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Millard Canyon Trail

Season: All Year

To Millard Canyon Falls

1 mile round trip

→ To Dawn Mine

5 miles round trip; 800-foot elevation gain

Hidden from the metropolis by Sunset Ridge, lush Millard Canyon is one of the more secluded spots in the front range of the San Gabriel Mountains. A cold stream tumbling over handsome boulders and a trail meandering beneath a canopy of alder, oak and sycamore, are a few of the many attractions of Millard Canyon.

The historical record is sketchy in regard to squatter Millard, who settled at the mouth of the canyon that now bears his name in about 1862. Millard eked out a living by keeping bees and hauling firewood down to Los Angeles. He reportedly spent about a decade in the canyon, then left suddenly in 1872 after his wife and child died.

Millard Canyon is best-known as the site of the Dawn Mine which, unfortunately for its investors, produced more stories than gold. The mine was worked off and on from 1895, when gold was first discovered, until the 1950s. Enough gold was mined to keep ever-optimistic prospectors certain that they would soon strike a rich ore-bearing vein, but the big bonanza was never found.

You can explore Millard Canyon by two different routes, which lack an official name, but are often referred to as Millard Canyon Trail. An easy half-mile path meanders along the canyon floor to 50-foot Millard Falls. This is a pleasant walk that provides a good introduction to the delights of the San Gabriel Mountains.

Experienced hikers will enjoy the challenge of following an abandoned trail through Millard Canyon to the site of the Dawn Mine. Enough of the old trail remains to keep you on track, but it's slow going with many stream crossings en route.

Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Pasadena, exit on Lake Avenue. Drive north four miles, at which point Lake veers left and becomes Loma Alta Drive. Continue a mile to Chaney Trail and turn right. Proceed another mile to a junction atop Sunset Ridge. If you're taking the hike to Dawn Mine, you'll bear right at this junction and park just outside the gate blocking Sunset Ridge Fire Road. If you're bound for Millard Canyon Falls, you'll stay left at the junction and descend to a parking lot at the bottom of the canyon.



The Hike: To Millard Canyon Falls. From the parking area at the bottom of Millard Canyon, you'll walk a hundred yards up a fire road to Millard Canyon Campground. Walk through the campground and pick up the signed trail leading to the falls. The trail heads east along the woody canyon bottom, crosses the stream a couple times, and arrives at the base of the waterfall. Don't try to climb up, over, or around the falls; people have been injured attempting this foolhardy ascent.

The Hike: To Dawn Mine. From the Sunset Ridge parking

area, head up the fire road. Enjoy the clear-day ridgetop views of the metropolis. You'll soon pass a junction on your left with a trail leading down to Millard Canyon Campground.

A short quarter-mile from the trailhead, you'll spot the signed Sunset Ridge Trail, which you'll join and begin descending into Millard Canyon. A few minutes of walking down the well-graded path will reward you with an eagle's-eye-view of Millard Canyon Falls.

Near the canyon bottom, you'll meet a trail junction. Sunset Ridge Trail continues along the canyon wall, but you bear left and descend past a cabin to the canyon floor. As you begin hiking up-canyon, turn around and take a mental photograph of the trail that brought you down to the canyon; it's easy to miss on your return trip.

As you pick your way stream-side amongst the boulders and fallen trees on the canyon floor, you'll follow vestiges of the old trail. Typically, you'll follow a fifty- or hundred-yard stretch of trail, boulder-hop for a bit, cross the stream, then pick up another length of trail.

The canyon floor is strewn with lengths of rusting pipe and assorted mining machinery. Several pools, cascades, and flat rocks suggest a stream-side picnic.

After hiking a bit more than a mile up-canyon, you'll find that Millard Canyon turns north. From this turn, it's a bit less than a mile to the Dawn Mine site. Don't go into the mine shaft. Darkness and deep holes filled with water make it very dangerous.

Return the same way, and remember to keep a sharp lookout for the trail that leads out of the canyon back to the trailhead.