

Inspiring Point of View From Topanga State Park

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Topanga State Park, located on the urban edge, is surrounded by civic sprawl but retains its rural character. Highlights are handsome sandstone cliffs and lush canyon bottoms.

Most walkers and picnickers enter Topanga State Park from the main entrance off Topanga Canyon Boulevard and figure it's the only way into the park. Few realize that there are about half a dozen ways to reach the park by road, a dozen ways by trail.

The state park, sometimes billed as the largest state park within a city limit in the United States, has entrances on the San Fernando Valley side, where an unpaved portion of Mulholland Highway crosses the park, and it has a couple of entrances on the Pacific Palisades side as well.

One of these Palisades paths is Los Lions Trail, which travels through Los Lions Canyon to East Topanga Fire Road.

This walk leads to a viewpoint sometimes called Parker Mesa Overlook, sometimes called Topanga Overlook, but most often simply called The Overlook. Views of West L.A. and the sweep of Santa Monica Bay are superb. Sunset views are often inspiring.

There are two ways to reach the inspiring viewpoint. Los Lions Trail climbs through its namesake canyon to East Topanga Fire Road, which in turn leads to The Overlook. Or the hiker may head directly for The Overlook via the fire road.

From The Overlook, the ambitious day hiker could trek into the main part of Topanga State Park.

Directions to trail head: To Los Lions Drive trail head: From Pa-

cific Coast Highway in Pacific Palisades, turn inland on Sunset Boulevard a quarter of a mile. Turn left on Los Lions Drive and follow it to road's end and a small parking area. Don't park in the adjacent church lot.

The hike: From Los Lions Canyon, march past the vehicle gate and follow the trail into the canyon. After a quarter of a mile, the trail begins to climb in earnest, switchbacking through the chaparral.

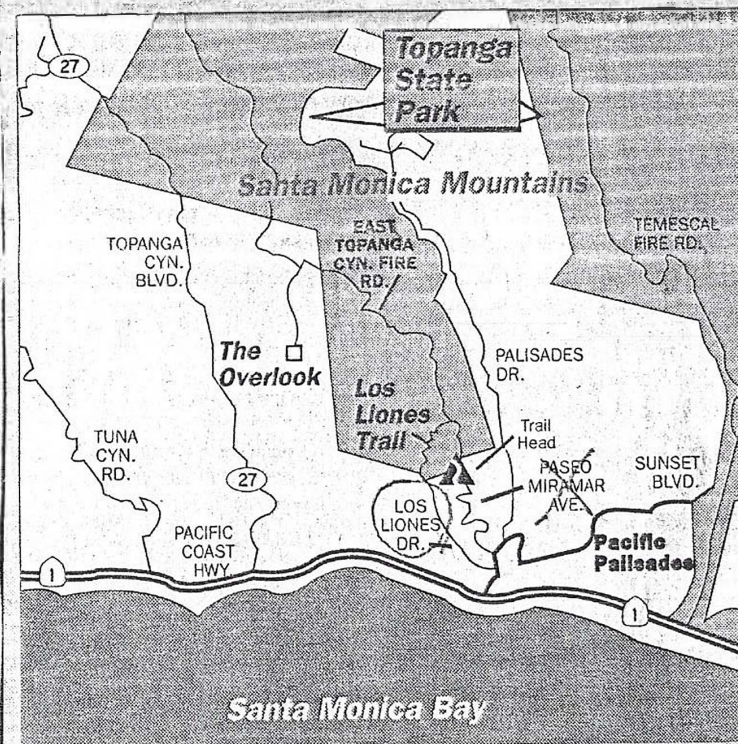
After leveling out for a stretch, the path then switchbacks even more earnestly through thickets of ceanothus. Los Lions Trail intersects East Topanga Fire Road about a quarter-mile from the road's beginning at Paseo Miramar.

Turn left (northwest) on the fire road and continue your ascent. For a short while the road travels a cool north slope and you get good over-the-right-shoulder views of neighboring Santa Ynez Canyon, a canyon that is wild and dramatic in its upper reaches in the state park and atrociously subdivided in its lower reaches outside park boundaries.

A two-mile ascent along the fire road brings you to a junction with a trail leading south along a bald ridge. Join this trail, which travels half a mile to The Overlook. On a clear day, enjoy the panorama of Westside L.A., Santa Monica Bay, Palos Verdes and Catalina Island.

Return the same way.

Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica Mts. Los Lions Trail, East Topanga Fire Road



Where: Topanga State Park.

Distance: Los Lions Drive to The Overlook, 6 miles round trip, with 1,500-foot elevation gain; from Paseo Miramar to The Overlook, 5 miles round trip, with 1,200-foot elevation gain.

Terrain: Rugged Los Lions Canyon is but a mile from Sunset Boulevard, but very much apart from the Westside city scene.

Highlights: The Overlook offers grand views of West Los Angeles and Santa Monica Bay.

For more information: Call the California Department of Parks and Recreation (Santa Monica Mountains District headquarters) at (818) 706-1310, or the Mountain Parks Information Service at (800) 533-7275.

Degree of Difficulty: Easy to moderate.

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BILL SHARPE