

SANDSTONE PEAK by the
Mishc Mokwa Trail

HIKE 10 OTP Hike #318

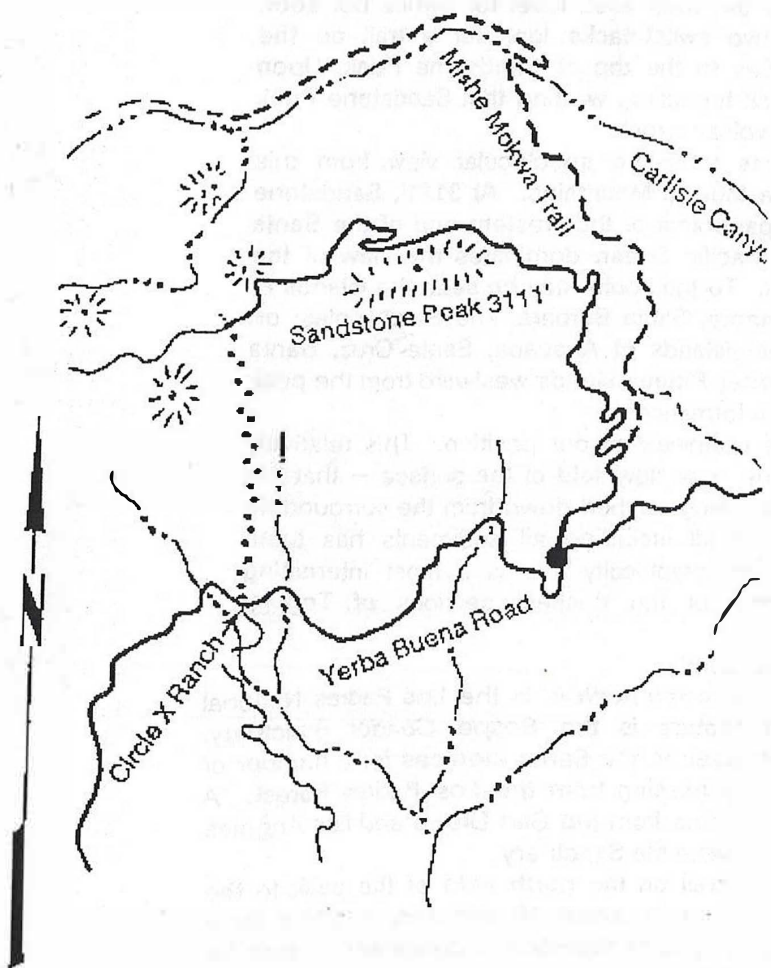
SANDSTONE PEAK BY THE
MISHC MOKWA TRAIL
(Loop)

G. Thomas

3/6/96 9:30

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Maps: Triunfo Pass, topo
Newbury Park, topo
Distance: 7 miles roundtrip
Elevation: 1500' gain and loss
Terrain: Road, trail (sometimes
rocky and steep) some
optional class 2
off trail
Time: 3 hours
Trailhead: Circle X Ranch



Sandstone Peak and the trails leading to it are on a massive volcanic rock formation called Boney Mountain. Inform the Ranger at the Circle X Ranch of the hike plan, and get any information you need about the current status of trails, before the hike.

The Circle X Ranch may be found by driving west on the Pacific Coast Hwy (State No. 1) 1.1 miles west of the Los Angeles-Ventura County Line. Travel north on Yerba Buena Road 5 1/2 miles to a parking lot on the right at the Ranch.

In the event you are coming from the other direction, drive west on Mulholland Hwy until reaching Little Sycamore Canyon Road on the right. Take this road and drive 5.4 miles to the Circle X Ranch. (Some confusion can exist as to the name of the road - the sign at the ocean end says Yerba Buena Rd; the sign at the east end says Little Sycamore Canyon Rd. Most maps also reflect these two names.)

After checking-in at the Circle X Ranch, go east on the highway, 1 mile to a fireroad on the left. Walk up the dirt road. After 10 or 15 minutes you will see a trail on the right with a sign reading in part "Split Rock." Follow this, the "Mishc Mokwa Trail."

