

STORIES MOUNT LAGUNA | ROAM-O-RAMA

Ramble 8 miles along the Indian Creek and Pacific Crest trails in the Laguna Mountains.

By Jerry Schad | Published Thursday, June 17, 1999

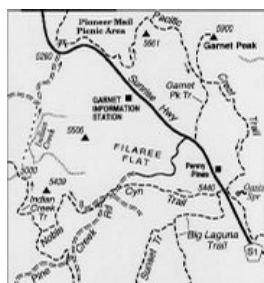
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Summer is finally arriving in upper-elevation San Diego County. At mile-high elevations you can still find lingering bursts of wildflower color amid the somber pines and bright-green black oaks. For a wide-ranging introduction to the local mountain landscape, plus a startling view of the desert, try the following easygoing eight-mile walk around the north end of the Laguna Mountain Recreation Area.

Begin at the Penny Pines trailhead, mile 27.3 on Sunrise Highway (about 4 miles north of the community of Mount Laguna), where parking is available along the highway's wide shoulder. Start by following the Noble Canyon Trail, a popular hiking and mountain-biking path, west through Jeffrey-pine forest. After gaining the north slope of a hill, dropping to cross dirt roads three times, and ascending once again to circle around the north end of a ridge, you'll come to a junction with the Indian Creek Trail, 2.4 miles from the start. Turn right at this junction and descend about 0.8 mile through black oaks and chaparral to the grassy banks along trickling Indian Creek.

Indian Creek Trail now sharply ascends to the left, but you head north, upstream along Indian Creek, following the remnants of an old road on the left bank. Keep going on what becomes a better dirt road until you reach Pioneer Mail Picnic Ground, 4.6 miles, across Sunrise Highway. Just below the picnic tables, find the Pacific Crest Trail, and follow it to the right (east). You parallel Sunrise Highway for a stretch, then crookedly ascend oak- and pine-shaded hillsides dotted with wallflowers, lupine, and paintbrush. Leveling, the trail proceeds through ceanothus (wild-lilac) chaparral, and Cottonwood Canyon, leading toward the desert, lies on the left.

Next comes an oblique intersection with a wide trail to Garnet Peak. Find the continuation of the Pacific Crest Trail on the far side, maintaining a course along the rim of the desert-facing Laguna Mountain escarpment. Here and there you can try working your way east through some intervening chaparral growth to reach the very brink of the escarpment. Or you can wait until you get to a stretch of trail where you look straight down into the yawning depths of Storm Canyon. A final descent on the PCT, through oaks and pines, takes you back through the Penny Pines plantation and to your starting point.



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