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Tom Kiyohara

Hike #356

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TRAILS OF THE ANGELES

38 Red Box to Strawberry Spring, Strawberry Meadow

8 miles round trip; 1400' elevation gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: All year

Topo map: Chilao Flat

FEATURES

The backside of Strawberry Peak holds pleasant surprises. Close under granite cliffs and boulder-stacked ridges, springs seep cold water and little meadows sprout tall grasses. In the protective shade of the great mountain, forest and chaparral intermingle and grow lush and green. Here, just across the ridge from the busy Angeles Crest Highway, away from ranger stations and public campgrounds and the assorted miscellany that accompanies civilization, you savor a small touch of wilderness.

This delightful trail trip takes you over the mountain from Red Box to Strawberry Meadow—three small meadows close below the great north cliff of Strawberry Peak. You pass alternately through clusters of dense chaparral—scrub oak, manzanita, snow brush, mountain mahogany—and a varied forest of live oak, big-cone spruce and Jeffrey and Coulter pine. The footpath that winds through this wilderness garden is old and little-traveled, making it all the more appealing. Bring lunch and a good book—you'll want to stay awhile. Unfortunately the area was burned in the 1979 Mill Creek fire, but Strawberry Meadow is gradually regaining its old charm.

DESCRIPTION

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway to Red Box Ranger Station, 15 miles above La Canada. Cross the Angeles Crest Highway and follow it northeast about 50 yards to the beginning of the Barley Flats fire road. Follow the road ½ mile, then turn left and follow the trail up to the ridge and around the mountain to the saddle between Mt. Lawlor and Strawberry Peak (see Trip 37).

From the saddle, continue on the trail as it gently descends around the east and northeast slopes of Strawberry Peak. The first ¼ mile is in fine shape; beyond, the

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path is narrow and eroded in spots but not difficult to follow. You pass through alternate stretches of chaparral on sun-exposed slopes and forest on shady north faces. About a mile from the saddle you enter a woody recess and reach Strawberry Spring—flowing icy cold in spring and early summer. Then you cross a ridge and get your first glimpse of the lower meadow of Strawberry Meadow, with the great north cliff as an imposing backdrop. The trail drops steeply into a forested gully below the meadow and continues over another low ridge and down to Colby Ranch, a retreat for young Methodists. You don't go that far.

Just beyond the low point where the trail crosses the forested gully, look for a side trail marked with red-paint arrows on rocks leading back to the left (southwest). Turn sharp left and follow this footpath to the lower meadow of Strawberry Meadow, about ¼ mile. You can stop here and enjoy the grassy clearing surrounded by oak and spruce and boulder ridges, or you can continue up the red-marked trail another ½ mile, past a second small meadow, to the westernmost and largest clearing, right beneath the towering granite cliffs. Here, under magnificent Coulter pines, are two picnic tables placed by young Methodists from Colby Ranch.

