

Hike #155

## Rustic Canyon -- Retreat of the Master Race

4.5 miles round trip, 600' elevation loss and gain

Classification: Easy to moderate

The remains of a Nazi utopia lie eerily quiet at the bottom of Rustic Canyon. For years, the L.A. Department of Recreation and Parks had wanted to bulldoze the site and make it into a picnic area, but a constant shortage of money and staff has left undisturbed the dream of Winona Stephens.

In 1933, Stephens, heir to a mining fortune, created the Murphy Ranch near what is now Topanga State Park. The evil genius behind it all, according to Pacific Palisades historian Randy Young, was a Nazi spy named Schmidt. Herr Schmidt persuaded Stephens to invest more than \$4 million to create a self-supporting community where a chosen few would live until the day anarchy fell on the United States after a presumed Nazi victory over England. They would then emerge to govern a California hungry for order.

By 1940, they had built a garage with living quarters overhead, a huge concrete water tank, a diesel fuel tank and a dual-generator power station. Stephens, Schmidt and 50 other future master racers lived on the site, cultivating a vegetable garden and waiting for the New World Order. Guards stood at the gates, and the sounds of military drills often rang through the canyon.

The day after the United States entered World War II, Schmidt was arrested by the FBI and the community soon began to disintegrate. Now the buildings lie in ruins, littered with the remains of bonfires and plastered with graffiti, including swastikas. The canyon walls above are cut by four staircases of crumbling, treacherous concrete.

**Directions to trailhead** - Take the Sunset Blvd. exit from the 405 Freeway and head west towards the ocean. Turn right at Capri, which is

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the first traffic light after Allenford. Continue on Capri until it ends at Casale Road. Turn left on Casale and park on the right side of the road as best you can. Parking is limited, so carpooling is suggested.

**The Hike** - Nancy gets credit for finding this hike written up in the L.A. Times Sunday magazine. We tried it and, thanks to the owner of the property where the hike starts, were able to make a pleasant loop trip out of it. There's a private trail with steps and a railing to start out, that takes you down into the canyon. A short side trip up the canyon leads to an old dam with a small waterfall -- at least there was water flowing on November 13! We briefly retrace our steps to pick up the trail that continues past the dam.. The trail levels out and continues through the woods. We'll see all sorts of interesting debris from the past 50 years along the trail as we proceed. We reach the ruined Nazi mecca at about 1.5 miles. We walked past the ruins up a drybed creek before the trail peters out into rather heavy brush.

We return on a fire road, which climbs above the canyon through ponderosa pine stands, bougainvillea and overhanging eucalyptus, reaching the big flagstone entry gate. We continue along the fire road where there are excellent views of Santa Monica Bay. There's enough of an upgrade that you should work up a good appetite for your turkey dinner the next day!

**Afterward** - Refreshments at the Sharpe household, 3 miles from the trailhead. Return to Sunset Blvd. on Capri, turn left, then right at Allenford, which is the first light. Allenford becomes 26th Street in Santa Monica. Turn right onto San Vicente Blvd. Proceed (at 35 mph maximum -- it's a speed trap) to 7th Street. Turn left on 7th, go two blocks to Margarita, turn left again to Lincoln, which is one block over. Turn left on Lincoln to 455, the fourth house on the right.