


## Trip 2: Tenaja Canyon ~~OTP~~ *OTP*

	<b>Distance</b>	7.4 miles (to Fishermans Camp and back)
	<b>Total Elevation Gain/Loss</b>	1300' / 1300'
	<b>Hiking Time</b>	3½ hours (round trip)
	<b>Optional Maps</b>	USGS 7.5-min <i>Wildomar, Sitton Peak</i>
	<b>Best Times</b>	November through May
<b>Agency</b>	CNF/TD	
<b>Difficulty</b>	★★★	

As the gloom of a late afternoon descends upon the deep-cut, linear furrow of Tenaja Canyon, dozens of orange-bellied newts waddle determinedly uphill and across the trail, oblivious to my footfalls. The cute faces and beady eyes of these little amphibians reflect a mindless desire I cannot fathom: Sex in a bower of leaf litter and ferns? A bellyful of succulent insects, ripe for the taking?

With the recent completion of the Tenaja Trail in the Santa Ana Mountains, the newts of Tenaja Canyon have been getting cross traffic of the hiker and horse types. The trail, and a fancy new trailhead built to serve it; has opened parts of San

Mateo Canyon Wilderness area to ready access; no longer is it necessary to rattle down horrendous dirt roads to reach any sort of decent trail.

It is best to approach the Tenaja Trailhead from the south. Exit Interstate 15 at Clinton Keith Road, proceed 5 miles south on Clinton Keith Road and 1.7 miles west on Tenaja Road to a marked intersection, where you must turn right to stay on Tenaja Road. Continue west on Tenaja Road for another 4.2 miles, then go right on one-lane, paved Cleveland Forest Road. Proceed another mile to the trailhead parking area, just north of Tenaja Station.

An old-fashioned hand pump dispenses cold, sweet water at the trailhead.

### Oak woodland at Fisherman's Camp



### Santa Ana Mountains

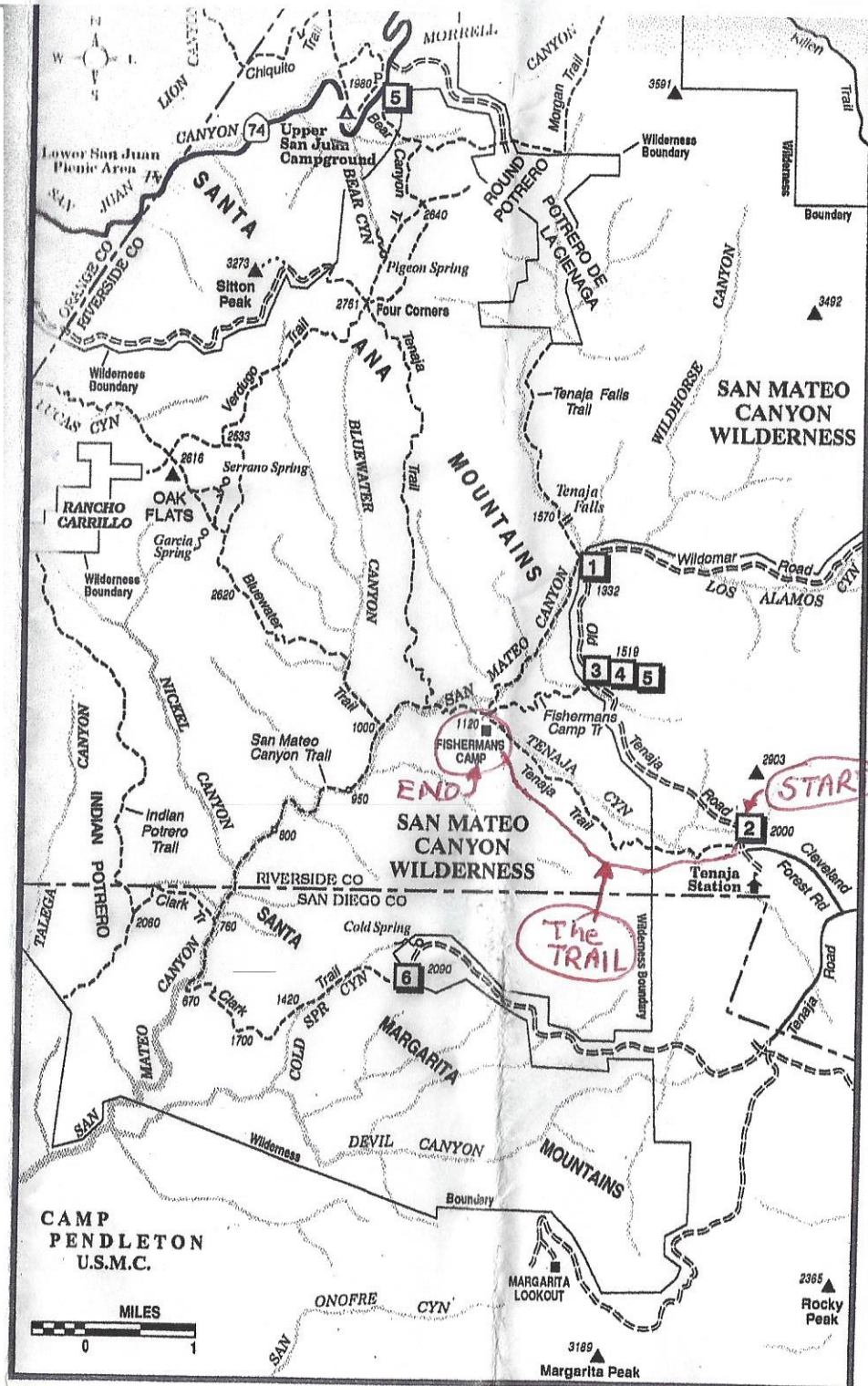
Sign in at the self-registration box, and head downhill on the trail going west. A few minutes' descent takes you to the shady bowels of V-shaped Tenaja Canyon, where huge coast live oaks and pale-barked sycamores frame a limpid, rock-dimpled stream. Mostly the trail ahead meanders alongside the stream, but for the canyon's middle stretch it carves its way across the chaparral-blanketed south wall, 200–400 feet above the canyon bottom.

After 3.7 miles of general descent, you reach Fishermans Camp, a former drive-in campground once accessible by many miles of bad road. Today the site,

distinguished by its parklike setting and a live-oak grove, serves as a fine wilderness campsite for an overnight backpack trip (a wilderness permit is required this). Its name hints of the fishing opportunities afforded by nearby San Mateo Creek during and after the rainy season.

At Fishermans Camp, three of trails diverge. Fishermans Camp Trail (old road to the camp) travels east up Old Tenaja Road. The San Mateo Can Trail, a narrow footpath, continues stream to meet Old Tenaja Road and do stream many miles to the east bound of Camp Pendleton.

*Trail goes down in the canyon. Return is all uphill*



Area M-3: Santa Ana Mountains—San Mateo Canyon Wilderness