

Stagecoach Trail - Butterfield Stagecoach route over the Santa Susanna Mountains, known as "The Devil's Slide."

Distance: 4 miles round trip

Difficulty: Moderate

Elevation: 500 feet, gain and loss

Trailhead: Chatsworth Park (South). Exit 118 freeway at Topanga Canyon Blvd., turn left, pass under the freeway and continue south about 2 miles to Devonshire Blvd. Turn right (west) and drive about 1 mile to the end of Devonshire which ends at the entrance to the park. Continue west on the park access road through the park to its end and park. Alternate: Exit 101 (Ventura) freeway at Topanga Canyon NORTHBOUND exit. Continue north about 7 miles to Devonshire Blvd, turn left (west).

History: Trail was used between 1859 and 1890 which ran from the way station at the Balboa Adobe in Encino, to the way station known as La Cuesta (The Hill) located at the base of the Devil's Slide, then up over the Santa Susanna Mountains and on up the coast via Ventura and Santa Barbara. The Southern Pacific railroad solved the problem of getting out of the west end of the San Fernando Valley by digging two tunnels through the mountains.

Devil's Slide was chopped out of the sandstone of the mountains by hand. Wooden logs were used to fill the gaps between the rocks, and the logs covered by dirt. All that can be seen now is the rocky underfooting, with wagon wheel ruts in places, and with many pick marks where the rock was removed. Also easily visible along the side of the trail are the gutters hand-picked out of the rock to provide drainage.

At the top of the Slide, the southbound stagecoach was stopped, the wheels were lashed to the frame, and the horses used to brake the coach as it was lowered backwards down the slide. The passengers were also required to get out and man the ropes strung out beyond the horses. When traveling northbound, the coach was again emptied and the passengers and way station personnel manned ropes to aid fresh horses from the way station stable to pull the stage up the hill.

Other Noteworthy Sites (some gone now because of the neighboring Oakwood Cemetery expansion): Tongva Indian midden and petroglyphs (trash heap and rock paintings which have now unfortunately been supplanted by modern trash and graffiti), sandstone quarry where rocks were quarried to make the Los Angeles breakwater (until they discovered that salt water dissolves sandstone), two cisterns fed by natural springs which provided water for horses, crew, and passengers (probably future graves by now), the way station La Cuesta foundation, a Spanish style building (only a rectangular array of heavy sandstone blocks existed 20 years ago) with a separate stable for the horses, and the commemorative plaque installed in 1939 at the top of the Slide by the Daughters of the American West.

The lunch spot will be at Tom Frye's back yard rather than on-trail.