



Reagan Ranch Trail

Hike #113

4-mile loop through Malibu Creek State Park

Before Ronald Reagan purchased what was to become the most well-known ranch in the world—Rancho del Cielo in the Santa Ynez Mountains above Santa Barbara—he owned another in the Santa Monica Mountains. Reagan's Ranch, now part of Malibu Creek State Park, is a delight for hikers, who can enjoy the ranch's rolling meadowland and grand old oaks, and even probe the origins of the former president's conservative political philosophy.

During the 1950s when Reagan hosted TV's "Death Valley Days," he desired a more rural retreat than his home in Pacific Palisades. He bought the 305-acre ranch in the hills of Malibu as a place to raise thoroughbred horses. Land rose greatly in value, and tax increases really piqued Reagan and influenced his political philosophy. From that point on, he would be hostile toward government programs that required more and more tax dollars to fund.

Reagan's Ranch boosted his political career in another way: it was the locale of many a barbecue and gathering attended by the well-heeled politicians who would support his gubernatorial campaign. When Reagan was elected governor in 1966, he moved to Sacramento, and sold his ranch to a movie company. Today the ranch makes up the northwest corner of Malibu Creek State Park. When the property was acquired, the Reagan ranch house was in such grim condition that it had to be destroyed. The Reagan barn still stands and is now used for offices and storage by state park employees.

Trails loop through the Reagan Ranch and connect with the main part of the state park. One path, which I've dubbed Reagan Ranch Trail, uses a combination of trails—Yearling, Deer Leg, Lookout, Crag's Road and Cage Canyon—to explore Reagan country and the heart of the park.

Winter, after rains put a little green in the grassy meadows, and spring, when lupine, larkspur and poppies pop out all over, are the best seasons for a visit.

Directions to trailhead: From Santa Monica, take Pacific Coast Highway up coast to Malibu Canyon Road, turn inland and proceed to Mulholland Highway. Turn left and drive 7 miles to the ranch entrance at the corner of Mulholland and Cornell Road. Or from the Ventura Freeway (101) in Agoura, exit on Kanan Road and head south. Make a left on Cornell Road and follow it to its intersection with Mulholland Highway.



The trailhead is on the southeast corner. Park carefully alongside Cornell Road.

The Hike: Walk into the park on Yearling Road. The dirt road leads a quarter-mile past a row of stately eucalyptus and soon arrives at the old Reagan barn. Continue on the road which passes a corral and heads across a meadow. Soon you'll pass the first of a couple of side trails leading rightward into a grove of oaks and linking up with Deer Leg Trail. Continue straight ahead on the meadow trail.

During spring, wildflowers color the field, a 3/4-mile-long grassy strip. At the east end of the meadow, the trail dips in and out of a canyon, tunnels through some high chaparral and ascends an oak crowned ridge. Atop the ridge is a great view of Malibu Creek and the main features of the state park. Also on the ridgetop is an unsigned trail junction. You'll take the left-leading trail and begin descending southeast on well-named Lookout Trail. The trail drops to Craggs Road, the state park's major trail, near Century Lake.

Feb. 19, 1992

Season: All Year



**9:30 AM
Brigitte's Hike**

Craggs Road leads east-west with Malibu Creek and connects to trails leading to the site of the old M*A*S*H set, the Backbone Trail and the park visitors center. More immediately, when you make a right on the road, you pass close to Century Lake. Near the lake are hills of porous lava and topsyturvy sedimentary rock layers that tell of the violent geologic upheaval that formed Malibu Canyon. The man-made lake was scooped out by members of Craggs Country Club, a group of wealthy, turn-of-the-century businessmen who had a nearby lodge.

Walk up Craggs Road about 200 hundred yards and join unsigned Cage Canyon Trail on your right. After you begin walking up the trail you'll see a sign: This trail constructed and maintained by Sierra Club. The trail makes a short and rapid ascent of the oak- and sycamore-filled canyon and soon brings you to an unsigned intersection with Deer Leg Trail. Here you bear left and begin traveling under a canopy of oaks. You'll get occasional glimpses of the rolling grassland of the Reagan Ranch below.

