

52 Angeles Crest Highway via Shortcut Canyon to West Fork Campground

6 miles round trip; 1800' elevation loss and gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: All year

Topo maps: Chilao Flat, Mt. Wilson

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FEATURES

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Years ago, before the Angeles Crest Highway was a reality, Shortcut Canyon felt the trod of many boots and hooves. Its busy trail, built in 1893 by Louie Newcomb, Arthur Carter and John Hartwell, was the major route into the Charlton Flat-Chilao-Buckhorn backcountry. The canyon and trail were so named because they greatly cut the distance into the mountain interior. The old route was the steep Indian footpath up Valley Forge Canyon and over Barley Flats, now completely disappeared. Today, although the old Shortcut pathway is no longer a major artery of travel, it is part of the Boy Scouts' Silver Moccasin Hike across the range from Red Box to Mt. Baden-Powell (see Appendix I). For this reason, the trail is well-traveled.

This trip now runs from the top down because, as of this writing, the West Fork road from Red Box to West Fork Campground is closed to public autos. Another change is that the historic West Fork Ranger Station, built in 1900 and second-oldest in the nation, has been moved to the Chilao Visitor Center. Still, this is a very pleasant hike. Shortcut Canyon is a woody delight, and the West Fork retains its charm of yesteryear. You will get the feel of the old San Gabriels when bandits, hunters, anglers and prospectors rambled into the then-wild heart of the range.

DESCRIPTION

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway to Shortcut Saddle, 19 miles from La Canada and ¼ mile east of the marked Shortcut Picnic Area. Park in the clearing on the left (north) side of the highway.

From the saddle, take the marked Shortcut Canyon Trail, which leads south. After several short switchbacks you reach a fire road; turn right (west) and follow the fire road about 200 yards; turn right (west) and follow the trail leading down to your left. You drop steeply down chaparral-coated slopes into the East Fork of Shortcut Canyon. Your path now descends the shady canyon floor and passes the junction of Shortcut's West Fork as you cross and recross the trickling creek. After 3 miles you reach the broad West Fork of the San Gabriel. Boulder-hop across the creek (can be dangerous in times of high water) and reach West Fork Campground, located on a forested bench south of the stream. The campground has stoves, tables and toilets.

