

15 Altadena to Oakwilde via Arroyo Seco

9 miles round trip; 900' elevation gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: November-May

Topo map: Pasadena

FEATURES

The Arroyo Seco today is largely bypassed and forgotten. Fifty years ago it was one of the most popular vacation spots in the range. Under its luxuriant cover of willow, sycamore, alder and bay, the canyon reverberated with the lusty shouts and merry songs of hikers and campers. The lower reaches were dotted with rustic cabins and well-used picnic spots. This was before the Angeles Crest Highway provided ready access into the mountains, climbing high on the west slope of the canyon. Now nature's stillness reigns supreme in the canyon, broken only by the gentle murmur of stream, the soft rustle of sycamore leaves, and—as a reminder of civilization's nearness—the occasional muffled roar of an automobile rounding a curve far above.

About halfway up this great gorge, on a forested streamside bench, is Oakwilde Picnic Area—tables and stoves. Here, in 1911, J. R. Phillips fashioned a tourist resort—old Camp Oak Wilde. For almost three decades, until it was nearly obliterated in the 1938 flood, this was a favorite spot of vacationing Southlanders. In the 1920s a road was built up the lower Arroyo Seco to the camp; it too was severely damaged in the greatest torrent known to man in the San Gabriels. Today, only remnants of the road remain, and a few stone foundations at Oakwilde are the only signs of what once went on here.

Time and nature's gradual healing process have restored much of the beauty of the lower Arroyo Seco, although parts of it have been permanently marred by man's work—most notably the Brown Canyon Debris Dam. Still, there is much to be seen and enjoyed in this great canyon; this trail trip gives you a fair sampling.

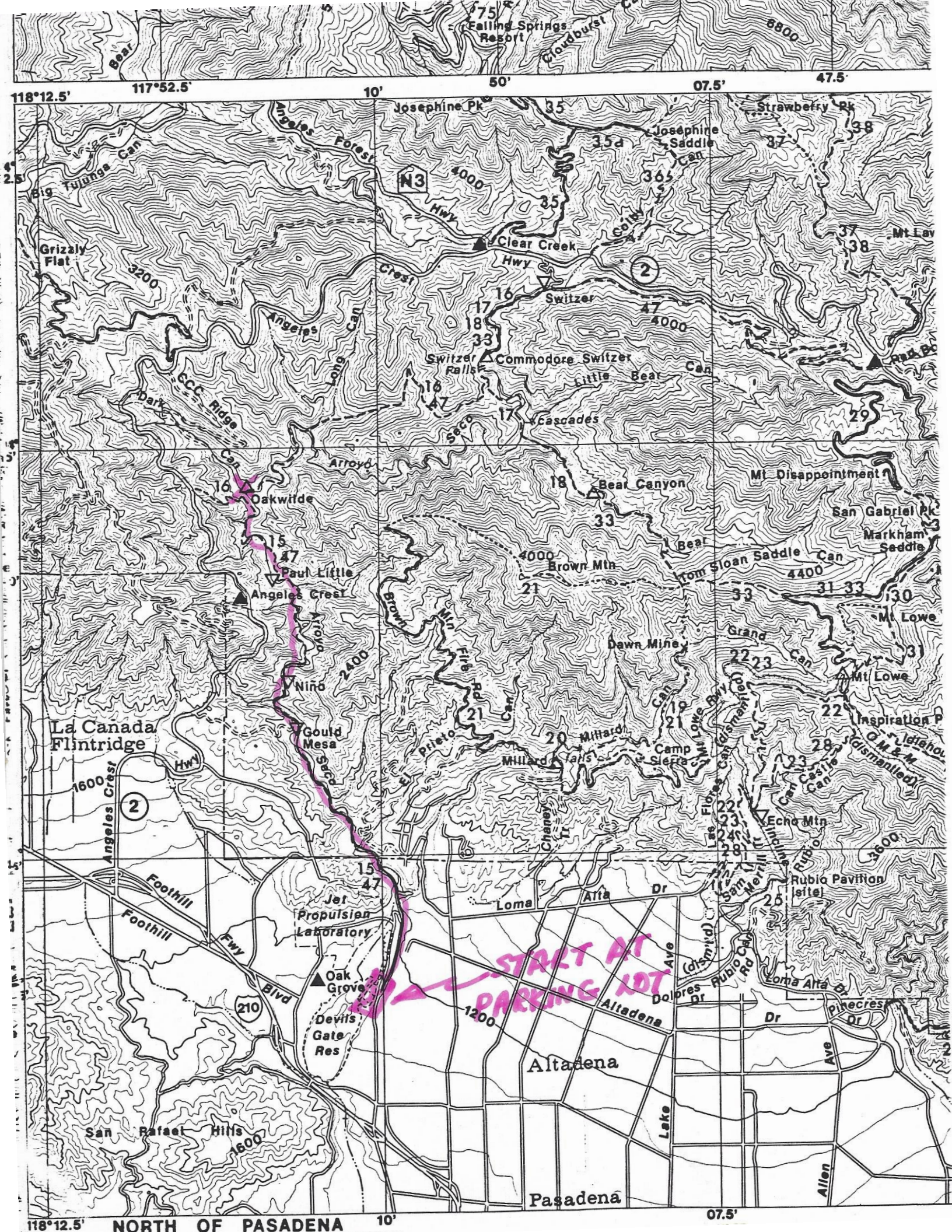
DESCRIPTION

From 210 Freeway, take the Arroyo Blvd. offramp and drive north on Arroyo, which promptly becomes Windsor Avenue. Continue north $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to the intersection with Ventura Street.

