



Winter Creek Trail

3. AUG 1994
9:30 AM START

Chantry Flat to Hoeees Camp

6 miles round trip; 300-foot elevation gain

Cascades, currants and woodwardia ferns are a few of the delights of historic Winter Creek Canyon, which has been popular with Southern Californians for nearly one hundred years.

Before the turn of the century, packer/entrepreneur Wilbur Sturtevant set up a trail camp in one of the woody canyons on the south-facing slope of Mount Wilson. This peaceful creek-side refuge from city life was called Sturtevant's Winter Camp. In later years the name Winter was given to the creek whose headwaters arise from the shoulder of Mount Wilson and tumble southeasterly into Big Santa Anita Canyon.

In 1908, Arie Hoeege and his family built a resort here that soon became a popular destination for Mount Wilson-bound hikers; it remained so until it was battered by the great flood of 1938. A trail camp named for the Hoeees now stands on the site of the old resort and offers the modern-day hiker a tranquil picnic site or rest stop.

A hike along Winter Creek is a fine way to greet the arrival of winter. One of a half-dozen trails accessible from the popular Chantry Flat trailhead located just above Altadena in the Angeles National Forest, Winter Creek Trail offers a pleasant family hike in the front range of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Arcadia, exit on Santa Anita Avenue and drive six miles north to its end at Chantry Flat. The trail begins across the road from the parking area. A tiny store at the edge of the parking lot sells maps and refreshments.

The Hike: (See Trail 42 map.) Descend 3/4 mile on the paved fire road, part of the signed Gabrielino Trail, into Big Santa Anita Canyon. At the bottom of the canyon, you'll cross a footbridge near the confluence of Big Santa Anita and Winter Creeks.

After crossing the bridge, look leftward for the signed Lower Winter Creek Trail. Following the bubbling creek, the trail tunnels beneath the boughs of oak and alder, willow and bay. The only blemish on the pristine scene is a series of check dams constructed of giant cement "Lincoln logs" by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District and Forest Service in the early 1960s. Fortunately, during the last quarter-century, moss, ferns and other creek-side flora have softened the appearance of the dams and they now fit much better into the lovely surroundings.

You'll pass some cabins, built just after the turn of the century and reached only by trail. For more than seven decades, the needs of the cabin owners have been supplied by pack train. Today, one of the more colorful sights in the San Gabriel Mountains is that of packers Dennis and Jody Lonergan urging their obstinate donkeys up the Winter Creek Trail.

When you see man and beast moving through the forest, it's easy to imagine that you've stepped three-quarters of a century back in time, back into Southern California's great Hiking and Trail Resort Era. The Lonergans operate one of the last working pack strings in Southern California, continuing a tradition that would surely make early packers Sturtevant and Chantry proud.

After crossing Winter Creek, you'll arrive at Hoeees Camp. A dozen or so tables beneath the big cone spruce offer fine picnicking. Almost all signs of the original Hoeees Camp are gone, with the exception of flourishing patches of ivy. (In later years, Hoeees was renamed Camp Ivy.)

Walk through the campground until you spot a tiny tombstone-shaped trail sign. Cross Winter Creek here and bear left on the trail. In a short while you'll pass a junction with Mount Zion Trail, a steep trail that climbs over the mountain to Sturtevant Camp and Big Santa Anita Canyon.

After recrossing the creek, you'll pass a junction with a trail leading to Mount Wilson and join the Upper Winter Creek Trail. This trail contours around a ridge onto open chaparral-covered slopes. This stretch of trail offers fine clear-day views of Sierra Madre and Arcadia. The trail joins a fire road just above Chantry Flat and you follow this road through the picnic area back to the parking lot where you left your car.

Ivy along trail recalls days when Hoeees was named "Camp Ivy"

