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Climb Poway's Woodson Mountain via pavement, and loop back via a primitive north-side route.

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Thursday, Aug. 3, 2006

Indians called it "Mountain of Moonlit Rocks," an appropriate name for a landmark visible, even at night, over great distances. Early white settlers dubbed it "Cobbleback Peak," a name utterly descriptive of its rugged, boulder-strewn slopes. For the past 100+ years, however, it has appeared on maps simply as "Woodson Mountain," in honor of a Dr. Woodson who homesteaded some property nearby well over a century ago.

The looping route for hikers described here, approximately 5 miles long up and over Woodson's summit, takes advantage of the newer, semi-rough Fry-Koegel Trail along the mountain's bouldery north slope. For the duration of this month and next, don't try this route in the midday heat; but rather try visiting either early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Even so, at this time of year, the hike is a two-water-bottle effort.

Park alongside Highway 67, 3 miles north of Poway Road, near the entrance to the California Division of Forestry fire station. Follow a well-beaten path south past the fire station to where it hooks up with a paved service road (closed to vehicular travel) that curls up the mountain's east slope. The road underfoot is at times very steep, but offers excellent traction.

On most weekends, the sounds of nature along the road will be accompanied by the clink of aluminum hardware, plus the shouts of "On belay!" This east slope of Woodson offers the best bouldering practice for rock climbers in all of San Diego County.

When you reach the top of the mountain, at 1.7 miles, you'll walk amid a forest of radio antennae rising from the outsized boulders. Walk west, on dirt now, along the narrow summit ridge to reach a vantage point overlooking Poway, north San Diego County's coastal region, and the great blue expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Santa Catalina and San Clemente islands are visible on the clearest days. Nearby you'll spot an amazing cantilevered "potato-chip" flake of rock jutting from a large boulder outcrop, the result of exfoliation and weathering.

On ahead, you quickly pick up a narrow, eroded trail which tilts downward, steeply at times, along Woodson's boulder-punctuated west ridge. After about 0.5 mile, there's a fork. Ignore the left branch, which is the Mount Woodson Trail coming up from Lake Poway, and continue west, down-ridge. The two next trail intersections on the right are two alternate versions of the Fry-Koegel Trail, which will take you on an oblique dive down through wildly tangled, mature chaparral, bound for the Mount Woodson Estates subdivision at the north base of the mountain. Near the bottom, the trail meanders through spooky clusters of coast live oaks. Watch out for copious growths of poison oak through here.

Back in the open air again, the trail skirts some homes; then it's a straight shot to Archie Moore Road, near

Highway 67. Just before reaching that, you'll hear and spot cars on the nearby Highway 67. You can take a short cut over to the highway shoulder and walk the short distance back to your car.

This article contains information about a publicly owned recreation or wilderness area. Trails and pathways are not necessarily marked. Conditions can change rapidly. Hikers should be properly equipped and have safety and navigational skills. The *Reader* and Jerry Schad assume no responsibility for any adverse experience.

