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Hiking: San Gabriel Mountains

The Long and Winding Fire Road

By JOHN MCKINNEY

Count me among the legions of hikers who have long ignored the San Olene Fire Road.

Maybe it's the name (not very inspiring) or its location (near three of the most famed footpaths in the San Gabriel Mountains).

For whatever reason and in whatever season, we pass San Olene by. We drive to Chantry Flat, one of the most popular trail heads in the San Gabriel Mountains, then we usually join the famed Gabrielino Trail for the short walk to Sturtevant Falls or the long hike to Mt. Wilson.

We traipse past the cascades, waterfalls and giant ferns in Big Santa Canyon or climb to Mt. Zion via dramatic Winter Creek Trail.

So with all these natural attractions nearby, what can San Olene Fire Road possibly offer?

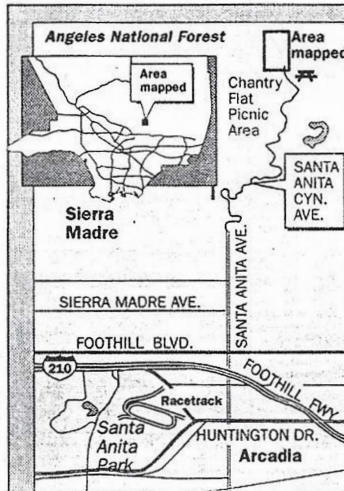
In a word: view.

The Channel Islands, Santa Catalina Island, Santa Monica Bay, Mt. San Jacinto, Saddleback Peak in Orange County and Palomar Mountain in San Diego are part of the clear-day view from the ridge.

From Chantry Flat, the fire road ascends at a moderate, but unremitting 6% grade all the way to the viewpoint. This hike can be an excellent sunset ramble.

Directions to trail head: From the Foothill Freeway (Interstate 210) in Arcadia, exit on Santa Anita Avenue and drive six miles north to its end at Chantry Flat. From the large parking lot, locate the paved, signed fire road at the edge of the picnic area.

The hike: From Chantry Flat Picnic Area, follow the paved fire road. You'll soon pass a junction with the right-branching Winter Creek Trail and three-quarters of a mile from the trail head, you will



San Olene Fire Road

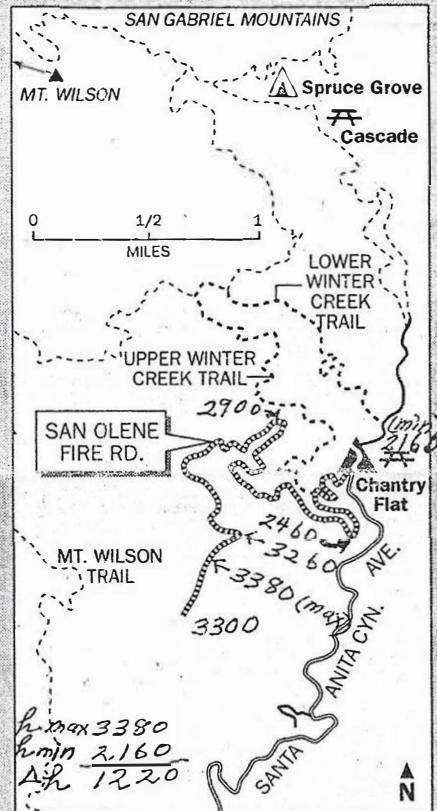
WHERE: Santa Anita Ridge, Angeles National Forest.

DISTANCE: From Chantry Flat to viewpoint is 7 miles round trip with 1,300-foot elevation gain.

TERRAIN: Big Santa Anita Canyon; steep slopes on the urban edge.

HIGHLIGHTS: City and mountain views.

DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous.



FOR MORE INFORMATION: Angeles National Forest, 701 N. Santa Anita Ave., Arcadia, CA 91006; tel. (818) 574-5300.

HELENE WEBB / Los Angeles Times

reach a Forest Service heliport—officially the Chantry Flat Air-Attack Station.

Here the pavement ends and a dirt road continues, ascending chaparral-covered slopes dotted with monkey flowers. Look for small groves of bay and maple, as well as a handsome stand of young madroño about two miles from the trail head.

San Olene Fire Road finally levels out at the 3½-mile mark, where you'll spot (can't miss, really) a futuristic-looking microwave relay tower on the left and a big water tank on the right.

For the very best view of the vast metropolis, as well as distant mountains, walk a few hundred yards south down Santa Anita Ridge.