boulder-littered canyon before eventually joining the main Lytle Creek Canyon. This adventure accesses the headwaters of the South Fork of Lytle Creek by means of a 4WD vehicle drive up the rough dirt San Sevaine Flats Road. The hike then travels the entire length of the South Fork, including a three rappel descent of the dramatic headwall. Because of loose rock especially near the headwall, helmets are essential for this hike.

The hike can be completed almost anytime of the year though, in winter you should be prepared for ice at the higher elevations and for frozen waterfalls. It would also be wise to call ahead to the Lytle Creek Ranger Station to ensure that the San Sevaine Flats Road is open. The rangers close the road when there is snow at higher elevations or when there is danger of washouts.

### Trailhead

This hike requires two 4WD vehicles to set up the necessary car shuttle. From Los Angeles take the 210 or 10 Freeway east toward San Bernadino and the 15 Freeway north toward Barstow. About 3mi before the intersection of the 15 and 215 Freeways in Devore, exit the freeway where the signs indicate the Lytle Creek Recreation Area. Drive north past Nealey's Corner toward Lytle Creek and, 1.6mi from the freeway, identify a left turn to a prominent white metal gate ( $34^{\circ}12.10'N$   $117^{\circ}26.92'W$ , elevation 2230ft). This is the entrance to the San Sevaine Flats Road that you will shortly follow. Then continue on up Lytle Creek Road to the point where the South Fork joins the main Lytle Creek. Identify a roadside parking area that overlooks this junction. It is 4.3mi north of the San Sevaine Flats Road junction and 1.2mi beyond the Lytle Creek Ranger Station. It is also 0.14mi south of the road junction to the South Fork Campgrounds. Park one 4WD vehicle in the roadside turn-off here ( $34^{\circ}14.23'N$   $117^{\circ}29.86'W$ , elevation 2910ft) and then drive back down Lytle Creek Road to the gate to the San Sevaine Flats Road.

Proceed up the San Sevaine Flats Road (called the Big Tree Truck Road on the topo map) in a 4WD vehicle. After 40min and 7.5mi you will come to the junction where the access road to the radio towers forks to the right (elevation 5560ft). Turn left here and con-



*Left: First rappel. Right: Third rappel.*



tinue along the rising ridge. There is a particularly rough section of road as it rounds to the south of a ridge peak. At 9.4mi the road begins to contour around to the north of a prominent peak. Here the drop-off to the north is dramatic. You are looking down into the rugged upper section of the South Fork of Lytle Creek and the bare grey rock of the headwall chasm is readily visible. Continuing on along the road, at 10.1mi you round Buck Point and begin a short descent to the forested headwaters of the South Fork. At the bottom of this descent, there is a saddle from which you can see the valley to the south. At this saddle there is a good parking area (34°12.96'N 117°33.00'W, elevation 5780ft). The 10.7mi drive from Lytle Creek Road to the parking area will take about 1hr to complete.

## Hike

From the parking area (34°12.96'N 117°33.00'W, elevation 5780ft) cross the road and hike northeast down the shallow draw that also contains the remains of an old road (more obvious in some places than in others). Follow this road as it gently descends through the forest along the uppermost section of the South Fork of Lytle Creek. About 0.4mi and 20min from the start at 34°13.25'N 117°32.80'W and an elevation of 5520ft you will arrive suddenly at the top of the South Fork headwall. Here, the terrain falls off precipitously on all sides, leaving a huge and dramatic chasm of bare and fractured rock. This rock is very unstable and loose so you need to be concerned about falling rock throughout the subsequent descent. Thus helmets are strongly recommended.

Three rappels are required during the descent of this fractured headwall. The first is an 80ft descent for which a good anchor is a rock trapped under the huge boulder at the lip of the drop-off in the streambed (elevation 5520ft). Descend down to the loose scree in the streambed and then proceed further on foot to avoid the rocks inevitably cascading down below the next rappeler. Just below this scree is an awkward 10ft downclimb that, in turn, leads to the top of the second rappel, a 30ft descent that is readily anchored by the group of trees in the middle of the streambed. When we came this way in the winter this was an interesting, frozen waterfall. Another short stretch of scree follows before you arrive at an elevation of 5260ft at the top of the third rappel. This consists of scary-looking

