

Date: 7 June 2000 @ 9:30 AM

Hike Leader: George Z. Thomas

Last time for Hike: 4 Oct. 1995 Hike # 297

HIKING: CHINO HILLS

Amid Pastoral Acres, Easy-to-Conquer San Juan Hill

By JOHN McKINNEY

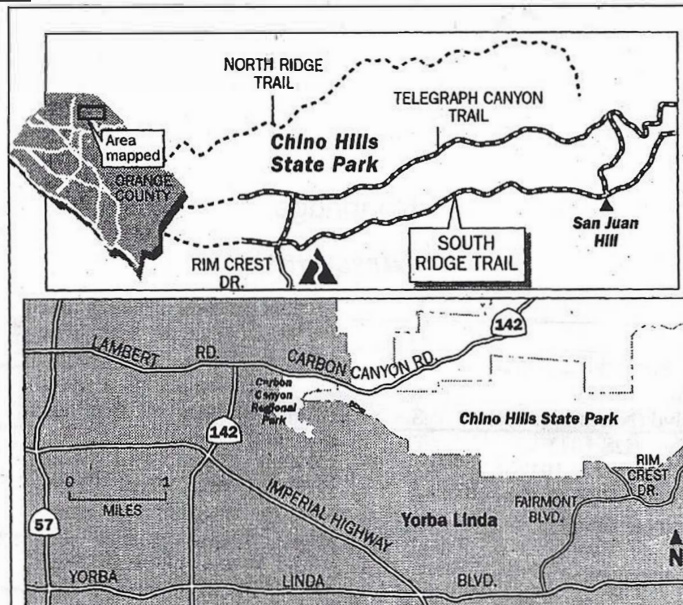
By the time Chino Hills State Park opened in 1986, it had earned the distinction of being one of the state's most expensive parks, with a price of more than \$50 million. There was a lot of grumbling about the cost then—from the public, from politicians and even from some conservationists who figured buying a redwood grove or two was a better use of hard-to-come-by funds.

Nowadays the 12,000-acre park seems like a bargain. And nowhere is this more apparent than on the trail to the park's high point, San Juan Hill.

The first glimpse of the park's great value is obvious when hiking the half-mile of South Ridge Trail and looking at what you're leaving behind: brand-new suburbia pushing right up to the park's southern boundary. Without a park, every available slope would likely be smothered in subdivisions.

Farther up the trail, most traces of civilization vanish, and the hiker enters a wonderfully pastoral landscape of rolling grassland and drifts of oak.

About 3 million people live within sight of the Chino Hills, but the park trails offer surprisingly tranquil and away-from-it-all hiking. Deer gambol through the high grasses, hawks circle overhead and a refreshing breeze keeps the temperature down. Atop San Juan's



South Ridge Trail

WHERE: Chino Hills State Park.**DISTANCE:** To the top of San Juan Hill is 6 miles round trip with 1,200-foot elevation gain.**HIGHLIGHTS:** Surprisingly pastoral landscape and vistas, the state park's highest summit.**TERRAIN:** Rolling, grassy hills.**DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** Moderate.**FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Chino Hills State Park; tel. (909) 780-6222.

HÉLÈNE WEBB / For The Times

slopes, hikers are frequently joined by kite-fliers, who take advantage of the robust gusts. You should have an easy time conquering 1,781-foot San Juan Hill, perched

on the border of Orange and San Bernardino counties. The trail to the hill is a well-graded fire road.

Directions to trail head: From the Orange Freeway (California 57)

in Brea, exit on Imperial Highway (California 90) and head southeast 4.5 miles to Yorba Linda Boulevard. Turn left (northeast) and drive 1.3 miles to Fairmont Boulevard. Turn left (east) and drive 1.5 miles to Rim Crest Drive. Turn left and proceed 0.3 mile to the signed trail head on the right. Park alongside Rim Crest Drive. Heed the curbside parking signs because public parking is permitted only on some lengths of Rim Crest Drive; some parking is for residents (by permit) only.

The hike: Walk 40 yards up the fire lane to the park information bulletin board and the signed beginning of South Ridge Trail. Begin your journey east with an ascent that soon removes you from all sights and sounds of civilization.

The moderate climb leads over hills covered with wild oats, rye, mustard and wild radish. Trees are few and far between atop these hills, which means both little shade and unobstructed views of the surrounding countryside. Only the high-voltage power lines bisecting the hills detract from the near-pastoral landscape.

Nearly three miles out, you'll reach a junction with the signed path to San Juan Hill. Walk 50 yards up a fire road toward a power-line tower, then join the narrow, unsigned footpath on the right leading 0.1 mile to the summit of San Juan Hill.