

Hike #6

DAY HIKE 1/23/70 9:30

WE VISIT "THE HISTORIC FOUR-HOLER"!

W. Shaffer

Day Hike

Circle X Marks the Spot for New Park

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Sandstone Peak, highest peak in the Santa Monica Mountains, is one of the highlights of a visit to Circle X Ranch, a new park located on the border of Los Angeles and Ventura counties. The park has more than 30 miles of trail and a much-needed public campground.

Last year the state Coastal Conservancy granted \$5.85 million to the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy to fund acquisition of the 1,655-acre Circle X Ranch from the Boy Scouts of America. The Conservancy has teamed with the Conejo Recreation and Parks District

Moshe Mokwa Trail

Five-mile circle tour of Circle X Ranch; 1,100-foot elevation gain.

to form the Mountains Recreation and Conservation Authority, which now maintains and administers the park.

Half a century ago, the land belonged to a number of gentlemen ranchers, including movie actor Donald Crisp, who starred in "How Green Was My Valley."

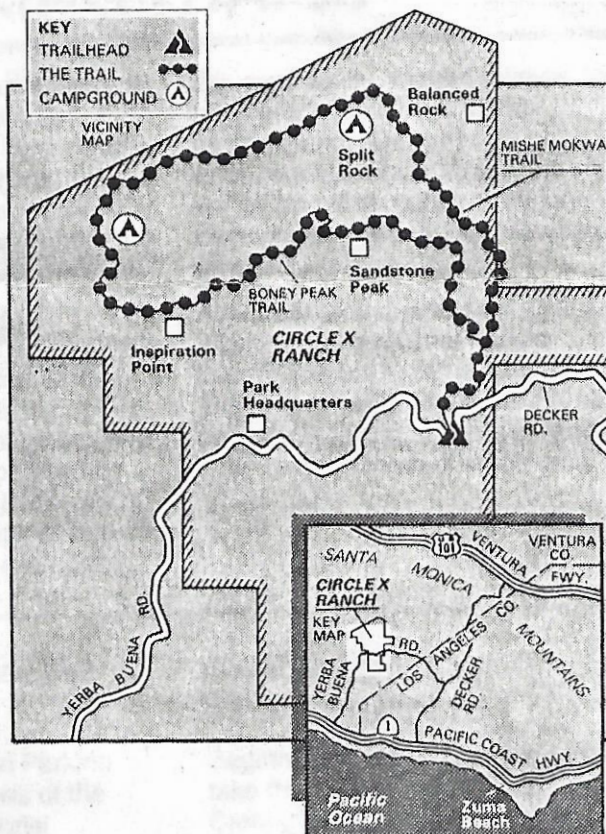
X Marks the Ranch

Members of the Exchange Club purchased the nucleus of the park in 1949 for \$25,000 and gave it to the Boy Scouts. The emblem for the Exchange Club was a circled X—hence the name of the ranch.

About two decades ago, the Scouts, in an attempt to honor Circle X benefactor Herbert Allen, petitioned the U.S. Department of the Interior to rename Sandstone Peak. The request for "Mt. Allen" was denied because of a long-standing policy that prohibited naming geographical features after living persons. Nevertheless, the Scouts held an "unofficial" dedication ceremony in 1969 to honor their leader.

Sandstone Peak—or Mt. Allen, if you prefer—offers outstanding views from its 3,111-foot summit. If the five-mile up-and-back hike to the peak isn't sufficiently taxing, park rangers can suggest some terrific extensions. For more information about Circle X trails or camping, call the park at (213) 457-6408 or the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy at (213) 620-2021. For campsite reservations call (213) 620-4341.

Directions to trailhead: Drive up-coast on Pacific Coast Highway past the outer reaches of Malibu, a mile past the Los Angeles County line. Turn inland on Yerba Buena Road and proceed five miles to Circle X Ranch. You'll pass the park's tiny headquarters building and continue one more mile to the signed trailhead on your left. There's plenty of parking. What



JOHN SNYDER / Los Angeles Times

relatively munificent water table located just below the surface. It's unlikely that the hiker will often find yuccas and ferns growing in close proximity on the same slope.

