





Rich Frederick
17 March

	Distance	6.8 miles
	Total Elevation Gain/Loss	1500'/1500'
	Hiking Time	3½ hours
	Optional Maps	USGS 7.5-min Canoga Park, Topanga
	Best Times	October through June
	Agency	TSP
	Difficulty	★★★

Start

09:30

South end
of Reseda Blvd.
(Reseda exit from
Ventura Fwy-101
west from 405)
Reseda ends in
a turn-around
circle and small
park area. Lots
of parking space.

The secret recesses of upper Rustic Canyon, its shady "bay tree" tributary, and Garapito Creek invite your attention. With rudimentary navigational skills you can find and follow this circle tour through some of the most remote and rugged terrain in the Santa Monica Mountains. Expect to encounter some indistinct or partially overgrown sections of trail, and watch for poison oak down in the canyons.

You start hiking from unpaved Mulholland Drive at a point 4.9 miles east of Topanga Canyon Boulevard and 2.6 miles west of the old missile site on San Vicente Mountain. More specifically, this point is 0.3 mile west of the trail (old fire road) coming up through Caballero Canyon. Parts of Mulholland are like a third-world highway, fairly wide but full of mudholes after heavy rains, rough and rutty otherwise. A high-clearance or 4-wheel-drive vehicle may be required. At the expense of an extra 3.5 miles round trip, you can avoid the dirt-road driving by starting from Reseda Boulevard and using the Caballero Canyon route (see Trip 9) to reach Mulholland.

On the brushy slope south of Mulholland, find and follow the narrow trail going due south. Steep and eroded at first, it drops into an upper tributary of Rustic Canyon, then descends more moderately as it joins the tributary's dry bed. The canyon deepens and the chaparral is joined by scattered live oaks, and then by a nice mixture of sycamores, willows, bay laurels, ferns, and assorted riparian plants—the hallmarks of a year-round water supply, at least underground. Some fine examples of dark-grey Santa Monica Slate are exposed along the canyon sides.

After 1.1 miles there's an easily missed, unmarked trail junction. You'll turn right here on the unsigned Bay Tree Trail, which goes up a narrow west fork. Down-canyon 0.4 mile from this junction is another fork, where the main Rustic Canyon heads north. When the streams are really flowing, you may want to make a side trip up this canyon to see "Blue Gorge," a moss-covered con-

striction in the canyon bottom where water tumbles over a series of cascades.

Follow the Bay Tree Trail along the bottom of the west fork for 0.4 mile, then start an ascent on an obvious trail up the steep south wall. A dense grove of bay laurel trees has stump-sprouted here after the 1978 Mandeville Canyon fire, creating what is today surely one of the most densely shaded spots in the Santa Monica Mountains. Water from a tiny spring seeps over the trail at one point, just below a multi-trunked bay tree. After a steady but delightfully shaded climb, you break out of the trees and soon thereafter hook up with the Backbone Trail (2.4 miles). Go right and walk 0.2 mile to Temescal Ridge Trail. Temescal Peak—highest point in Topanga State Park—lies within easy reach, if you desire, on the left.

Go north on the Temescal Ridge Trail to Hub Junction and take the middle of the three roads ahead, signed north loop trail. Follow this ridge-running fire road 0.3 mile east to the obscure junction of the Garapito Trail (just short of Cheney Fire Road, which descends west onto private lands outside the park). Turn right here.

The Garapito Trail, the newest in the park, cuts a sinuous course through mature chaparral—mostly mountain mahogany and ceanothus up to 20 feet tall. The blossoms of the ceanothus exude a wild-honey scent in spring, attractive to bees as well as humans. You contour along a west-facing slope, then descend along a sharply falling ridgeline, crisscrossing on many tight switchbacks. At the bottom, the trail swings around to cross a south fork of Garapito Creek, and then contours a short distance over to an east fork. A steady climb up along this east fork takes you to a wide dirt road, the Temescal Ridge Trail. Cross over to the far side of this road and you'll see a footpath that takes you down and then back up to Mulholland Drive. You join Mulholland at a point 0.1 mile west of where you started your descent into the Rustic Canyon tributary.