

X 2/6/91

Hike #62

Season: All Year
Recommended map: Angeles
National Forest
Topo: Condor Peak,
Pasadena



Gabrielino National Recreation Trail

Switzer Picnic Area to Switzer Falls

4 miles RT; 600' loss.

Switzer Picnic Area to Bear Canyon

8 miles RT; 1000' gain.

Switzer Picnic Area to Oakwilde

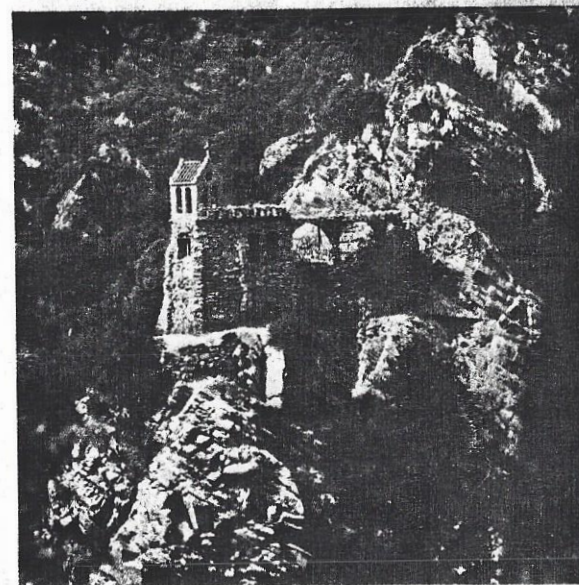
9 miles RT; 1400' loss.

The Arroyo Seco is undoubtedly the best known canyon in Southern California. It's the site of the Rose Bowl and has the dubious distinction of hosting California's first freeway, the Pasadena. But the ten miles of civilized urban canyon bear little resemblance to the ten miles of rugged mountain arroyo which begins near the north slope of Mount Wilson. A quiet stream lined with colonnades of alder, live oak and mountain lilac clinging to the narrow sides of the gorge, cascades over boulders of big gray granite—these are some of the joys of the wild arroyo that will greet you.

Perry Switzer, a carpenter who regained his health in the invigorating San Gabriels, built a trail up the Arroyo Seco and decided to build a trail resort. He put up some rough log cabins, despite arguments that "no one would want to pay for a bed up among the grizzlies, mountain lions and bobcats." He earned the nickname "Commodore" because of his skill in navigating his burro squadron as they forded the Arroyo Seco. His hospitality made Switzer's the most popular trail camp in the San Gabriels.

The resort passed into the hands of Lloyd Austin, who added a tennis court, chapel, and dance floor. A sign across from the resort greeted visitors: LEAVE YOUR CARS AND ANIMALS THIS SIDE OF THE STREAM. Switzer-land was popular with hikers well into the 1930s, until the Angeles Crest Highway rendered the peaceful camp "obsolete."

During the "Great Hiking Era," a hiker could venture up the Arroyo Seco and within an hour lose all signs of civilization. Amazingly, you still can today. This hike takes you past the site of Switzer's retreat and visits



Switzer's Chapel (1924-1959)

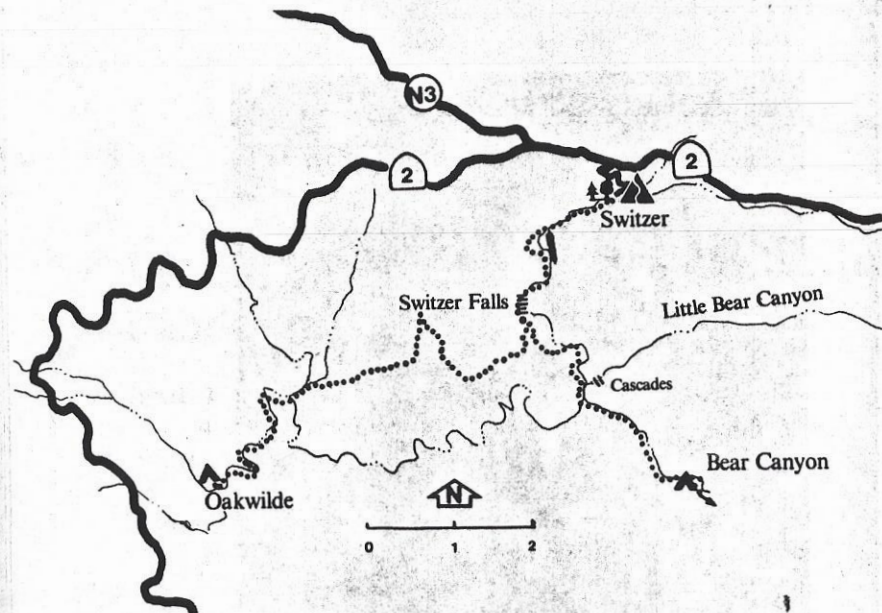
Switzer Falls. Further exploration of the Arroyo Seco country is possible by taking one of the optional trails to Oakwilde and Bear Canyon.

Directions to trailhead: Take Angeles Crest Highway (2) north from La Canada for 10 miles. A half mile past the junction of Angeles Crest and Angeles Forest Highways, turn right at entrance to Switzer Picnic Area and continue ¼ mile to parking area. Trail begins across the bridge.

The Hike: Cross the bridge and follow the trail into the canyon. The pathway meanders with the stream under oak, alder and spruce. You'll cross and re-cross the stream several times and do some easy boulder-hopping. Plan to get wet. In some places, stream crossing is quite difficult in spring. In a mile, you'll reach Commodore Switzer Trail Camp. Perched on a bench just above the falls, it's an inviting place with tables for a picnic. The creek trail below the camp dead-ends above the falls.

From the camp, cross the stream and follow the trail on the west slope. You'll soon get a nice view of the falls. A signed junction soon appears. To the right (southwest) is the main trail down to Oakwilde and Pasadena. Bear left here and hike down into the gorge of the Arroyo Seco below the falls. When you reach the creek, turn upstream ¼ mile to the falls. Don't try to climb the falls; it's very dangerous.

Return the same way.



Option: To Bear Canyon Trail Camp. Continue down the Arroyo gorge on a mediocre trail $\frac{3}{4}$ mile to its junction with Bear Canyon. Follow the trail east up Bear Canyon, crossing and re-crossing the creek. Along the way are many nice swimming pools. In spring the water is cold from snowmelt and little sun reaches the canyon floor. The trail, shaded by big cone spruce, closely parallels the creek. When you look at an Angeles Forest map, you'll discover that Bear Canyon is surrounded on all sides by highways, dams, and development. The canyon has no right to be so quiet, so pristine. But it is. As you boulderhop from bank to bank, the only sound you'll hear is that of water cascading over granite into clear pools. Give thanks that there is at least one spot in the front range of the San Gabriels that is untouched wilderness and continue to Bear Canyon Trail Camp, 2 miles up the canyon.

Option: To Oakwilde. From the signed junction above Commodore Switzer Trail Camp, continue right on the Gabrielino National Recreation Trail. The trail leaves the main Arroyo Seco canyon, crosses a chaparral ridge, then drops down into Long Canyon. It then descends to Arroyo Seco creek bottom and follows the creek an easy mile to Oakwilde Trail Camp. In this canyon yuccas and a variety of wildflowers bloom in season.

Oak Wylde, as it was called during the "Great Hiking Era," was a jump-off place for trips further up the Arroyo Seco. Pack burro trails connected Oak Wylde with the stage station in Pasadena. The trail camp is located among the crumbling stone foundation of a resort. Alder and oak shade a pleasant campground and picnic area.

Return the same way.