

1/8/97

Brigitte

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Hike #357

Day Hike

Cliffs and Waterfall Seen in the Santa Ynez Canyon

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Ferns, falls and dramatic sandstone cliffs are some of the delights of a ramble through Santa Ynez Canyon in the Topanga area of the Santa Monica Mountains.

The canyon is pleasant year-round, but it's particularly inviting after a rainstorm.

The name Topanga is from the Shoshonean Indian dialect. These Indians and their ancestors occupied Topanga and adjacent canyons on and off for several thousand years, until the Spanish evicted them and forced them to settle at the San Fernando Mission.

Until the 1880s, there was little permanent habitation in the Topanga area. Early settlers tended vineyards, orchards and cattle ranches. In the 1920s, the canyon became a popular weekend destination for Los Angeles residents.

Summer cabins were built along Topanga Creek and in subdivisions in the surrounding hills. For \$1 round-trip fare, tourists could board a Packard Auto Stage in Santa Monica and be driven up Pacific Coast Highway and Topanga Canyon Road to the Topanga Post Office and other, more scenic spots.

The canyon—and its seasonal waterfalls—can be reached from two trailheads. One is found in the heart of Topanga State Park; the other, farther east, is located at the edge of the tony Palisades Highlands development.

The longer hike in the park departs from quiet and imperturbable Topanga Canyon, surrounded by urban sprawl but retaining its rural character. Santa Ynez Trail descends a ridge into Santa Ynez Canyon, then heads upstream to a 15-foot waterfall. Remember that the uphill part of this hike comes last; pace yourself accordingly.

A much shorter trail meanders from the top of Pacific Palisades to Santa Ynez Canyon and the falls.

Directions to the trailhead (Topanga State Park): From Topanga Canyon Boulevard, turn east on Entrada Road; that's to the right if you're coming from Pacific Coast Highway, and to the left if you're coming from U.S. 101 (Ventura Freeway). Follow Entrada Road by turning left at every opportunity until you arrive at Topanga State Park. There is a state park day-use fee.

Santa Ynez Trail

Trippet Ranch to Santa Ynez Canyon: 6 miles round trip; 1,000-foot elevation gain

Santa Ynez Canyon: Nice now, or save for a rainy day

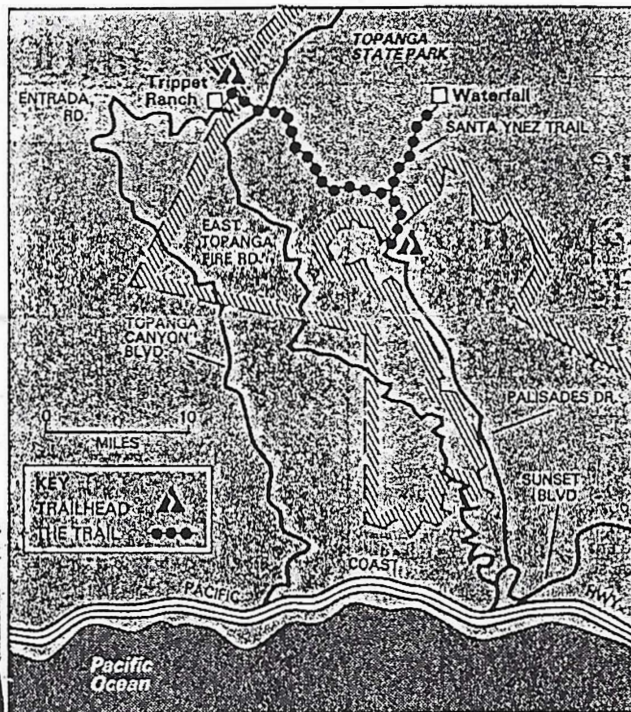
Directions to the trailhead (Palisades Highland): If you're not feeling energetic, you can easily reach Santa Ynez Canyon via the Palisades Highland trailhead. From Sunset Boulevard in Pacific Palisades, a short distance inland from Pacific Coast Highway, turn north on Palisades Drive. As you enter the Palisades Highlands community, turn left on Veranda de la Montura. Park near the signed trailhead.

Directions (from Topanga State Park): From the parking lot, you may proceed up the wide main trail or join the park's nature trail (a prettier way to go) and ascend past some oaks. Both the nature trail and the main trail out of the parking lot lead a quarter-mile to Fire Road 30A. Turn left on the dirt fire road and travel a short distance to signed Santa Ynez Trail. Start your descent into Santa Ynez Canyon.

High on the canyon wall, you'll get good views of the canyon and of the ocean beyond. A half-mile descent brings you to an outcropping of reddish sandstone. The main route of Santa Ynez Trail stays atop a ridgeline, but you'll notice a few steep side trails that lead to the right down to the canyon floor.

Soap plant, a spring bloomer with small, white, star-like flowers, is abundant along the trail. This member of the lily family was a most useful plant to early residents of the Santa Monica Mountains. Indians cooked the bulbs to concoct a glue for their arrows. They also made a lather of the crushed bulbs and threw it into creeks to stun fish. White settlers stuffed mattresses with the plant's fiber.

Enjoy the views of tilted sand-



JOHN SNYDER / Los Angeles Times

stone and the great bowl of Santa Ynez Canyon. As the trail nears the canyon floor, it descends more precipitously. Once on the canyon bottom, turn left (down-canyon) and enter a lush environment shaded by oak and sycamore.

The trail meanders with a seasonal creek to a signed junction. You'll turn left and head up-canyon on a path that crosses the creek several times. The fern-lined pools and the handsome sandstone ledges make an idyllic scene, marred only by the graffiti on the boulders.

About three-fourths of a mile of travel brings you to the base of the waterfall. Beyond the fall are some more cascades, but continuing farther is recommended only for experienced rock climbers; most hik-

ers make a U-turn here and head for home.

The hike (from Palisades Highlands): This walk departs from what I call the Designer Trailhead. Here, Santa Ynez Creek, lined by orange/beige artificial walls, spills over a cement creek bed. Creek-side trees have been enclosed in planters, and stream crossings are accomplished by means of cylindrical-shaped cement "stepping-stones."

Once beyond this trail travesty, the path takes you into a canyon that's really quite lovely. Coast live oaks, sycamore and bay laurel line the trickling seasonal creek. Half a mile farther, the trail passes a pipe gate and forks. A sign points the way to Santa Ynez Falls, three-fourths of a mile up the canyon.