

Hike #187

Temescal Canyon

Date: Wednesday, July 28, 1993

Time: 8:30 am

Contact: Bill Sharpe

Highlights: *This steep hike gradually climbs via Temescal Fire Road to scenic overlooks among the highest summits (over 2,000 feet) in the Santa Monica Mountains. From the overlooks, you can see Santa Ynez, Temescal and Rustic Canyons, as well as the Los Angeles Basin and the great blue Pacific (maybe even Catalina!).*

Distance: From the canyon floor to Ridge Overlook is 5 1/2 miles round trip with 700-foot gain; to Rogers Road is 12 1/2 miles round trip with 1,600-foot gain. Will we go to Rogers Road? Don't even ask!

Directions: From Pacific Coast Highway just north of Santa Monica turn north on Temescal Canyon Road. Cross Sunset Boulevard, proceed for about 1/2 mile and park in the open area just before the Presbyterian Conference Grounds. Walkers must sign in and out at the gate. Respect the quiet and privacy of the grounds.

As you sweat it out crossing the exposed ridge above Temescal Canyon, you might be amused to learn that "temescal" is what the Chumash Indians called their village sweathouse. The Chumash took as many as two ceremonial sweat baths a day, in what anthropologists speculate might have been a religious ritual. A fire burned in the center of the sweathouse. When the Chumash began to perspire, they scraped the sweat off with special sticks,

then rushed out and leaped into a cold stream. (Speaking of Indians, did you know that the Gauchos in the Andes used to use whips to beat the children of the tribe? The whips left rather nasty red welts on the kids' backs. These were known as "Gaucho Marks".)

The walk: Head up-canyon on the paved road, passing a number of meeting halls and residences. The route, shaded by coast live oak, next follows a washed out road along Temescal Creek.

The trail climbs through a narrow gorge of the canyon and, 1 1/2 miles from the trailhead, crosses over to the west(left) side of the canyon. You might want to stop and cool off at a small waterfall. At the canyon crossing stands an old burned bridge, which fell victim to the 1978 Mandeville Fire that blackened the upper reaches of Temescal Canyon. Scramble up the steel slope to the other side of the canyon and begin switchbacking up the mountainside. The fire road levels out atop a northwest-trending ridge. The view to the southwest down at the housing developments isn't too inspiring, but the view of the rough unaltered northern part of Temescal Canyon is. Proceed along the ridge; you'll see some rock outcroppings. A short side trip off the fire road will bring you to Skull Rock, where you can climb inside the wind-formed(aeolian) caves to cool off or picnic.

Return the same way, or if time permits continue on the fire road past Split Rock Road on the left to Trailer Canyon Road a mile further north. A microwave tower, atop what locals have dubbed "Radio Peak," stands halfway between the two points.

We'll have lunch at the first picnic area on the right heading down Temescal Canyon Boulevard towards PCH.