

Welcome to Mt. Gower Open Space Preserve

Visitors to this nearly pristine wilderness area will experience San Diego’s backcountry as it was centuries ago. Consisting primarily of dense chaparral, the preserve showcases the vegetation community that, perhaps more than any other, evokes Southern California. But there is also variety at Mt. Gower. Peaceful oak woodlands, shaded streamside bowers, and seldom-visited meadows await the visitor who has the energy and curiosity to explore the 1574-acre preserve. Although hiking is the most typical way people experience Mt. Gower, the park is also very popular with equestrians.

Common plants that can be found in the mixed chaparral include chamise, sugar bush, ceanothus, mountain mahogany, and manzanita. Black sage and monkey flowers add vivid splashes of color. Dramatic displays of flowering yucca stalks rise above the chaparral. Several streams support woodlands of sycamore, willow, and oak (watch for poison oak!). Mule deer, coyotes, raccoons, foxes, and bobcats are some of the more conspicuous mammals that live in the park. Among the resident birds, you’ll probably see ravens, California thrashers, scrub jays, lesser goldfinches, and red-tailed hawks, and, if you’re lucky, a golden eagle. Rattlesnakes are residents here, as are coastal horned lizards and orange-throated whiptails.

Mt. Gower Open Space Preserve, located southeast of Ramona, has approximately eight miles of trails within its boundaries. A primitive campground is available only for groups of ten or more, by reservation. You’ll find water and vault toilets at the trailhead. The following descriptions correspond to the trails marked on the map.

- A

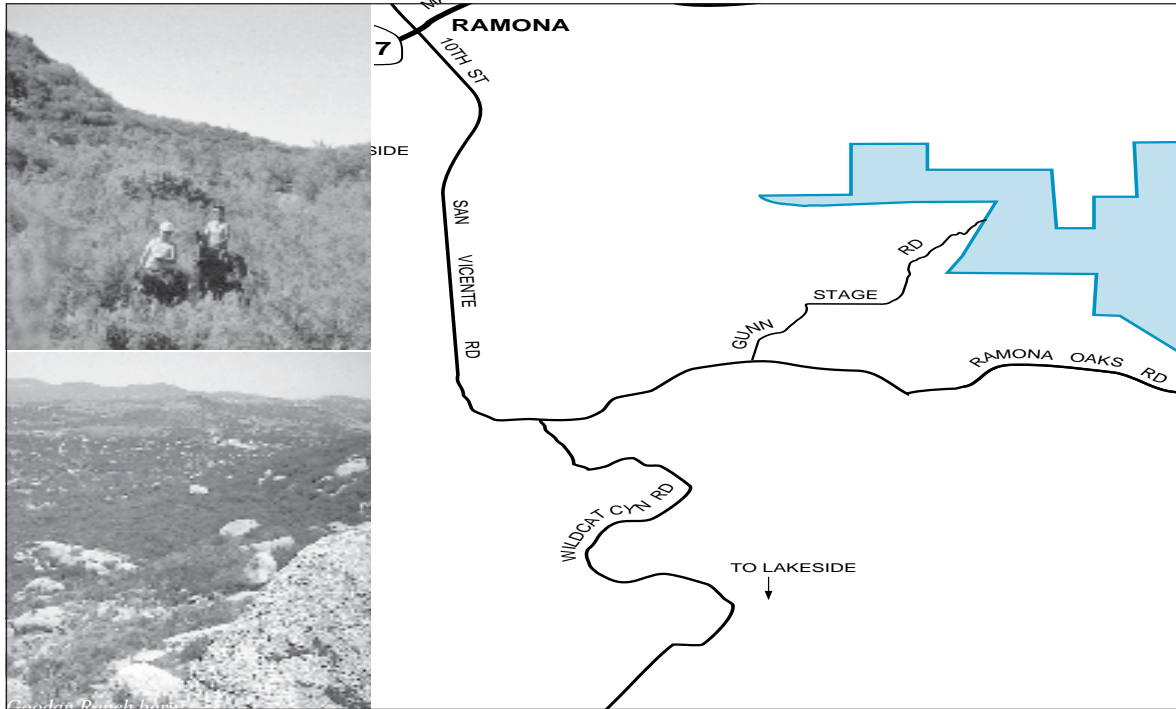
A long, fairly level switchback trail heads northwest from the trailhead. Unadventurous for most of its length, toward its west end it runs along a ridge and ends at a viewpoint at nearly 2300 feet. Rest awhile on the wooden bench and enjoy the view of the San Vicente Valley and other points of interest to the west and north. No shade. This trail is moderately difficult.
- B

Heading south and east, this trail soon comes to two large boulders leaning against each other that form a teepee-like structure (hence its local name, Teepee Rock). You’ll find some welcome shade here, and a wooden bench is alongside the trail. As you reach this spot, you’ll see a side trail that branches to the right and steeply ascends to a pleasant viewpoint that overlooks the San Diego Country Estates. A wooden bench is at the top.

If you continue on the main trail, it will lead you down to Swartz Canyon, where you’ll
- C

A steep rise out of the creek area leads to a ridge and past a water tank. The trail continues to wind along a high ridge and comes to the first of two meadows. There is no shade here. Continue up the steep trail to a rock shelf, then up a sharp incline to the upper meadow. Unusual rock formations are a scenic attraction here.

Across a seasonal creek, the trail continues up a steep incline to a rock shelf overlooking a broad valley. There is no shade or bench at this viewpoint. To the south and east is the Cleveland National Forest. This trail is rugged and difficult.
- Manzanita



Tips for Hikers

Take the time to enjoy your outdoor experience. Binoculars will help you observe the plants and animals as you walk quietly along the trails. A camera will preserve memories of your visit.

