

Hike #478

CENTURY LAKE
from Tapia Park

This is HIKE 32 from "Hiking Trails of the Santa Monica Mountains.

Hike Sponsor: George Z. Thomas
Date: 4 August 1999 @ 9:30 AM

Maps: Malibu Beach, topo
Distance: 7 miles roundtrip
Elevation: 1000' gain and loss
Terrain: Trail, road, steep trail
Time: 3 hours
Trailhead: Tapia Park

The Tapia Park to Malibu Creek State Park segment of this trail was built by Sierra Club Volunteers before the Dayton Canyon fire of 1982. I've heard comments to the effect that had they known they could have waited, because trail building through chaparral is hard work. The trail is an important link in the Backbone Trail system and is used a good deal by both hikers and equestrians.

The trail begins near the road in the northwest corner of the Park. Upon entering the main entrance to Tapia Park from Las Virgenes Road, turn right and parallel Las Virgenes a hundred yards or so. At the first opportunity turn left and follow the road about 1/4 mile until it goes downhill and you can see a meadow on the right. Park near two oak log segments at telephone pole I 467 294 E In due time a sign may be placed to designate the trail. We go north across the lower part of the meadow and cross an intermittent stream to enter an Oak Woodland. Watch for a left turn as the trail enters chaparral and goes uphill. After a switchback the trail takes us through a stand of Mountain Mahogany, and soon, after gaining more altitude we can look to our right and see Camp David Gonzales. The rock underfoot to the ridge and beyond is fragmental volcanic breccias that intruded through sandstone about 14 million years ago.

After crossing a saddle, the trail makes two switchbacks in chaparral before dropping down to a large oak grove at the head of a big meadow. Picnic tables, water, and restrooms are available. Look for Goldback Ferns along the trail. A sequence of the movie "Roots" was filmed at the west end of the grove but all props have been removed so the location is completely restored to nature.

An old macadam road skirts the edge of the meadow. Part way down the road, a faint trail goes across the ridge on the right, ending at the proposed RV camp. In May we can find Lilac Mariposa Lilies in bloom on the ridge. Continue down the road until we are in the shade of a magnificent Valley Oak. Having read many articles about the plight of Valley Oaks in southern California, this tree is worth observing. In January 1986 ground squirrels were living under the oak and many mounds of dirt were visible. Some oak seedlings were growing. On 13 July 1986, 614 seedlings were growing under the oak, the tallest of which was 23 inches high. Ground squirrels no doubt hid more acorns than they needed or could find, so many acorns sprouted. These seedlings don't survive because the parent tree takes the sunshine, the nutrients, and the water. This process may not occur every year but my guess is that without interference this oak will at least replace itself.

The route continues across Stokes Creek, turns left near the parking lot, and crosses Las Virgenes Creek then makes a wide turn right and heads northwest. At a road junction we continue ahead on the "High Road" which overlooks Malibu Creek on our left. The High Road is shaded by Coast Live Oaks and is an almost level, pleasant walk for about 1/2 mile. At a road junction we turn right and make climbing turns to the top of a low ridge overlooking Century Lake. Century Lake is impounded by a dam built in 1901 by the Crags Country Club who owned the property during the early 1900's. The lake is gradually silting up because of annual run-off, and in time could become a

marsh. The lake is a haven for wildlife: Migrant ducks are often seen, coots are regular inhabitants, and occasionally a heron is seen. Fish live in the lake, and this is a popular place for sons to bring fathers to try their angling skills. The route of this hike takes us to the lake shore then left to near the dam — but not on it. An alternate extra 3/4 mile walk is available if time allows. Instead of turning left at the lake, continue ahead until we cross Malibu Creek on a low concrete bridge, then look left for a trail that follows the base of the mountain west of the lake. The Forest Trail is shady and almost level. It ends at the dam so we retrace our steps. Coast Redwood trees were planted along the trail at the turn of the century and some still remain.

A short, steep trail goes uphill from the southeast end of the lake and intersects the road we came in on. We turn right and walk downhill. Before crossing the bridge, we turn right and go a couple hundred yards upstream on a trail and sometimes on rocks, to Rock Pool — a great place for lunch under the Sycamore trees.

After lunch we retrace our steps, turn right and cross over the bridge for a stop at the Visitors Center. Upon leaving the Center turn right and find a trail that climbs up the hill behind the house. We gain about 165' of elevation before reaching a narrow saddle and immediately go steeply downhill to Mott Road. Mott Adobe is a short distance downstream and is the ruins of the original building. A stone fireplace is in place and parts of the adobe walls are standing. Fire and water have taken a toll. Look for the simulated bullet holes on the face of the wall — this was used as a prop in a movie.

After turning around at the adobe our route is upstream until we come to the road that crosses Malibu Creek. We then turn right and retrace our steps to the trailhead at Tapia Park. This hike is flexible to the extent that several side trails are available to us and could extend the hike for as many miles as we feel like walking.