Initially the trail goes through the chaparral, climbing gently with some level stretches as it works its way around the eastern

shoulder of the mountain a moment to stop and look back over the rugged expanses of mountains and canyons. The south slope of this mountain presents a panorama of sunlit chaparral. Look for the different shades of green; maybe not noticeable at first, but soon you can pick out Red Shanks in the chaparral by the yellow tinge in spring, turning rusty by fall. The bright green patches could be Holly-herry or Laurel Sumac. Back along the trail you may have seen the Peruvian Pepper tree - how this tree came to be growing here from its native land is anybody's guess. Near the trail, very close to the ground, can be found a small salmon colored flower - "Poor Man's Weather Glass." During spring and early summer a wide variety of flowers intensify the beauty of this trail. For Golden Yarrow, Wild Buckwheat, Brodiaea, Sticky Leaf Fly Flower, Popcorn Flower, and Wild Peony.

Continue along the trail as it enters the canyon coming down from the right and when looking across the canyon you will see the outstanding geological sight - "Balanced Rock." The rock is volcanic in origin as is most of the rock in the area. How this rock came to be balanced here it is and how it has managed to resist the force of earth and other of the elements is food for thought.

The trail becomes steeper as it nears the narrow canyon, dominated by Oak and Laurel trees. Pison Oak becomes common and Clematis and Humboldt Lilies are seen occasionally. The trail dips into the canyon at Split Rock. Split Rock is a volcanic breccia, split into three pieces. A pathway large enough to walk through goes between two of the pieces. The running stream is shaded by Bay, Sycamore, and Coast Live Oak trees. The Coast Live Oak has a distinctive leaf; it is about 3/4" by 1" and is cupped. If a leaf were placed upside down on water it would float. Another characteristic of the leaf can be seen with magnifying glass - little tufts of hair are spaced on the upper surface, sort of starbursts. Split Rock is a good place to eat lunch.

To continue the hike, go downstream about 100 yards and turn left onto an old road and follow it upstream. Across the stream on the left is an unusual rock formation, a magnificent cliff that looks something like a giant slab of Swiss cheese. A wooden bridge crosses a side stream where ground plants grow here, which can be made into cold remedies either in liquid or candy form. The scientific name is *Marrubium vulgare*; a name that to me has an intriguing poetic balance. Just after crossing the bridge leave the

stream on the left by making a right turn to continue uphill. When you crest out and head south into a semi-level area, look for 2 water tanks high on the opposite hill. The trail passes below and east of the tanks. Follow the road east, level for awhile but soon becoming uphill. After two switchbacks look for a trail on the right. This steep trail goes to the top of Sandstone Peak. Upon close inspection of the rock formation, we find that Sandstone Peak is not sandstone at all, but volcanic rock.

None of this detracts from the spectacular view from this highest point in the Santa Monica Mountains. At 3111', Sandstone Peak commands a 360° panorama of the western end of the Santa Monica Mountains. The Pacific Ocean dominates the view of the quadrant in the southwest. To the south may be seen the islands of Santa Catalina, San Clemente, Santa Barbara, and San Nicolas; on the west are the Channel Islands of Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Santa Rosa, and San Miguel. Boney Ridge extends westward from the peak for 1 1/2 miles of rugged rock formations.

The Oxnard Plain is northwest of our position. This relatively flat land is a giant syncline - or downfold of the surface - that has been filled by the material being washed down from the surrounding mountains. The depth of fill including all sediments has been measured at 41,000'. Stratigraphically this is a most interesting valley because it is one of the thickest sections of Tertiary

sedimentary rocks in the world.

The mountain range to the north is in the Los Padres National Forest. A significant feature is the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. Condors have not been seen in the Santa Monicas for a number of years and are temporarily missing from the Los Padres Forest. A program of supplying Condors from the San Diego and Los Angeles Zoos is expected to repopulate the Sanctuary.

Go down the steep trail on the north side of the peak to the road. Turn left and follow it for about 10 minutes, watching for a sign on the left " (X) ". (Signs sometimes disappear so look for the trail.) A trail from this sign goes downhill to the south for about 1 mile, most of the time deep in a canopy of trees. The trail is steep but with good footing, and ends near your car.

Several alternate trails come down from the Peak. One is to go down the steep trail on the north side of Sandstone Peak and upon reaching the road, turn right and follow it back to the highway. This point is 1 mile uphill from the Circle X Ranch.

This trip is one of my favorites. The variety of vegetation from Chaparral to Riparian Woodlands is striking, and the rock