Carry water. Mt. Gower can be very hot and dry, and there is no water available on the trails. For a full day’s hike in moderate temperatures, you might need at least one gallon of water. Do not drink from any stream.

If you are planning a longer hike, **carry light trail snacks.** They will help maintain your energy level.

Wear suitable clothing and footgear. Sturdy shoes and a hat are indispensable, and sunglasses, sunscreen, and insect repellent are highly recommended. Weather conditions can change rapidly, so be prepared for extremes.

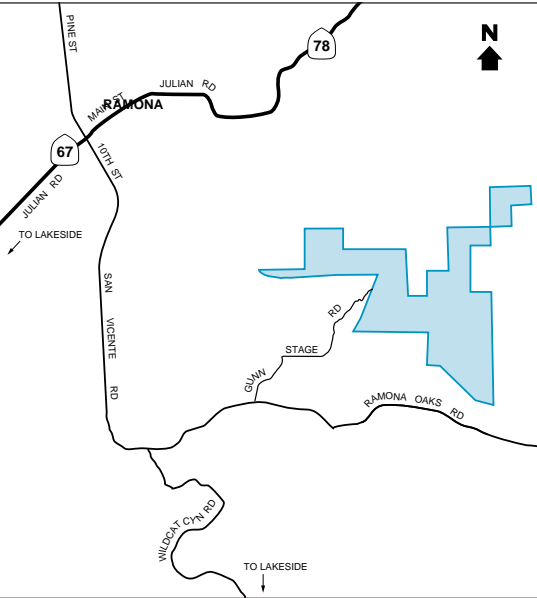
Tell a friend or family member about your hiking plans. Be specific about your route and what time you should return. Hike with a companion.

Stay on the trails. The natural resources of Mt. Gower are fragile. Their survival and your safety depend on correct trail etiquette. Don’t cut switchbacks—proper trail maintenance depends on proper trail use.

Carry a first aid kit. It can make the difference between an enjoyable hike and a potentially serious situation.

Mt. Gower is a wilderness area. Poison oak, bees, ticks, and rattlesnakes occur here naturally.

Mt. Gower Open Space Preserve



Other County Open Space Preserves:

El Capitan Nearly 3,000 rugged, mountainous acres of dense chaparral and oak woodland. Located between Lakeside and the Barona Indian Reservation. Six-mile trail, one way, to El Cajon Mountain. Primitive — no water is available.

Hellhole Canyon More than 11 miles of trails traverse this rugged 1,712-acre park, which features spectacular views for hikers and equestrians. Located about ten miles northeast of Escondido.

Sycamore Canyon/Goodan Ranch More than 10 miles of trails through shaded oak groves and dense chaparral. Located between Poway and Santee, off Highway 67.

Preserve hours:
8:00 a.m. to sunset



Sugar bush

Rules and Regulations for Open Space Preserves

ACCIDENTS: The County of San Diego shall not be responsible for loss or accidents.

UNAUTHORIZED MOTOR VEHICLES: The unauthorized operation of motor vehicles is prohibited.

SPEED LIMIT: 10 m.p.h. on all trails.

BICYCLES: Bicyclists must yield right-of-way to other users.

LITTERING: Is prohibited.

DEFACEMENT PROHIBITED: No person shall remove, deface, or destroy trail markers, monuments, fences, trees, camp or picnic structures, or other preserve facilities.

PRESERVATION OF TRAIL FEATURES: All wildlife, plant, and geologic features are protected and are not to be damaged or removed. All historical artifacts are to be left in place.

HORSES AND OTHER ANIMALS: No horse or other animal shall be hitched to any tree, shrub, or structure in a manner that may cause damage to preserve property. No person shall ride, drive, lead, or keep a horse, except in areas specifically designated for such use.

PETS: Domestic pets are excluded from open space preserves. Dogs accompanying the unsighted or deaf are excepted.

NO HUNTING: No person shall use, transport, carry, fire, or discharge any firearms, air guns, archery device, slingshot, fireworks, or explosive device of any kind in a preserve.

ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES: No intoxicating liquors having more than 20% alcohol by volume are permitted.

FIRE HAZARDS AND SMOKING: No smoking. Campfires are prohibited. Stoves allowed only in primitive group camping area.

Reneé E. Bahl, Director



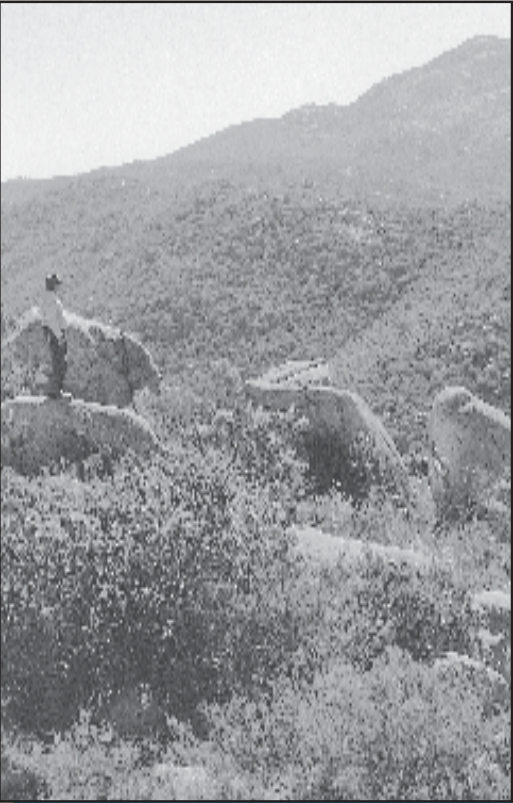
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