

Hike #562

## G. Z. Thomas Hike, 9 May 2001 @ 9:30 AM

Note: this hike was done 21 months ago by John Chady. It was featured in the LA Times Travel section on 22 April 2001. This is a moderate 6 mile hike with an 1,100 foot elevation gain.

### **Walking a Canyon Where Scenery, Industry Make Historic Companions**

In September 1876, oil driller Charles Alexander Mentry tapped black gold 617 feet under the surface of Pico Canyon, near Santa Clarita. By the time it was capped in 1990, Pico No. 4, was the longest continuously operated oil well in the world.

Success here led to the creation of Pacific Coast Oil Co., acquired by Standard Oil (later renamed Chevron). The region's wells, along with California's first refinery, in nearby Newhall, were a model for the Golden State's emerging oil industry.

For the hiker, Pico Canyon's value lies in its scenery. The canyon trail, in northern Santa Clarita Woodlands Park, offers a walk in an oak woodland, a hike high in the Santa Susana Mountains and a stroll down memory lane in the old boomtown of Mentryville. Hikers can ascend to excellent viewpoints high above the Pico Canyon headwaters.

#### **Directions to the trail head:**

From Interstate 5 (Golden State Freeway) in Valencia, take the Lyons Avenue-Pico Canyon Road exit. Drive west on Pico Canyon Road; near its end, bear left at the Y and continue to the end of the road and a large parking area opposite Mentryville.

Mentry built an impressive home here in 1898; it still stands, as does a one-room schoolhouse used from 1885 to 1932. (Docents lead short tours from noon to 4 p.m. on the first and third Sundays of each month.)

### **The hike:**

From the town, follow the paved road up the canyon. Interpretive panels tell about the region's heyday. It's hard to picture all that used to be here: tennis courts, rows of redwood cabins and Anthony Cochem,Âs Bakery, known throughout the region for its coconut macaroons. In contrast, Johnson Park, a picnic area less than a mile down the road, looks ready for a gathering. It's outfitted with a barbecue and plenty of tables, and you can't miss a replica of a late 19th-century wooden oil derrick.

Continue up the canyon to a couple of historical markers commemorating Pico No. 4, where the boom began with a 30-barrel-a-day flow. Continue 0.2 mile more to a fork. Bear right (west) on an asphalt-and-dirt road onto Bureau of Land Management property and ascend slopes dotted with buckwheat, sage and yucca.

At a minor saddle, a right-forking road leads to a viewpoint of the Santa Clarita Valley. The main trail works its way onto a ledge that's safe (but no place for the acrophobic), then leads to a fairly flat vista point.

If you turn left at the previously mentioned junction and climb two miles, you'll reach a 2,800 foot-high vista point and the trails end.

Santa Susana Mountains activists want to extend this trail to Towsley Canyon about seven miles away.

For more of John McKinney, hiking tips and trails, visit [www.thetrailmaster.com](http://www.thetrailmaster.com).