The trail descends into Carlisle Canyon. Across the canyon are some striking red volcanic rock formations, among them well-named Balanced Rock. The path, shaded by oak and laurel, drops into the canyon at another aptly named rock formation—Split Rock. Hikers have long had a tradition of walking through the split in the rock.

Fine Place for a Picnic

Split Rock is the locale of a trail camp, shaded by oak and sycamore. An all-year creek and a spring add to the camp's charm. It's a fine place for a picnic. At this time of year the camp is crawling with bugs—ladybugs. Millions of ladybugs cluster on stumps and tree trunks.

From Split Rock bear right past an old outhouse—"the historic four-holer" as it is known—and begin your ascent out of Carlisle Canyon on an old ranch road. From the road's high point, you'll look straight ahead up at a pyramid-like volcanic rock formation the Boy Scouts call Egyptian Rock. To the northwest is Point Mugu State Park. You are walking on the Backbone Trail, which when completed will stretch 55 miles from Will Rogers State Historic Park to Point Mugu State Park.

The fire road turns south and you'll pass a trail camp located amid some cottonwoods. Past the camp, the

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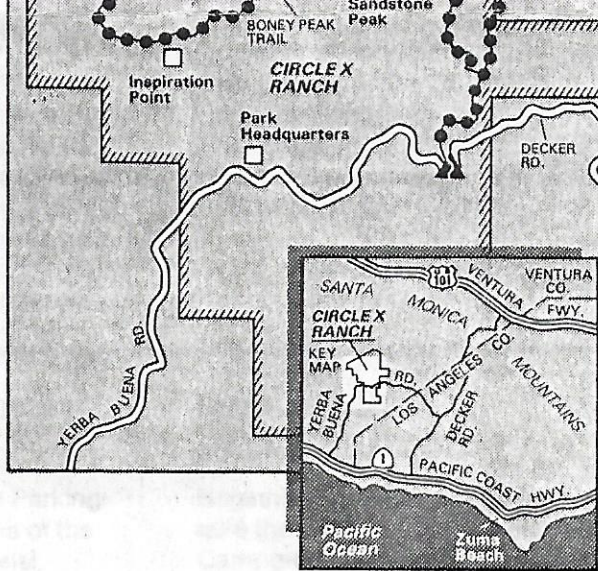
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The hike: From the signed trailhead, walk up the fire road. A short quarter-mile of travel brings you to a signed junction with Mishe Mokwa Trail. Leave the fire road here and join the trail, which climbs and contours over the brushy slopes of Boney Mountain. Late spring blooms include black sage, golden yarrow and woolly blue curls. Look for the orange-red, waxy petals of the rare lance-leaved dudleya.

Breaks in the brush offer good views to the right of historic Triunfo Pass, which was used by the Chumash to travel from inland to coastal areas. The "drive-in movie screen" you see atop Triunfo Peak is really an old microwave relay station.

Mishe Mokwa Trail levels for a time and tunnels beneath the boughs of handsome red shanks. Growing beneath the drought-resistant chaparral plants found along the trail are some ferns. The opportunistic ferns take advantage of the shade offered by the chaparral and tap what is for the Santa Monica Mountains a



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The fire road turns south and you'll pass a trail camp located amid some cottonwoods. Past the camp, the fire road angles east. Look sharply to the right for a short, unsigned trail that leads to Inspiration Point. Mt. Baldy and Catalina Island are among the inspiring sights pointed out by a geographical locator monument.

Continue east on the fire road and you'll soon pass the signed intersection with Boney Peak Trail. This trail descends precipitously to park headquarters. If for some reason you're in a hurry to get down, this bone-jarring route is for you.