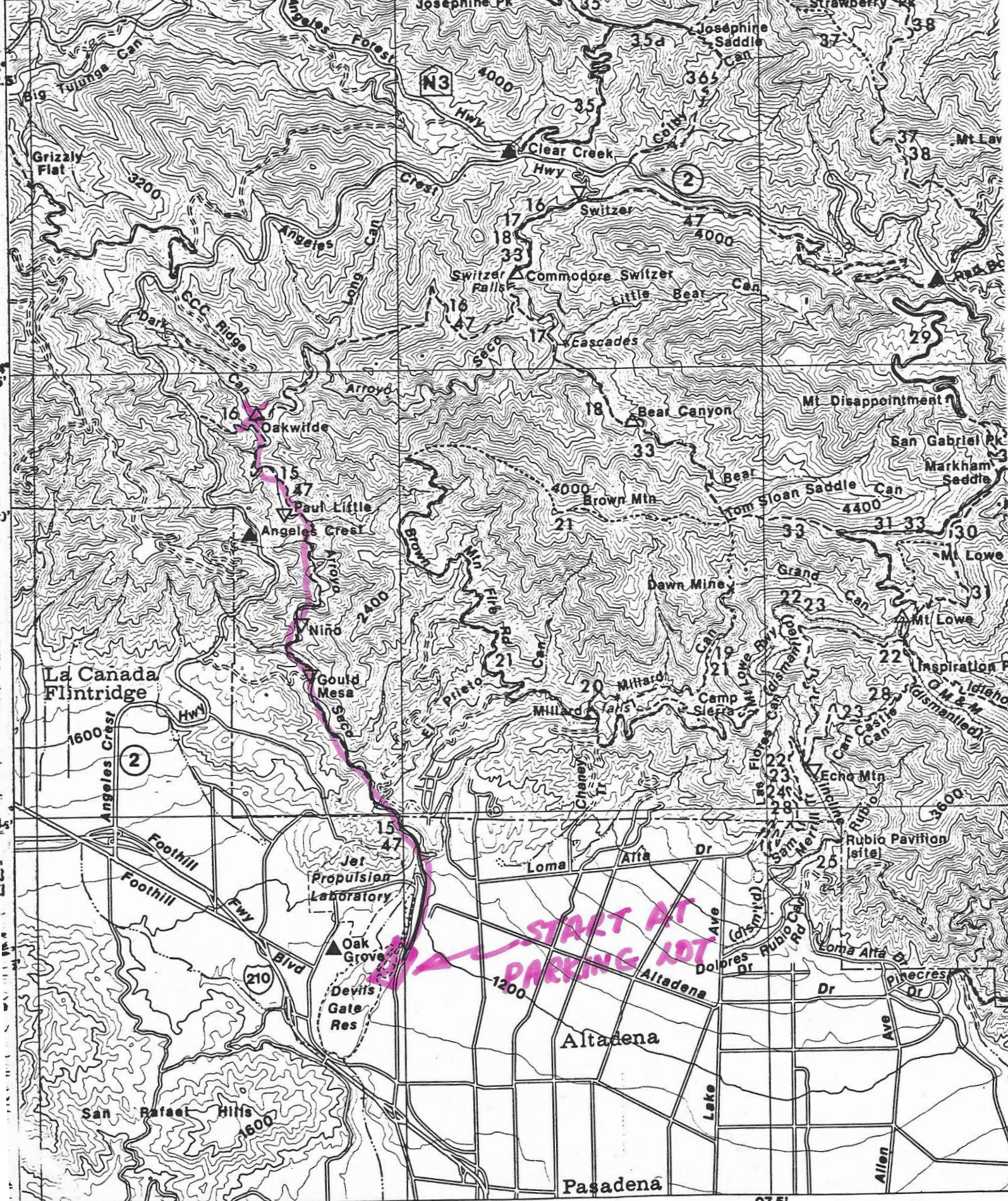
You will notice two roads—both with gates usually locked—leading north down toward the canyon entrance. Take the right (eastern) of the two; the left road goes to the JPL parking lot. Proceed on foot down the road, which gains the Arroyo Seco entrance in $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. You pass the assorted markings of the Pasadena Water Department—fences, retaining walls, gaging stations, and a host of warning signs—and reach Forest Service residences in another $\frac{1}{2}$ mile. Go left at a road fork, as indicated by the GABRIELINO TRAIL sign. Now the canyon closes in and the scenery becomes more woodsy—giant canyon oaks, alders, willows, sycamores, even a few eucalyptus trees from resort days. This is both a hiking and an equestrian route, so you'll most likely pass horseback riders. The trail alternates between following the old road and stream-hopping where roadbed and bridges have washed out.

A half mile above the Forest Service residences is Gould Mesa Picnic Area—named for Will Gould, who homesteaded here back in the '90s—and a side road leading up to Gould Mesa. Nino Picnic Area, where Nino Canyon joins the Arroyo, is a $\frac{1}{4}$ mile farther. Above Nino the canyon narrows, twists and turns, and remnants of the old road become less evident. In another mile you reach the Paul Little Memorial Picnic Area. Just beyond, the trail climbs up the steep east slope of the canyon to get around Brown Canyon Debris Dam, then drops back into the gorge and rounds two more sharp bends before reaching Oakwilde, $4\frac{1}{2}$ miles from the start. Here, amid the crumbling foundations of the old resort, under spreading oaks and alders, the Forest Service has built Oakwilde Picnic Area, with tables and stoves.

Return the way you came. Or, you have two other options: Take Red's Short-cut, very steep, up to the Angeles Crest Highway (see Trip 16); or continue up the Gabrielino Trail to Switzer Picnic Area (see also Trip 16). Both options require a car shuttle.



118°12.5' 117°52.5' 10' 50' 07.5' 47.5'



118°12.5' NORTH OF PASADENA 10' 07.5'