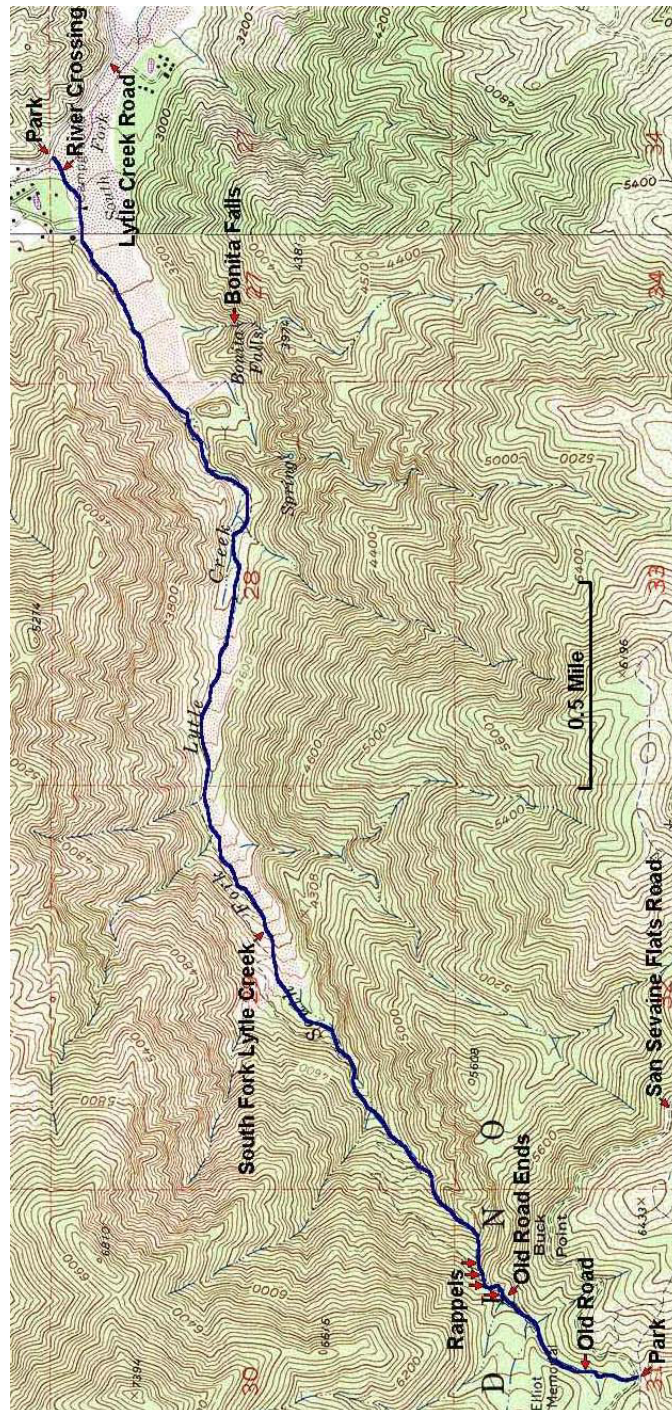
drop-off from a hanging slot. This was also a frozen waterfall when we descended in winter. The drop to the scree slope below is only 60ft though it looks much bigger when viewed from above. The anchor is a trapped rock under a large boulder some distance back from the lip.

A long scree-filled canyon descent follows this third rappel in the headwall and the route then transitions to a rocky, boulder-strewn canyon with pine trees and the beginnings of a running stream. You should reach this transition about 2hr 15min from the start. There are several modest downclimbs and, at 4840ft, a large gully enters from the left. As the rate of descent begins to lessen and the trees become more numerous, another large canyon and stream enter on the left at 4660ft. Then, at 4380ft there is a short section of narrows that begins with a 20ft waterfall in a rocky chute. This is best bypassed by downclimbing (with a belay) or rappeling a 20ft slot below a large tree on the left. Two more beautiful waterfalls follow almost immediately. The first, a vertical cascade about 30ft high can be rappeled using a tree anchor to the right of the stream. Alternatively, it can be bypassed by climbing to a small saddle on the left about 20yds upstream of the falls and, from that saddle, descending a scree chute to the bottom of the falls. The second waterfall, 20ft high, is also readily bypassed on the left by climbing to a low saddle and descending a leafy slope. You should reach this 4240ft elevation 1.3mi and 3.5hr from the morning start.

