

LOS ANGELES TIMES

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Lecho Torres

Sawmill Trails Don't Cut Out Scenery

Hiking

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Many travelers no doubt consider the northwest corner of Angeles National Forest to be desolate—a section of the San Gabriel Mountains with serpentine canyons and un-spectacular rounded summits. Shaped by the nearby San Andreas fault, the land has a parched appearance that reflects its proximity to the Mojave Desert.

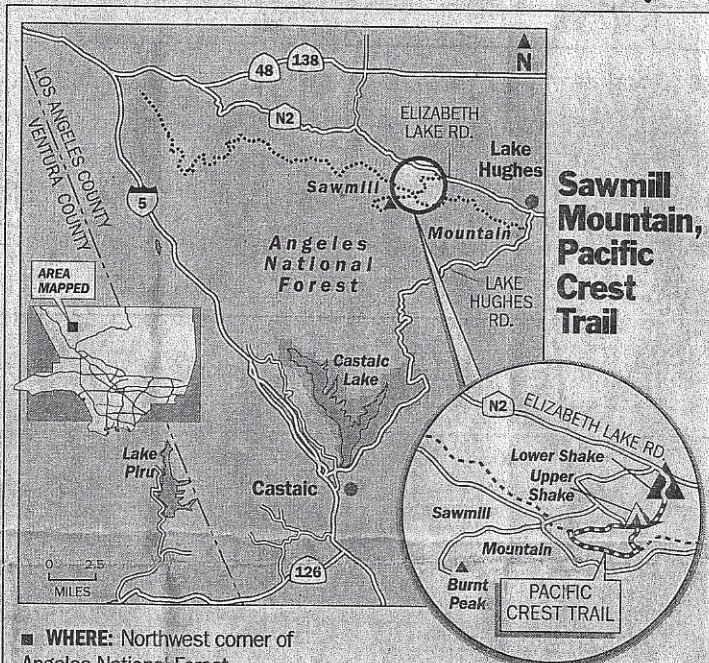
But mile-high, tree-spiked Sawmill Mountain is more welcoming. It can be hiked in any season. In summer, temperatures are cooler than in the nearby Santa Clarita and Antelope valleys. Black oaks wear colorful colors in autumn, and Shake Creek bubbles in spring. The south slope is covered with chaparral; its cooler and steeper north slope hosts a mix of trees.

The hike up Sawmill Mountain is typical of trekking in this part of the national forest: no developed trail head or trail signs, but better-than-you-imagined scenery and much-appreciated solitude.

Directions to trail head: From Interstate 5 in Castaic, about seven miles north of Valencia, exit onto Lake Hughes Road. Drive north 23 miles to a junction with County Route N2 (also called Elizabeth Lake Road or, on its far western end, Pine Canyon Road). Turn left onto N2 and drive 4.5 miles.

Look for a yellow pipe gate on the left side of the road. Park along N2 or at the signed turnoff for Forest Road 7N23 (a dirt route closed to vehicles) on the left about a quarter-mile up the road.

The hike: Walk down this dirt route for a quarter-mile to the abandoned Lower Shake Camp-



■ **WHERE:** Northwest corner of Angeles National Forest.

■ **DISTANCE:** From County Route N2 to Upper Shake Campground is 1.8 miles round trip; loop via Pacific Crest Trail is 5.2 miles round trip with 1,000-foot elevation gain.

■ **TERRAIN:** Steep canyons, oak- and conifer-dotted whaleback summit.

■ **HIGHLIGHTS:** Peaceful country, steep canyon.

■ **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** Moderate.

■ **PRECAUTIONS:** Poison oak, stinging nettle, lots of bugs; Adventure Pass required.

■ **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Angeles National Forest, tel. (626) 574-5200; Santa Clara-Mojave Rivers Ranger District; tel. (661) 296-9710.

HELENE WEBB / For The Times

ground. A footpath here crisscrosses alder-shaded Shake Creek, reaching Upper Shake Campground just short of a mile from your starting point. Walk through the campground and follow the dirt road a quarter-mile west to a concrete patch at a creek crossing and a junction with an unsigned dirt road on the left. You'll ascend southwest through the canyon for three-quarters of a mile. Climb a quarter-mile farther on switch-

backs to a junction with signed Pacific Crest Trail, then turn left.

You'll be hiking east on an excellent stretch of Pacific Crest Trail. It's a mellow descent. After about 1.75 miles, look left for an unsigned spur trail that will lead down to Upper Shake Campground. Retrace the first part of your journey back to the trail head.

For more of John McKinney's tips, visit www.thetrailmaster.com.