

OTP Hike #0087

HIKE FOR 8/7/91



57

START @ 10AM Season: All Year

O'Neill Park Trail

NOTE: ↗

Trabuco Canyon to Ocean Vista Point

3 miles round trip; 600-foot elevation gain

The soldier marching with Captain Gaspar de Portola's 1769 expedition who lost his firearm in this hilly region would not be astonished at the number of Orange County place names inspired by his mistake. Trabuco, which means "blunderbuss" in Spanish, now names a canyon, a creek, a plain, a trail, a road and even a ranger district of the Cleveland National Forest.

If the unknown soldier who lost his blunderbuss trod this way again he would be amazed at the names on the NAME OF THE LAND and at the land itself, so drastically has it changed. MAYBE HE WOULD recognize Trabuco Canyon, at least that part of it saved from SUBURBANIZATION by O'Neill Regional Park. Here the modern trekker can explore a small slice of the pastoral Southern California of two centuries ago.

This land of grassy meadows, rolling hills and oak woodland was originally part of Rancho Trabuco two leagues granted to Santiago Arguello in 1841 by Mexican Governor Alvarado. The rancho had various lessees and owners until it was purchased by James Flood, a wealthy businessman and his partner Richard O'Neill, a packing house owner. O'Neill built up quite a ranching empire here in California. O'Neill's Orange County property passed to his son, in turn,

gave 278 acres of Trabuco Canyon to Orange County for a park in 1948. Today, after various gifts and purchases, the park encompasses 1,700 acres of woodland and brushy hills, taking in Trabuco Canyon and neighboring Live Oak Canyon.

A good way to learn about the ecology of Trabuco Canyon is to walk the park's 1 1/2-mile (round trip) nature



O'Neill Park

trail. Trabuco Creek Trail, with stops keyed to a pamphlet available at the park's entry station, meanders through an oak/sycamore woodland and explores Plano Trabuco, or Trabuco Flat, a level alluvial surface deposited by runoff from the slopes of the Santa Ana Mountains.

Another way to explore a bit of rural Orange County is to hike the park's various fire roads and trails on a route I've dubbed O'Neill Park Trail. The trail ascends to Ocean Vista Point, which offers fine coast and canyon views.

Directions to trailhead: From the San Diego Freeway (5) in El Toro exit on El Toro Road and drive 7 1/2 miles to Santiago Canyon Road (SR 18). Turn right and proceed 3 miles to O'Neill Regional Park. There is a vehicle entry fee. Park in the day use lot near the entrance.

The Hike: From the entry station, walk north on a service road that parallels Live Oak Canyon Road. Soon you'll head left on a paved road that ascends toward some water tanks. After a quarter-mile's travel, leave the pavement and turn right on a dirt road. Two turns bring you to a junction with a dirt road on your right (an optional return route from the top).

Continue your ascent along a ridge. Over your shoulder are two scenes typical of rural Orange County: Red-tailed hawks circling over classic Southland ranching country in one direction, and suburbs-in-the-making in the other.

Continue on a last steep ascent toward what appears to be a Star Wars movie set, but is actually Ocean Vista Point, sometimes known as "Cellular Hill." Up top, communication's hardware helps car phone users complete their calls.

From the 1,492-foot summit, enjoy clear-day coastal views from Santa Monica Bay to San Clemente, with Catalina Island floating on the horizon.

For a different return route, head back two hundred yards and make a left at the first fork. Descend to an unused kid's camp, then follow the park's service road back to the trailhead.

MIKE

