

Wed. 18 Dec 1991

— Last hike of the year!

OTP Hike #106

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TRAILS OF THE ANGELES

54a Mt. Gleason Road to Mt. Gleason, Gleason Mines

5 miles round trip; 1000' elevation gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: May-October

Topo map: Acton

FEATURES

The long, forested hogback of Mt. Gleason (6502') dominates the western end of the San Gabriels. From Gleason's broad summit you look north across the drab expanse of the Mojave Desert and, on the clearest of days, you can just make out, far on the distant horizon, the angular snow-streaked peaks of the southern High Sierra.

The mountain is drenched in history. In 1869 George Gleason, first postmaster of Ravenna and superintendent of the rich Eureka Mine near present-day Acton, climbed the north slope in quest of the timber stands he saw on top. Instead, he found gold. Men swarmed up the mountain, and the Mount Gleason Mining District was organized. Transporting the gold-bearing quartz down the steep slopes to the mill in Soledad Canyon was a harrowing process. Logs were fastened behind the ore-filled wagons, pulled by eight-mule teams, to slow the descent. Even so, accidents occurred with regularity. The most active period for the Gleason Mines was from 1888 to 1896, when some twenty prospects were being worked and a five-stamp mill was erected high on the north slope. The richest mines were named the Gleason, the Lost Padres and the Eagle. There has been limited activity into recent years, but only the miners' ghosts remain now.

This is a delightful circle trip through forest and chaparral with far-ranging desert views. You travel first on trail, then do ½ mile of cross country to reach the mines, and finally return via an old mining road. It's best done on a cool May or an early June day, when snow patches linger on shady slopes and Gleason Creek is running full.

DESCRIPTION

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway to Clear Creek Junction, then left on the Angeles Forest Highway (L.A. County Road N3) to Mill Creek Summit, 23 miles from La

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Canada. Turn left (west) and follow the Mt. Gleason Road (signed MESSENGER FLATS 12), passing a Pacific Crest Trail junction in 2½ miles (you can start your hike here if you don't mind adding 6 miles round trip to it), to a road junction in 6 miles, just outside the Youth Conservation Camp. Drive left and follow the dirt road ½ mile to where it bottoms out. Park in the clearing to your right.

Walk right to the lower, east end of the clearing, where you will see a yellow locked gate and a poor dirt road descending northward. Pass the gate and walk down the road only about 25 yards to where you intersect the Pacific Crest Trail. Go left and follow the PCT as it climbs west, then northwest, under a canopy of interior live oak, black oak, big-cone spruce and incense cedar. As you climb higher on the north shoulder of Mount Gleason, Jeffrey pines become predominant and views open northward over the shimmering Mojave Desert. You cross an old dirt road and, ¼ mile farther, just before the PCT starts its long descent to Acton, reach a trail junction. Leave the PCT here and go left, following the side trail up to Mount Gleason's summit ridge, then southeast along the ridge over several hummocks to the top. The large concrete structure you see is the foundation of the recently disassembled Air Force radar dome.

Descend the summit trail back to the PCT. At this point, if you are alone or inexperienced in cross-country travel, you should return the way you came. For the Gleason Mines, leave the PCT and descend northward, without trail, into the head of Gleason Canyon's west fork. In a short ½ mile, after dropping about 600 feet, you will pick up a very steep old mining road. Evidence of past diggings are all around you, but mostly on the northwest slope of the canyon you see ahead as you are descending. Follow the mining road down, passing several eroded and brushed-over pathways leading left to old mining prospects, to the foreman's cabin of Gleason Mines. Unfortunately, this historic old cabin has been the site of recent drinking revelries, and the area is littered with beer cans and other unsightly litter. Continue down the mining road to Gleason Creek in the floor of the main canyon, then cross the creek and climb steeply up the road to your car.

