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La Tuna Canyon Trail

- La Tuna Canyon Road to Horny Toad Ridge
6 miles round trip; 1,000-foot elevation gain ←
- La Tuna Canyon Road to Fire Wardens Grove
9 miles round trip; 1,700-foot elevation gain
- Return via Hostetter Fire Road
10 1/2 miles round trip

Rising above the southeast end of the San Fernando Valley, the Verdugo Mountains are a surprisingly rugged, usually overlooked place to hike. One reason the mountains are an overlooked destination is the scarcity of hiking trails.

La Tuna Canyon Trail, constructed in the spring of 1989, is the first foot trail built in modern times to explore the Verdugo Mountains. The trail was built by the Los Angeles Conservation Corps, under the leadership of Ron Webster. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy, a state conservation agency, provided funds for the project.

Hikers who have hiked a lot of trails will be delighted with the look and feel of La Tuna Canyon Trail. The hand-built trail follows the lay of the land and is not at all obtrusive.

The mountains took their name from Jose Maria Verdugo, who in 1784 received one of the earliest Spanish Land grants in California. Rancho de Los Verdugo was a cattle ranch that took in land between Mission San Gabriel and Mission San Fernando.

Conservationists, primarily members of SWAP (Small Wilderness Area Preservation), rallied to halt a proposed scenic parkway at the crest of the Verdugos, prevented the subdivision of the mountaintops, and preserved a portion of the mountains as parklands.

La Tuna Canyon Trail visits some quiet oak- and sycamore-lined canyons and ascends to the range's principal feature—and its main attraction for hikers—its ridgetop, which extends the length of the range. The ridgetop offers grand clear-day views of the San Fernando Valley, San Gabriel Mountains and downtown Los Angeles.

Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Tujunga (between the communities of La Crescenta and Sunland), exit on La Tuna Canyon Road. As you head west, look sharply left, and you'll spot what looks like a frontage road paralleling the freeway. This road, closed to vehicular traffic, is the road you'll be descending from the ridgetop if you elect the longer loop option of this hike.

9:30 AM October 31, 1990

Season: All Year



One mile from the freeway exit, you'll spot a turnout on the south side of the road with a Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy sign. (A short trail leads to a grotto and a seasonal waterfall.) Continue another 3/10 of a mile to a second turnout on your left and park.

The Hike: The unsigned trail descends into the mouth of a narrow canyon, then promptly ascends the canyon wall to a little wooden overlook. The path switchbacks out of the canyon, tops Horny Toad Ridge, then descends holly-leaved cherry-covered slopes into a second, unnamed canyon. (Not only are the charms of the Verdugos undiscovered, they're also unnamed.) Reaching the bottom of the canyon, the trail visits an oak- and sycamore-shaded glen. Beneath the trees are ferns, tangled vines and plenty of of poison oak.

At the canyon bottom, the trail joins a very steep, crumbling dirt road. Below the road are a couple of old pickup trucks; one guesses their owners drove them down the steep grade, but couldn't get them back out of the canyon. The road climbs at a 25% grade for a half-mile, then joins Horny Toad Ridge, so-named by the trail builders for the abundance of spiky-looking, brown, tan, and cream-colored horned toad lizards found here. Another half-mile's ascent along the ridge brings you to a junction with Verdugo Fire Road. Looking sharply to the east, you can see the hike's next destination—the radio towers and pine plantation near Verdugo Peak.

Turn left (east) on Verdugo Fire Road, sometimes called "Backbone Road," and begin a moderate ascent. Enjoy the great ridgetop views of the San Fernando Valley. Near the top of the range, you'll reach Fire Wardens Grove, planted by the Los Angeles County Department of Forestry more than a half-century ago. The department's Fire Wardens patrolled the Verdugos until 1953 when the agency was combined with the Los Angeles

County Fire Department. The mixed stand of conifers planted by the Fire Wardens offer some welcome shade.

From the ridge just above Fire Wardens Grove, enjoy the the views, particularly to the south, of Griffith Park, the Santa Monica Mountains and downtown L.A. On a clear day, even the Palos Verdes Peninsula, Los Angeles Harbor and Catalina Island are visible from this vantage point.

From Fire Warden's Grove, continue east on the ridge road, and you'll soon pass the second-highest peak in the Verdugos, a 3,120-foot-antennae-topped (again we have a shortage of names here) peak. Continue toward Verdugo Peak, and you'll soon reach a junction; Verdugo Fire Road continues along the top of the range, then descends to Glendale, but you turn left and begin descending on unsigned Hostetter Fire Road toward La Tuna Canyon. As you descend the north slopes of the Verdugos, and look north, particularly prominent is Mount Lukens—bristling with antennae—the highest peak within the city limits of Los Angeles. You'll also get a good look at the Glendale Freeway and narrow Verdugo Valley, which separates the mountains from its smaller sister range, the San Rafael.

A bit more than a mile's descent from the top brings you to a water tank, and two miles along to an apiary. The Foothill Freeway comes into view, the road turns to asphalt, and you'll travel the frontage road one-half mile to La Tuna Canyon Road. Here you'll head west (use caution when walking on the road shoulder) 1.3 miles back to the trailhead.



Master trail builder Ron Webster walks the trail he designed

La Tuna Canyon Trail
10 1.3 miles round trip
Return via Hostetter Fire Road
9 miles round trip; 1,700-foot elevation gain
La Tuna Canyon Road to Fire Wardens Grove
6 miles round trip; 1,600-foot elevation gain
La Tuna Canyon Road to Hory's Last Ridge

Keep above the western end of the San Rafael Valley
Verdugo Mountains are a strikingly rugged, usually forested
to the top of the ridge, the mountains are an overlook of the
a series of hiking trails.
La Tuna Canyon Trail, constructed in the spring of 1971, is the first
trail built in modern times to explore the Verdugo Mountains. The
was built by the Los Angeles Conservancy Corps under the leadership
Ron Webster, The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy is state con
servation agency, provided funds for the project.
Hiker, who have hiked a lot of trails will be delighted with the look
out of La Tuna Canyon Trail. The hand-built trail follows the lay of
land and is not at all strenuous.
The mountains took their name from the black Verdugo, which is a
red variety of oak - eastern Spanish Land grant in California. Pacific
La Tuna Canyon - a small creek runs that took its name from the Mission.
Gardner and Mission San Fernando.
Conservationists, primarily members of SWAP - Small Wilderness
Action Organization, decided to build a proposed scenic parkway at the
of the Verdugos, provided the subdivision of the neighborhood.
protected a portion of the mountains as parkland.
La Tuna Canyon Trail runs some quiet and scenic in
canyon, and ascends to the range's principal feature—and its in
struction for hikers—in red granite which extends the length of the ran
The viewpoint offers grand clear-day views of the San Fernando Valley
San Gabriel Mountains and downtown Los Angeles.
Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Tujunga
head east at the overpass of La Cresenta and 2nd Street to La Tuna
Canyon Road. As you head west, look sharply left and you'll spot what
looks like a frontage road paralleling the freeway. This road, closed
to vehicular traffic in the past, will be descending from the top of the
mountain to the bottom loop of this trail.