At the bottom of the leafy slope you will note the beginning of a use-trail that here follows a section of the old road that once penetrated up the South Fork. Follow the old road or use-trail on the north side of the broadening canyon and you will come to the remains of an old campsite complete with cooking pots! From here on the canyon bottom is frequently a boulder field and there is an episodic use-trail that usually proceeds along one or other side of the canyon to avoid the larger boulders. At 4200ft a large canyon and its wash enter on the left and at 3820ft, 1.7mi and 4hr from the start, you should arrive at the bottom of the first large boulder field. From this point on the canyon is more densely wooded and the use-trail sometimes follows the wooded southern bench and sometimes the more open, bouldery northern side.

At 3290ft, 2.8mi and 4hr 40min from the start, there is a brief section of narrows, easily negotiated using the trail on the left. Be-

low these narrows, the South Fork emerges onto a broad boulder field as it widens approaching the junction with the main Lytle Creek canyon. The well-worn trail runs along the north side of this boulder field. A short distance beyond the narrows, look for the spectacular Bonita Falls that drop down the steep south wall of the canyon. After another 0.3mi, the trail proceeds along the south side of two campgrounds and then arrives at the main stream of Lytle Creek. It is not easy to find a place where you can cross the river without getting your feet wet. And it could be quite difficult, even dangerous, after prolonged rain. However, on the other side it is just a few yards through the trees to the road and, hopefully, the place where you left the return vehicle ( $34^{\circ}14.23'N$   $117^{\circ}29.86'W$ , elevation 2910ft). The entire descent, 3.7mi long, should take about 5hr.



## Map of South Fork of Lytle Creek Hike

## 11.3 Spring Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 4 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.5 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Devore
- Difficulties: Two rappels of 90ft and 200ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with one 200ft rope and a 200ft recovery line, 12ft of webbing, 1 rappel ring, helmets, harnesses.
- ACA Rating: 3A II

The eastern end of the San Gabriels is riven through by the three forks of Lytle Creek that have created some rugged and beautiful canyons in this section of the mountains. The South Fork of Lytle Creek runs due east from the slopes of Cucamonga Peak and forms the northern side of a dominant ridge, the San Sevaine ridge, that also runs east from Cucamonga and overlooks the eastern end of the San Gabriel Valley. The north slope of San Sevaine ridge is particularly precipitous. Spring Canyon (as we have called it) is one of many small tributaries of the South Fork that drain this north slope and drop dramatically as they do so. In particular, Spring Canyon falls through two spectacular waterfalls, 90ft and almost 200ft in height. This hike accesses the top of Spring Canyon and follows the stream through its entire course down to Lytle Creek. It is a dry hike (though your feet may get wet) and is suitable for any time of the year.

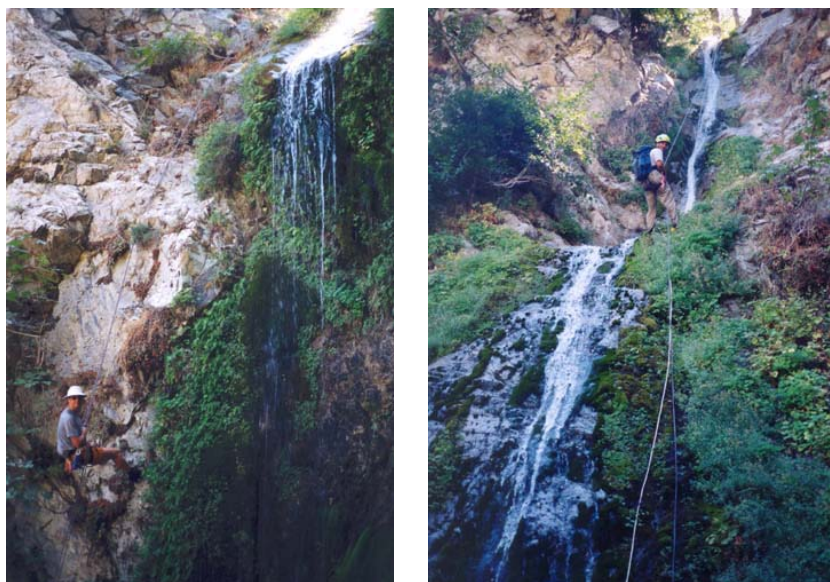
### Trailhead

This hike requires a four-wheel-drive shuttle. From Los Angeles take the 210 or 10 Freeway east toward San Bernadino and the 15 Freeway north toward Barstow. About 3mi before the intersection



