

OTP Hike

August 23, 1995 - - - - 9:30 AM

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For those who feel a need to expend a little more energy, we will have an option to also climb Mt. Markham. This will be done when we get back to the saddle between Mt. Lowe and Mt. Markham. It will add about 1.5 miles.

Mt. Lowe is 5593 ft. elevation and Mt. Markham is 5752 ft. elevation.

Eaton Saddle to Markham Saddle, Mt. Lowe

3 miles round trip; 500' elevation gain

Classification: Easy

Season: November-June

Topo map: Mt. Wilson

FEATURES

This is the easy way to do historic Mt. Lowe. You start from the backside—the Mt. Wilson Road—and contour across the white diorite cliffs of San Gabriel Peak to Markham Saddle, then climb the gentle north slope of the mountain through fire-thinned chaparral and clusters of small oak trees to the bare summit.

In the early days it was called Oak Mountain, for the groves of splendid live oak on its upper slopes. By this name it was known when Professor Thaddeus Sobieski Coulincourt Lowe and a party of leading Pasadena citizens ascended it on horseback in 1892. Lowe was showing his friends his proposed mountain railway, then just beginning construction. One of the party proposed the name "Mount Lowe" in honor of the man in their midst. The motion was carried by a chorus of ayes, and in the words of publicist and writer G. Wharton James, "There, above the clouds it was named and will continue to be named when every one of the party present at the christening shall have been laid away in mother earth, and generations yet unborn will trace its rugged outlines on their physical geographies and call it Mt. Lowe."

Lowe planned to continue his mountain railway to the top and construct there a summit hotel, but he ran out of funds after reaching the site of Ye Alpine Tavern 1000' below. During the years of the Mt. Lowe Railway, untold thousands climbed to the top via two well-graded trails from the tavern. On the summit was a small, open observation pavilion and a series of view tubes pointed at various attractions below.

With the burning of Mt. Lowe Tavern in 1936 and the abandoning of the mountain railway, visits to Mt. Lowe almost ceased, and the trails and summit paraphernalia fell into decay. In recent years, a party of Sierra Club

volunteers has restored one of the trails, polished and relettered the old view tubes, and left a new register book with pictures of the Mt. Lowe of old. Old Mt. Lowe is again worth visiting.

DESCRIPTION

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway 14 miles from La Canada to Red Box. Turn right on the Mt. Wilson Road 2½ miles to Eaton Saddle. The saddle is unnamed on maps but easy to locate; it is the first spot past Red Box where the highway touches the top of the ridge and you can look south.

Walk past the locked gate onto the Mt. Lowe fire road, overlooking the yawning chasm of upper Eaton Canyon. Follow the road as it turns west and contours around the precipitous south face of San Gabriel Peak. Near midpoint, the road tunnels through a nearly vertical cliff. Notice the old guard rails outside the wall, remnants of the airy old Cliff Trail that once joined Mt. Lowe Tavern with Mt. Wilson. After a short mile you reach Markham Saddle, a V-shaped cleft between San Gabriel Peak and Mt. Markham. Here you leave the road and take an unmarked footpath to the left that leads southwest around the slopes of Mt. Markham. You cross an area of sparse growth, where fire a few years ago took its toll, to the saddle between Mt. Markham and Mt. Lowe, then enter a forest of small oaks as the trail rounds the east slope of Mt. Lowe. About 300 yards beyond this last saddle, look for an unmarked side trail branching back to your right (west). Leave the main trail (which continues down to Mt. Lowe Trail Camp (see Trip 31)) and walk up the side footpath about ¼ mile to the bare summit of Mt. Lowe.

After enjoying the fine vista over the front-range country and pondering the history of this place, return the way you came.