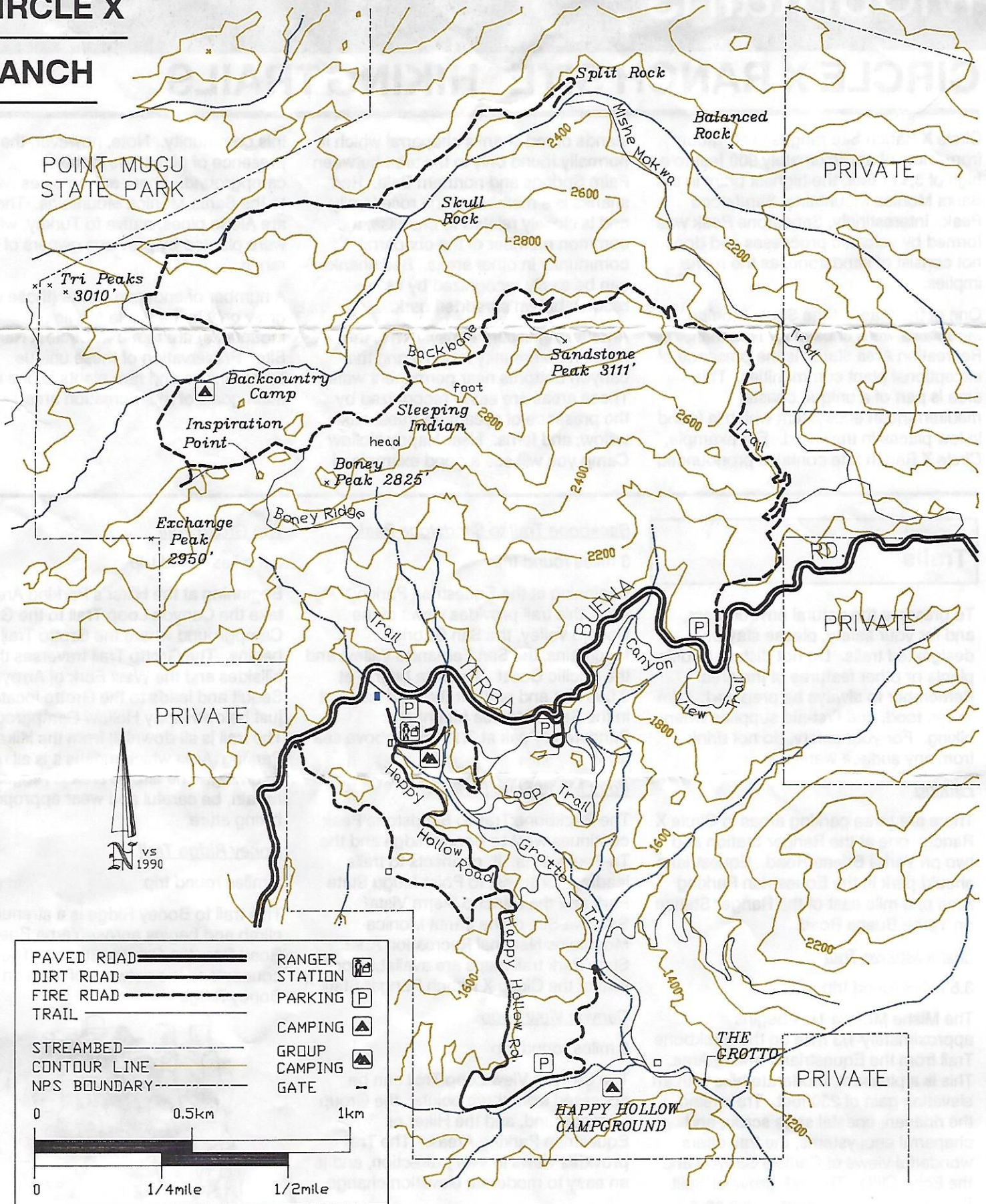
Continue ascending on the fire road. After a few switchbacks look for a steep trail on the right. Follow this trail to the top of Sandstone Peak. "Sandstone" is certainly a misnomer; the peak is one of the largest masses of volcanic rock in the Santa Monica Mountains. Sign the summit register and enjoy the commanding, clear-day views: the Topa Topa Mountains where condors once roosted, the Oxnard Plain, the Channel Islands, and the wide blue Pacific.

After you've enjoyed the view, you'll descend a bit more than a mile on the fire road back to the trailhead.

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area

CIRCLE X

RANCH



To reach Circle X Ranch, take the

TO VENTURA