

1029

Aliso and Wood Canyons Wilderness Park Trails (in Laguna Niguel, Orange County)

Distance: 8 miles round trip (with shorter and longer excursions)

Elevation gain: 900 ft. (or 400 feet for shorter excursion)

Leader: Bob Singer

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Directions to Trailhead: Take the 5 South (from the Valley and from north Orange County) or the 405 South (from the coast cities) past the "Y" junction near Irvine where the 5 and 405 merge. Shortly thereafter (on the 5) take exit #90, Alicia Parkway. Go south for about 2.8 miles, (you will pass Highway 73), until Pacific Park Drive. Turn right (east) for about 2 miles until Canyon Vistas Drive. Turn left and go about 1/2 mile until it reaches its end at Silkwood. Park by the corner here at Canyon View Park, where we will gather for the hike. [*An untried alternative that would save about 1 mile is: Get off the 5 at El Toro Road (one exit prior to Alicia Parkway), turn right on El Toro for about 1 mile to Moulton Parkway, turn left on Moulton and go about 1 mile to Glenwood Drive, turn right on Glenwood (which will become Pacific Park Drive) for about 1.5 miles, turn right on Canyon Vistas and continue as above.*]

We will start from, and return to, Canyon View Park, which has one upgraded port-a-potty and three picnic tables. Parking is in the streets of the neighborhood and there is no parking fee. There are occasional port-a-potties along the hike. The trailhead is reached by walking through the park to the rear right corner to a gate into the Wilderness Park. Excellent signage exists along the trails in the Wilderness Park.

The Hike: Several excellent (baseline hike, longer [and even longer] hike, shorter hike with and without moderate elevation gain) hike alternatives exist here and will be explained, with a good map, at the start of the hike. The baseline hike is a loop starting down Wood Canyon Trail along Wood Creek, with shade, trees, creek, and meadow scenery and a short 0.5 mi round trip excursion to Dripping cave and a 0.5 mile side loop to Cave Rock until we reach the end of this trail at Aliso Creek Trail, for a total of about 4 miles. We then head back directly (no side trips) for about 1 mile to Mathis Trail to the left (east) making a steady 1.25 mile climb without much shade, gaining about 550 ft. We then get to West Ridge Trail, turn right (north), traverse along the ridge of the park, and return to the trailhead either at the edge of the park or on Cholla Trail to Wood Canyon Trail again. This portion of the hike is about 1.7 mi.

Two suggested shorter hikes are (1) Go down Wood Canyon Trail to Dripping Cave and return (5.1 miles without much elevation gain, and in pretty, shaded scenery) and (2) a full 5 mile loop but that turns onto Mathis Trail without side trips and without going all the way to Aliso Creek Trail (this keeps the climb for elevation gain).

Hike extensions include (1) a half mile walk each way to Top of the World by turning left on West Ridge Trail at the end of Mathis Trail, (2) up to 1.75 miles each way by walking along Aliso Creek Trail or possibly Meadows Trail at the end of Wood Canyon Trail, and/or (3) various little trail options along the way.