of the 15 and 215 Freeways in Devore, exit the freeway where the signs indicate the Lytle Creek recreation area. Drive north past Nealey's Corner toward Lytle Creek and, 1.6mi from the freeway, identify a left turn to a prominent white metal gate ( $34^{\circ}12.10'N$   $117^{\circ}26.92'W$ , elevation 2230ft). This is the entrance to the San Sevaine Flats road that you will shortly follow. Then continue on up the Lytle Creek road to the point where the South Fork joins the main Lytle Creek. We wish to identify a roadside parking area that overlooks this junction. It is 4.3mi north of the San Sevaine Flats road junction and 1.2mi beyond the Lytle Creek Ranger Station. It is also 0.14mi south of the road junction to the South Fork Campgrounds. Park one vehicle here ( $34^{\circ}14.23'N$   $117^{\circ}29.86'W$ , elevation 2910ft) and then drive back down Lytle Creek road to the gate to the San Sevaine Flats road.

It is possible to drive a 2WD vehicle up the rough dirt road that climbs up to San Sevaine Flats but it is not recommended; a 4WD vehicle is much preferred. It takes about 40min to drive the 7.5mi to the road junction where the access road to the radio towers forks to the right. Continue left (west) on the San Sevaine Flats Road for 0.45mi and park at the side of the road in a dip ( $34^{\circ}12.66'N$   $117^{\circ}30.71'W$ , elevation 5520ft).



*Left: Spring Canyon Upper Falls. Right: Spring Canyon Lower Falls.*

## Hike

From the 5520ft location where you parked (34°12.66'N 117°30.71'W) you should be able to locate a stile (four closely spaced posts) through the fence on the right side of the road. It is behind a tree just beyond where you parked and is roughly the third such stile from the Radio Towers junction. Proceed through that stile and head north (and slightly west) down into a gradually developing gully. This is a pleasant wooded canyon with only small sections of brambles and brush. As the gully deepens, grey bedrock appears and about a mile from the start, you encounter the first of a number of short downclimbs.

