

HIKE FOR: 7/6/94



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HIKE LDR: Season: May - October

Ski Hut Trail

Bill Thurmond

OP #2

Manker Flat to San Antonio Falls
1 mile round trip; 200-foot elevation gain

OP #1

Manker Flat to San Antonio Canyon Overlook
6 1/2 miles round trip; 2,600-foot elevation gain
Manker Flat to Mount Baldy summit
8 1/2 miles round trip; 3,800-foot elevation gain

Three saintly mountains—San Geronimo, San Jacinto and San Antonio—tower over the City of the Angels. Lowest of the three, but by far the best-known, is Mount San Antonio, more commonly called Mount Baldy. The 10,064-foot peak, highest in the San Gabriel Mountains, is visible from much of the Southland. Its summit gleams white in winter, and early spring, gray in summer and fall. Old Baldy is so big and bare that it appears to be snow-covered even when it's not.

Legend has it that the padres of Mission San Gabriel, circa 1790, named the massive stone bulwark after Saint Anthony of Padua, Italy. The 13th-Century Franciscan friar evidently was a favorite of California missionaries: A number of geographical features in Monterey County and around Southern California were christened San Antonio. In the 1870s, San Antonio Canyon and the nearby high country swarmed with gold seekers, who gave the massive peak a more earthy name—Old Baldy.

Several trails lead to the summit. The most difficult is the Bear Flat (or Old Baldy) Trail, which gains 5,500 feet as it climbs the south ridge of Baldy to the top. The most popular route gets a head start with the Mount Baldy ski lift, then follows Devil's Backbone Trail to the summit.

This day hike utilizes a pretty but not-so-well-known trail that leads up San Antonio Canyon to the top of Baldy. Locals call it the Ski Hut Trail because the Sierra Club maintains a hut halfway up the path. The trail doesn't have an official name and it's not on the Angeles National Forest map.

P#2

Hikers of all ages and abilities will enjoy the half-mile walk to San Antonio Falls. After a little rain, the three-tiered, 60-foot waterfall is an impressive sight.

Beyond the falls the hiking is strenuous, definitely not for the inexperienced or out-of-shape. Hikers who want more than the "leg-stretcher" walk to the falls but aren't quite up for an assault on the peak can choose two intermediate destinations: the Sierra Club ski hut, where there's a cool spring, or a high ridge overlooking San Antonio Canyon.



Old Baldy

Hikers in top form, with good trail sense (the last mile of trail to the peak is rough and tentative), will relish the challenge of the summit climb. A clear-day view from the top offers a panorama of desert and ocean, the sprawling Southland and the southern High Sierra.

Directions to trailhead: Take the San Bernardino Freeway to Claremont, exit on Mountain Avenue and head north, joining Mount Baldy Road in San Antonio Canyon, and winding about 11 miles to Manker Campground. One-third mile past the campground entrance, look to the left for an unsigned paved road with a vehicle barrier across it. Park in the dirt lot just below the beginning of the road.

The Hike: Walk up the fire road, which is closed to all motor vehicles except those belonging to ski-lift maintenance workers. After a modest ascent, you will hear the sound of falling water and soon behold San Antonio Falls. If you decide to hike down to the base of the falls, watch for loose rock and use caution on the rough trail.

Resume walking along the road (unpaved beyond the falls). After about 10 minutes of walking at a moderate pace, look sharply left for an unsigned trail. Ducks (piles of rock) on both sides of the road mark the trail. (If you find yourself heading north up Manker Canyon and getting good views of the ski lift, you missed the turnoff.)

The no-nonsense trail ascends very steeply along the side of San Antonio Canyon. You'll get great over-the-shoulder views of the canyon bottom and of Mount Baldy Village. Trail connoisseurs will appreciate this path, which, despite its steepness, has a hand-hewn, unobtrusive look and follows the natural contours of the land. Jeffrey pine, ponderosa pine

and fir shade the well-constructed path, which is seasonally decorated with red Indian paintbrush and creamy yucca blossoms.

From the ski lift road, it's 1 3/4 miles by trail to the Sierra Club ski hut. Near the hut, which was built in 1935, is a cool and refreshing spring.

Just past the ski hut the trail crosses a tiny creek, then snakes through a boulder field. Beyond the boulders, the trail ascends via a half-mile series of steep switchbacks to a ridgetop overlooking the headwaters of San Antonio Canyon. There's a great view from the tree-shaded ridgetop, and if you aren't quite up for an assault on the peak, this is a good picnic spot or turnaround point.

Peak-baggers will continue up the extremely rugged trail for another mile to the summit. The trail is rough and tentative in some places, but rocks piled in cairns help you stay on course. You'll get good view of Devil's Backbone, the sharp ridge connecting Mount Harwood to Mount Baldy.

Boulders are scattered atop Baldy's crown. A couple of rock windbreaks offer some shelter. Enjoy the view of San Gabriel and San Bernardino Mountain peaks, the Mojave and the metropolis.

Depending on your energy and inclination, you can either return the same way or take the Devil's Backbone Trail to Mount Baldy Notch. From the Notch, you can follow the fire road down Manker Canyon back to the trailhead or ride down the ski lift.

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