



## Roam-O-Rama

### **Climb Tahquitz Peak in the San Jacinto Mountains, and visit one of the few active fire lookouts remaining in Southern California.**

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Thursday, July 15, 2004

Tahquitz Peak celebrates a legendary demon who, in the oral tradition of the Cahuilla Indians, used to dine on maidens and create crackling bolts of lightning over the San Jacinto Mountains. At an elevation of 8828 feet, the forest lookout tower perched atop the peak commands a view westward over haze and smog to the crests of the Santa Ana and San Gabriel Mountains. On rare days of crystalline visibility, the coastline at Santa Monica and Malibu can be glimpsed, as well as the offshore islands of Santa Catalina and San Clemente.

The direct approach to Tahquitz Peak is by way of the South Ridge Trail out of the mountain hamlet of Idyllwild. First, you'll have to obtain a wilderness permit from the Forest Service station in Idyllwild's town center, off Highway 243. South of the town center, take Saunders Meadow Road to Pine Street, turn north for two blocks, turn right (east) on Tahquitz View Drive, and then right again on South Ridge Road, Forest Road 5S11. If your car is sturdy enough, drive up this dirt road for 1.5 miles to the South Ridge trailhead.

The no-nonsense trail ahead (three miles with 2000 feet of elevation gain) takes you steadily uphill along a viewful ridge, first through Jeffrey pine, live oak, and fir, then past thickets of low-growing chinquapin and stalwart lodgepole pines. Off to the left (north of the trail), you may see or hear some of the many rock climbers who gingerly make their way up the sheer face of Lily Rock (colloquially known as "Tahquitz"). Finally, after many switchbacks, you reach the fire lookout structure atop Tahquitz Peak. The lookout is staffed from May through November. Walk around the structure to enjoy the complete summit view encompassing the timbered slopes of the southern San Jacinto Mountains and innumerable valleys and ridges spilling west and south.

After taking in the view, descend from the lookout the way you came. The following longer, looping return is possible as well: Head northeast, join the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) after 0.5 mile, and follow the PCT 1.3 miles north to Saddle Junction. Descend Devil's Slide Trail 2.5 miles to Humber Park. There, you can arrange to be picked up. Or, you can close the entire long loop by hoofing it 2.6 miles down the gently descending Ernie Maxwell Scenic Trail to Tahquitz View Drive, not far away from the dirt road leading to your starting point.