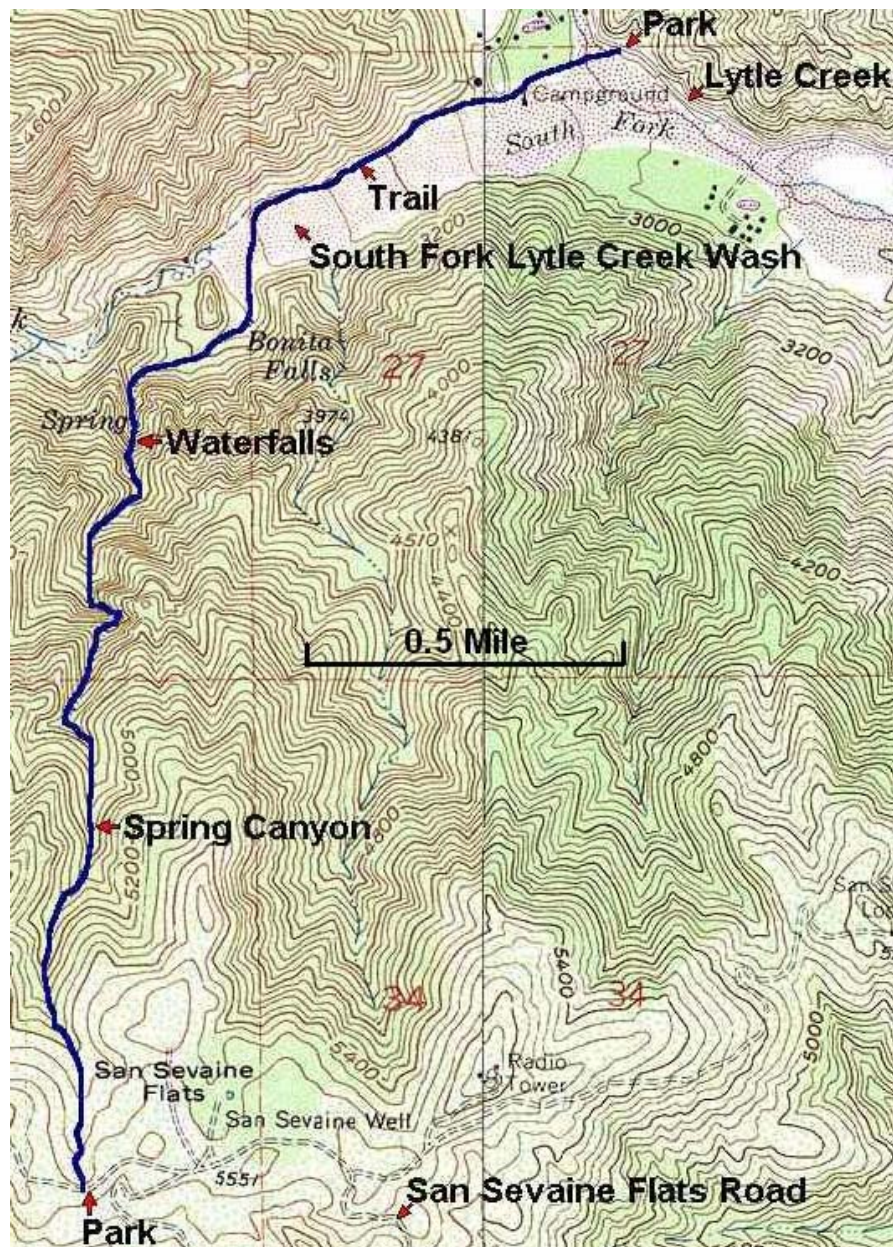
About 2hr and 1.2mi from the start at 3900ft a large gully enters on the right and you begin to encounter running water. Very shortly thereafter you come to an awesome drop-off, the top of the two beautiful waterfall rappels in Spring Canyon. It is a good place to pause, lunch and prepare for the excitement ahead. Below you is a drop of a little under 300ft in two vertical stages. Though it is hard to discern the bottom from your eerie perch, the rappels are technically easy and the anchors are robust.

The first stage is a 90ft vertical descent to the right of a beautiful moss- and fern-adorned waterfall. There are several possible anchors but the best is probably a stout tree on a ledge about 10ft above the lip on the right. This first rappel lowers you into a lovely wooded glade beside the waterfall. The second stage drops almost 200ft down from this glade. The best anchor is a large tree just to the left of the narrow lip. A single strand rappel from this tree using a 60m rope will just reach the bottom. About 2/3 of the way down this inclined and slippery rappel there is a sloping shelf with a tree on the right side that could, with some difficulty, be used to anchor a third stage if your rope is shorter than 60m. You should reach the bottom of the rappels (elevation about 3550ft) about 3hr and 1.3mi from the morning start.

There follows a section of descent over white bedrock with some downclimbing. A short distance from the bottom of the rappels, you will come to an inclined 50ft chute waterfall that is easily bypassed by downclimbing over the shoulder to the left. This is followed by a 30ft vertical drop that is best downclimbed in a slot on the left. Soon the canyon turns sharp right, opens up and passes to the south of two substantial knobs before entering a broad boulder field,

the wash of the South Fork of Lytle Creek. You should reach this boulder field (elevation 3090ft) about 3hr 40min and 1.7mi of hiking from the ridgetop start.

Once in the wash, hike north across the South Fork stream bed to the north side of the wash where you should be able to find a well-worn trail. Traveling east, this trail proceeds along the south side of two campgrounds and then arrives at Lytle Creek. Find a spot to cross the river; just a few yards through the trees you climb the bank up to the road and, hopefully, the parked return vehicle ( $34^{\circ}14.23'N$   $117^{\circ}29.86'W$ , elevation 2910ft). You should arrive here just over 4hrs and 2.5mi from the start.



