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HIKING

Steep Wilderness at L.A.'s Doorstep

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Mt. Waterman, in the San Gabriel Mountains, is best known for its ski area. A couple of lifts carry skiers up the north face of the mountain. Alpine scenery and decent snowfall contribute to Waterman's popularity.

But when Mt. Waterman is snow-less, the 8,038-foot peak (and the San Gabriel Wilderness that adjoins it) becomes the province of hikers.

Angelenos, while inching along on some crowded interchange, may be comforted to know that no other major metropolitan area has a wilderness so close. The primeval canyons of the San Gabriel Wilderness are as close as 18 miles, as the crow flies, from downtown Los Angeles.

The 36,137-acre wilderness contains much rough-and-rugged country, especially in two canyons, Devils and Bear.

It is surrounded on three sides by roads: on the north and west by Highway 2 (the Angeles Crest Highway), on the east by Highway 39. Picnickers and campers crowd its edge, skiers peer down at it from nearby ridges. But despite its accessibility, most people only look at this wilderness. The few trails leading around and through the San Gabriel Wilderness—even the moderate, well-graded path to Mt. Waterman—are infrequently traveled.

Even more remote than Mt. Waterman (and offering better clear-day views) is Twin Peaks. The boulder-strewn summits of 7,761-foot East Twin Peak and 7,596-foot West Twin Peak offer commanding panoramas of the Angeles high country and the metropolis below.

Directions to trail head: From Interstate 210 (the Foothill Freeway) in La Cañada, exit on Highway 2 and drive 33 miles. Half a mile past the Mt. Waterman ski lift, look right for road paddle 58/00, then park in the large lot on the left side of the highway. Walk carefully along the highway to a dirt road with a yellow steel gate across it. This road is on the right side of the highway near road

paddle 58/15 and across the highway from a phone booth and the (closed) Buckhorn Ranger Station.

The hike: Walk up the fire road about 50 yards, then join the unsigned footpath branching from the left side of the road. The path parallels, then rises above Angeles Crest Highway.

About 1½ miles of ascent bring you to a dramatic crest where signs mark the boundary of the San Gabriel Wilderness.

Mt. Waterman Trail turns west for half a mile and brings you to a signed junction with the trail lead-

ing to Twin Peaks.

To reach Mt. Waterman: Go right and climb through the pine trees. Join an unsigned trail on your left for the final ascent to the stony, broad-shouldered summit.

To Twin Peaks: From the trail junction, descend a steep mile to Twin Peaks Saddle.

A rough, steep trail contours south, then an even more steep and faint trail climbs to a ridgeline between the Twin Peaks. Ascend east to reach the eastern peak. A clear panorama includes Palomar Mountain and Catalina Island.

San Gabriel Mountains

Mt. Waterman Trail, Twin Peaks Trail

Enlargement of area outlined below

Where: San Gabriel Wilderness, Angeles National Forest.

Distance: To Mt. Waterman, 6 miles round trip, with 1,300-foot elevation gain; to Twin Peaks, 9 ½ miles round trip.

Terrain: Pine- and cedar-dotted slopes.

Highlights: Superb views of San Gabriel Wilderness; chance to experience mysteries of L.A.'s own Twin Peaks.

Degree of difficulty: Moderate to strenuous.

Precautions: Route to Twin Peaks is partly trail-less; for experienced hikers only.

For more information: Contact Angeles National Forest, 701 N. Santa Anita Ave., Arcadia 91006, (818) 574-5541.