

MEET @ 9:15 - PHOTOS

START @ 9:30

5 JAN 1998

G.Z. Thomas

HIKING

# A Celebrated Trail in Angeles National Forest

By JOHN MCKINNEY

It's the second most-visited national forest in the United States, guardian of the San Gabriel Mountains, a wilderness near home. And next month, the Angeles National Forest celebrates its 100th anniversary.

In 1891, Congress passed the Forest Reserve Act, authorizing the President to establish "forest reserves" (forerunners of our national forests). Among the first to be set aside was the San Gabriel Timberland Reserve, created on Dec. 20, 1892, the first such reserve in California.

Today, the Angeles has everything one might expect in a national forest: half a dozen ski areas; a couple of lakes with decent fishing; three wilderness areas; birds, bears and bighorn sheep, plus great mountain biking and hundreds of miles of trail, including a grand stretch of the Pacific Crest Trail.

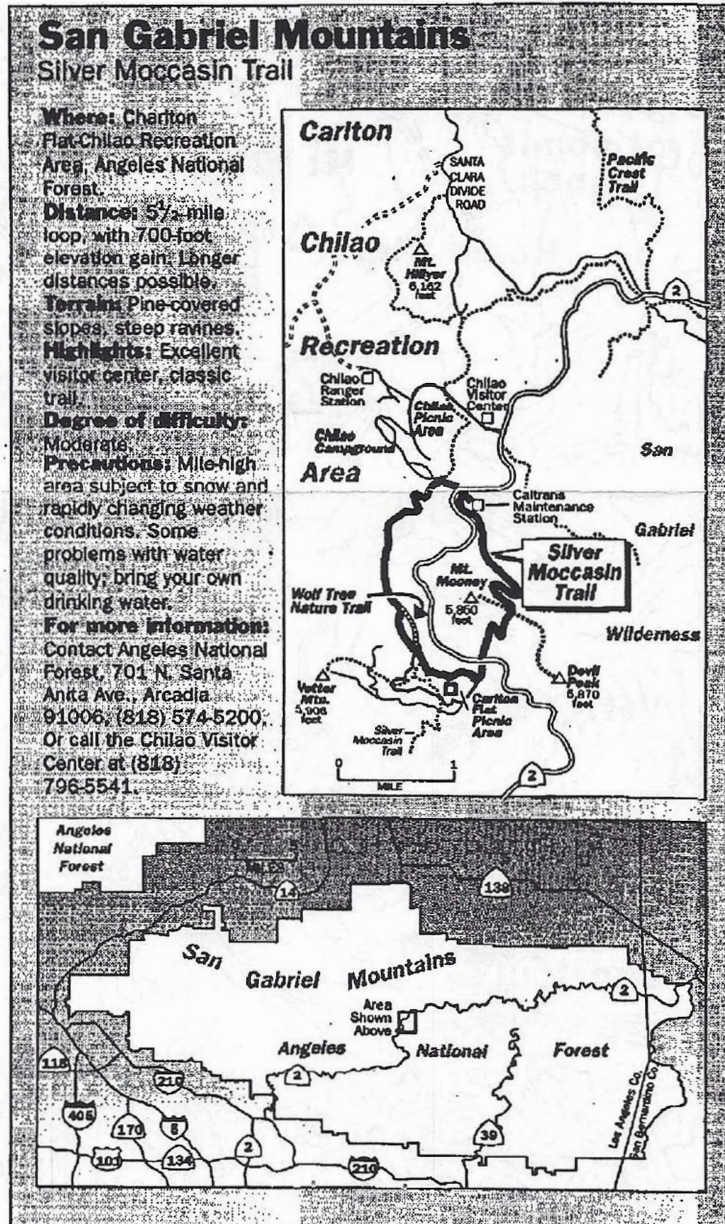
A good place to learn about Angeles Crest history and the difficult life of the early forest rangers is at the Chilao Visitor Center, just off Angeles Crest Highway (California 2) in the heart of the forest. The center also has flora, wildlife and geology exhibits, and offers the latest information about trail, road and weather conditions.

Another way to learn about the forest is to hit the trail. And the best trail to hit, near the Chilao Visitor Center, is a Southern California classic—the Silver Moccasin Trail.

One particularly enjoyable stretch tours the Charlton Flat-Chilao area, a region of giant boulders and gentle, Jeffrey pine-covered slopes. In order to make a loop, this hike employs other trails, as well as both dirt and paved roads.

**Directions to trail head:** From the Foothill Freeway (210) in La Canada, exit on Angeles Crest Highway and drive 13 miles to the signed turnoff for Chilao Campground. Turn left and proceed a short quarter-mile to signed Silver Moccasin Trail. Limited parking is available next to the Golden Anniversary Victory Grove.

**The hike:** Join the signed trail and hike south. Navigate very carefully at first, the Silver Moccasin is cut by numerous confusing side trails and is easy to lose. When in doubt, generally steer to the right toward the bluff overlooking the campground. After a few minutes of walking, the now-more-



distinct trail plunges down a chaparral-lined ravine.

A mile's descent brings you to an intersection with a dirt road. Go left and begin ascending along—and above—the east fork of Alder Creek. Another mile's hike and you'll arrive at the huge Charlton Flat Picnic Area. Turn left and begin walking up the paved picnic ground road.

After traversing the large picnic area, you arrive at Angeles Crest Highway. Carefully cross the highway and walk left a short way to a paved road on the right. Walk up

this paved road (which leads to a trailer sanitation facility). The pavement gives way to dirt and you ascend north three-quarters of a mile over forested slopes to a distinct saddle.

From the saddle, "peak-baggers" can journey to two summits. Devil Peak, which offers a grand view of the rugged San Gabriel Wilderness, is a three-quarter-mile trek via a dirt road and steep fire break. Mt. Mooney's pine-dotted summit, which offers better picnicking than panoramic views, is reached by a rough, steep half-



Hiker on Moccasin Trail, 1920s.

mile trail. Our main path drops north 1 1/4 miles over wooded slopes before bending westward, back toward Angeles Crest Highway. Some 50 yards short of the highway, join the unsigned, brush-lined trail that parallels the highway.

Now you are truly walking in the path of history, along the Angeles Crest Trail that dates from the 1890s. This was one of the main routes through the forest until the 1930s, when Angeles Crest Highway was constructed. The highway obliterated most of the old trail, except for a few stretches such as the one you're walking.

Your hike into history soon ends abruptly when you come face to face with a Caltrans maintenance station. Go left on the access road leading to the station and walk some 75 yards to Angeles Crest Highway. Carefully cross the highway, walk a short distance to the right, and join the entrance road to Chilao Campground for the short walk back to the trail head.

If you'd like to hike to the Chilao Visitor Center, join Silver Moccasin Trail, this time heading north through the pines. A mile's walk brings you to the Chilao Picnic Area, and another half-mile's walk up the picnic area road takes you to the center.

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