Map of Spring Canyon Hike



## 11.4 Bonita Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 2.2 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Cucamonga Peak, Devore
- Difficulties: Four rappels ranging in height from 25ft to 160ft
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with one 200ft rope and a 200ft recovery line, 20ft of webbing, 2 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The eastern end of the San Gabriels is riven through by the three forks of Lytle Creek that have created some rugged and beautiful canyons in this section of the mountains. The South Fork of Lytle Creek runs due east from the slopes of Cucamonga Peak and forms the northern side of a dominant ridge, the San Sevaine ridge, that also runs east from Cucamonga and overlooks the eastern end of the San Gabriel Valley. The north slope of San Sevaine ridge that overlooks the South Fork is particularly precipitous. Bonita Canyon is one of many small tributaries of the South Fork that drain this north slope and drop dramatically as they do so. In particular, Bonita Creek falls through three spectacular waterfalls, respectively 190ft, 40ft and 160ft high, during the last phase of its descent into the South Fork. This hike accesses the top of Bonita Canyon and follows the stream through its entire course down to Lytle Creek. The highlight is the dramatic and challenging descent of three spectacular waterfalls, the Upper, Middle and Lower Bonita Falls. It is a dry hike suitable for any time of the year provided the stream flow is not unusually swollen.

### Trailhead

This hike requires a four-wheel-drive shuttle. From Los Angeles take the 210 or 10 Freeway east toward San Bernadino and the 15



Freeway north toward Barstow. About 3mi before the intersection of the 15 and 215 Freeways in Devore, exit the freeway where the signs indicate the Lytle Creek recreation area. Drive north past Nealey's Corner toward Lytle Creek and, 1.6mi from the freeway, identify a left turn to a prominent white metal gate ( $34^{\circ}12.10'N$   $117^{\circ}26.92'W$ , elevation 2230ft). This is the entrance to the San Sevaine Flats road that you will shortly follow. Then continue on up the Lytle Creek road to the point where the South Fork joins the main Lytle Creek. We wish to identify a roadside parking area that overlooks this junction. It is 4.3mi north of the San Sevaine Flats road junction and 1.2mi beyond the Lytle Creek Ranger Station. It is also 0.14mi south of the road junction to the South Fork Campgrounds. Park one vehicle here ( $34^{\circ}14.23'N$   $117^{\circ}29.86'W$ , elevation 2910ft) and then drive back down Lytle Creek road to the gate to the San Sevaine Flats road.

It is possible to drive a 2WD vehicle up the rough dirt road that climbs up to San Sevaine Flats but it is not recommended; a 4WD vehicle is much preferred. It takes about 40min to drive the 7.5mi to the road junction where the access road to the radio towers forks to the right. Turn right onto that spur road and proceed about



*Left: Upper Bonita Falls. Right: Lower Bonita Falls with Upper Falls in background.*

200yds to a saddle almost in the shadows of the radio towers. Park in a small turnout on the right (34°12.71'N 117°30.15'W, elevation 5520ft).

## Hike

From the 5520ft saddle near the radio towers (34°12.71'N 117°30.15'W), proceed into the obvious shallow valley that leads north from the saddle. The going is easy, open low forest and the canyon slowly deepens into an open gully relatively free of brush or brambles. It is a pretty, isolated canyon rarely visited by humans. The faint use trail that can be detected in places is an animal track; bear traces are evident. About 1hr from the start you pass the junction (elevation 4400ft) with the first substantial tributary entering on the right. The going remains straightforward with benches on either side occurring with increasing frequency until, 3hr from the start at about 3850ft, you arrive at the top of the first significant obstacle, a multiple stage waterfall descending about 60ft in total. This can be readily downclimbed on the right using some trees and footholds to access a shallow gully that leads down to a broad sloping bench on the right side.

A short distance further downstream you arrive at the second falls, a rappel of about 25ft using a convenient tree anchor on the left. Descend into a large shallow pool and continue the rappel down the second small step to the base of the waterfall. It is possible to bypass these falls high on the right but the footholds are sketchy and the rappel is much safer. Another easy and gently descending section of canyon follows with increasing bushes on either or both sides of the stream.

