



climbs above Willow Creek, and after a mile, rejoins the main Nicholas Flat Trail. Enjoy this interesting option on your return from Nicholas Flat.

Take the left branch, which immediately begins a moderate to steep ascent of the grassy slopes above the park campground. The trail switchbacks through a coastal scrub community up to a saddle on the ridge-line. Here you'll meet the alternate branch of Nicholas Flat Trail. From the saddle, a short side trail leads south to a hilltop, where

there's a fine coastal view. From the viewpoint, you can see Point Dume and the the Malibu coastline. During the winter, it's a good place to bring your binoculars and scout the Pacific horizon for migrating whales.

Following the ridgeline, Nicholas Flat Trail climbs inland over a chaparral-covered slope. Keep glancing over your right shoulder at the increasingly grand coastal views, and over your left at the open slopes browsed by the park's nimble deer. In the spring, the fast-fading wildflower population is dominated by that scrambling vine with the white trumpet-shaped flowers—the morning glory.

After a good deal of climbing, the trail levels atop the ridgeline and you get your first glimpse of grassy, inviting Nicholas Flat. The trail descends past a line of fire-blackened, but unbowed, old oaks and joins an old ranch road that skirts the Nicholas Flat meadows. Picnickers may unpack lunch beneath the shady oaks or out in the sunny meadow. The trail angles southeast across the meadow to a small pond. The man-made pond, used by cattle during the region's ranching days, is backed by some handsome boulders.

Return the way you came until you reach the junction located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the trailhead. Bear left at the fork and enjoy this alternate trail as it descends into the canyon cut by Willow Creek, contours around an ocean-facing slope, and returns you to the trailhead.

Nicholas Flat Trail

Leo Carrillo State Beach to Nicholas Flat
7 miles round trip; 1,600-foot gain

Season: All year

Leo Carrillo State Beach has always been a popular surfing spot. Surfers tackle the well-shaped south swell, while battling the submerged rocks and kelp beds. In recent years, the state added a large chunk of Santa Monica Mountains parkland to the state beach, and now Leo Carrillo is a pleasing place to take a hike.

Leo Carrillo's relatively remote location on the Los Angeles/ Ventura county line gives the park a mellow feeling that is lacking at other Southern California beaches. The park's shoreline is very popular with movie-makers, who roll some palm trees onto the strand and *voilà!*—Leo Carrillo doubles for a Caribbean island.

Sequit Point bisects the beach, forming a bay to the south. Beach hikers will enjoy exploring the point's caves and coves, and beachcombing a mile up-coast to the county line.

The state beach is named after Angeline Leo Carrillo, famous for his TV role as Pancho, the Cisco Kid's sidekick. Carrillo, the son of Santa Monica's first mayor, was also quite active in recreation and civic affairs.

Nicholas Flat Trail departs from Pacific Coast Highway and climbs inland over steep, scrub-covered slopes to a wide meadow and a small pond. From its high points, the trail offers good views of the Malibu coast.

Nicholas Flat Trail can also be savored for one more reason: In Southern California, very few trails connect the mountains with the sea.

Get an early start. Until you arrive at oak-dotted Nicholas Flat itself, there's not much shade en route. In good wildflower-watching years, you might spot such fast-fading spring blooms as monkeyflowers, coyote brush, golden yarrow, bush sunflowers, hummingbird sage, and a lot of lupine along the trail.

Directions to trailhead: From the west end of the Santa Monica Freeway in Santa Monica, head up-coast on Pacific Coast Highway about 25 miles to Leo Carrillo State Beach. There's free parking along Coast Highway, and fee parking in the park's day use area. Signed Nicholas Flat trailhead is located a short distance past the park entry kiosk, opposite the day use parking area.

The Hike: If the state park hasn't mowed its "lawn" lately, the first fifty yards of Nicholas Flat Trail will be a bit indistinct. Immediately after its tentative beginning, the trail junctions. The right branch circles the hill,

OTP Hiking & Debating Society
 Approx 1650 Ft. Altitude Gain, then Reverse Back to Origin
 Anne Foss Hike
 22 June 94
 Drop About 200 Ft