Then, quite suddenly, you arrive (4hr from the start at 3360ft) at the top of a high waterfall with a panoramic view of the precipitous final section of Bonita Canyon and the surrounding mountains. There is a pathway to the right of the top of the falls leading to a flat clearing or platform with an even more spectacular view. Far below is the broad boulder field that is the South Fork of Lytle Creek. And all around is a convoluted mosaic of cliffs and trees and waterfalls. Cliffs surround three sides of the platform and the exposure is awesome. Others have clearly gathered here and camped to enjoy the marvelous view. The high waterfall whose top you passed and that lies immediately below and to the left is the first or uppermost of the

three spectacular Bonita Falls. It falls about 200ft, crashing down a recessed gully with the water bouncing off the rock walls on both sides. It would be very difficult to rappel directly down this waterfall and so I recommend that you bypass it in the following way. On the right or innermost side of the platform is a steep, earthy gully that many have used to climb up to and down from the platform. The upper section of this gully can be either downclimbed or rappeled. The lower section is best rappeled using one of the larger trees in the gully. The necessary rappel is only about 25ft high. From the bottom, continue to descend a steep earthy, rocky slope to rejoin the stream.

Before continuing downstream, I recommend that you hike a few yards upstream to the base of the aforementioned Upper Bonita Falls. This is a fine spot to pause, to enjoy this beautiful waterfall and to rest before the last and most difficult part of the hike. It is certainly one of the most beautiful waterfalls in all the San Gabriels.

Resuming the descent, the next immediate obstacle is the Middle Bonita Falls, a sloping cascade about 40ft high. Use the tree in the middle of the canyon as the anchor and rappel down to the base, a short flat area at the top of the final and most spectacular obstacle, the Lower Bonita Falls. This vertical drop of about 160ft, is an



*Author descends Lower Bonita Falls.*

awesome sight when you stand near the lip and look down. There is no difficulty with the anchor for there are three robust young trees on the right that allow one to descend dryly to the right of the falls. Though the height is awesome, both the entry on the right and the descent are quite straightforward. You should reach the bottom about 5.5hr from the start.

From the bottom of Bonita Falls, a well-worn trail to the right of the stream descends to the boulder field (3100ft) that is the South Fork of the Lytle Creek, a short 10min hike. Turn right at the end of Bonita Canyon and angle across the boulder field to the north or left side of the flood plain where there is a trail traveling due east. The trail proceeds along the south side of two campgrounds and then arrives at Lytle Creek. Find a spot to cross the river; just a few yards through the trees you climb the bank up to the road and, hopefully, the parked vehicle (34°14.23'N 117°29.86'W, elevation 2910ft).





Map of Bonita Canyon Hike



## 11.5 Green Mountain Canyon

### Characteristics

- Hiking time: 6 hours
- Estimated hiking distance: 1.8 miles
- Elevation gain: None
- USGS Topo Maps: Devore
- Difficulties: About 5 rappels ranging in height from 20ft to 180ft and much downclimbing
- Special equipment: Rappeling equipment with one 200ft rope and a 200ft recovery line, 40ft of webbing, 2 rappel rings.
- ACA Rating: 3A III

The eastern end of the San Gabriels in the region of Lytle Creek contains some of the most rugged and beautiful canyons in the range. The South Fork of Lytle Creek runs due east from the slopes of Cucamonga Peak and forms the northern side of a dominant ridge, the San Sevaine ridge, that runs east from Cucamonga Peak and overlooks the eastern end of the San Gabriel Valley. Green Mountain Canyon drops dramatically down over the end of this ridge into Lytle Creek and emerges at the rustic Green Mountain Ranch. This hike starts at the radio towers on a high point at the end of the ridge and descends the entire length of Green Mountain Canyon with many rappels and downclimbs. It is a dry hike suitable for any time of the year provided the road up to San Sevaine Flats is open (it is usually only closed when there is substantial snow - check with the Lytle Creek Ranger Station).

### Trailhead

The hike requires a four-wheel-drive shuttle. From Los Angeles take the 210 Freeway or 10 Freeway east toward San Bernadino and the 15 Freeway north toward Barstow. About 3mi before the intersection of the 15 and 215 Freeways in Devore, exit the freeway where

the signs indicate the Lytle Creek recreation area. Drive north past Nealey's Corner toward Lytle Creek and, 1.6mi from the freeway, identify a prominent white metal gate ( $34^{\circ}12.10'N$   $117^{\circ}26.92'W$ , elevation 2230ft) at a turn-off on the left. This is the entrance to the San Sevaine Flats road that you will shortly follow. Then continue on up Lytle Creek road for 4.1mi and turn left into the Green Mountain Ranch (5.7mi from freeway). Leave one vehicle here ( $34^{\circ}14.03'N$   $117^{\circ}29.63'W$ , elevation 2840ft) and drive back down Lytle Creek road to the entrance to the San Sevaine Flats road.

It is possible to drive a 2WD vehicle up the rough dirt road that climbs up to San Sevaine Flats but it is not recommended; a 4WD vehicle is much preferred. It takes about 40min to drive the 7.5mi to the road junction where the access road to the radio towers forks to the right. Turn right onto that spur road and proceed to the broad, flat parking area at the radio towers ( $34^{\circ}12.80'N$   $117^{\circ}30.04'W$ , elevation 5590ft).

## Hike

The hike begins at the sharp left hand corner in the dirt road just as you turn onto the 5590ft parking area at the radio towers



*Left: The first rappel. Right: The last rappel.*

(34°12.80'N 117°30.04'W). From this point hike NE down a wooded slope (there is a rough opening with a berm at the roadside) that soon feeds into a broad, shallow valley. This is very pleasant and easy off-trail walking. The gully gradually deepens and after 50min and 0.5mi you will come to a junction with an equally large gully entering on the right (elevation 4670ft). More easy gully travel follows until, at 4310ft elevation and 2hrs and 0.7mi from the start, you abruptly arrive at the top of a very large drop-off. This is the first and highest rappel in Green Mountain Canyon. It is a drop of about 180ft with a sloping ledge about a third of the way down. The anchor is a stout bush in the rockface on the left. The lower part of this descent could be quite wet if the stream is flowing but normally the stream in this canyon is little more than a trickle. We should also note that it may be possible to bypass this big drop by traversing up and over to the left where a substantial side gully drops down to the bottom.

From here on Green Mountain Canyon is a beautiful and rugged descent, a classic San Gabriel canyon with bands of hard rock and hanging gardens of fractured granite. It is almost brush free. Below the big rappel you enter a narrow slot section with a number of downclimbs before the canyon starts a more rapid descent that begins at 3840ft and 3hr 20min from the start with a broad 30ft cliff that you rappel using an anchor tree on the left. This is immediately followed by a 35ft dryfall that can be bypassed on the left by climbing over some projecting rocks (the climb is somewhat exposed) to access a steep earth slope extending to the bottom of the fall. This in turn is followed by a short 20ft rappel at 3810ft for which we web-wrapped a rock trapped under a large boulder in the middle of the streamcourse.

This brings you at 3780ft and 4hrs from the start to the second largest rappel in this canyon, a two-stage descent just before the canyon makes an abrupt right turn. The descent consists of a 15ft drop onto a streambed platform followed by a steep 50ft slope in a broad bedrock slot. We used a tree anchor about 12ft above the lip on the left to set up a single strand rappel with recovery cord for the 100ft rappel but it may be better to use one of the trees further off on the left to set up a double strand rappel.

Just after the right turn at the bottom of this rappel, the canyon becomes more wooded and there is a 50ft drop created by a large

chockstone. To bypass this, climb up on the left and contour over to an easy leaf-filled descent gully. This is followed by about another 20mins of easy hiking before you come (at 3340ft) to a steep 25ft drop into a narrow slot followed by another 20ft drop. These are both readily bypassed by means of an easy ledge on the right that descends to the streamcourse just after a right hand bend. It is then only a short distance down the canyon to the last rappel at 3230ft and a little over 5hr from the start. This is a 50ft vertical descent down a broad cliff. The anchor is a stout bush on the right. This is immediately followed by a 25ft drop that is readily downclimbed by means of the gully on the left. The canyon gradient then eases as the exit approaches. A little more boulder hopping brings you to the canyon exit at 2950ft. Here you will encounter a short dirt road that leads to an asphalt road behind some houses. Veer left and follow the asphalt road past the houses to the Green Mountain Ranch parking area where you left your return vehicle (34°14.03'N 117°29.63'W, elevation 2840ft). The 1.8mi descent from the radio towers should take about 6hrs. A pleasant tavern at the Green Mountain Ranch serves welcome refreshment.



Map of Green Mountain Canyon Hike