

Chilao to Horse Flats, Mt. Hillyer

6 miles round trip; 1000' elevation gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: All year

Topo map: Chilao Flat

FEATURES

The Chilao-Horse Flats country is a gentle region of rounded ridgetops, shallow draws, and small flats set deep in the heart of the San Gabriels. The forest here is open and parklike; tall Jeffrey pines and incense cedars cluster in sheltered recesses and dot the rolling hillsides. The chaparral is rich and green and the sky a deep blue, with seldom a trace of the brown murkiness that so often invades the south slope of the range. It is ideal picnicking, camping and hiking country.

A century ago this was *bandido* country. The notorious Tiburcio Vasquez and his gang of horse thieves utilized Chilao and Horse Flats—then deep in the wilderness and little-known—as refuges from the law, as hideouts where they could rest and plan their next raid, and as pastures for stolen horses. The great boulders of nearby Mt. Hillyer furnished an impregnable fortress if pursuing posses came too close. One of Vasquez's men at Chilao was a herder named Jose Gonzales, noted among his cohorts for his skill with a knife. On one occasion he killed a bear with some slick knife-work, earning the nickname "Chillia" (hot stuff). From this allegedly came the name *Chilao*.

There are no *bandidos* here now, and roads lace the region, but the country still holds appeal. This very pleasant trail hike takes you through the best of the Chilao-Horse Flats area, and climbs through magnificent stands of Jeffrey pine and around jumbo boulders to the summit of Mt. Hillyer.

DESCRIPTION

Drive up the Angeles Crest Highway to the turnoff for the Chilao Visitor Center, 27 miles from La Canada. Turn left and drive down the paved road, passing the visitor center, ½ mile to a clearing on your right, where a sign indicates SILVER MOCCASIN TRAIL. Park here.

57

140

TRAILS OF THE ANGELES

Proceed up the trail as it switchbacks through chaparral and clusters of Jeffrey pine to a junction just short of Horse Flats Campground, 1 mile. Turn left, leaving the Silver Moccasin Trail, and follow the path 100 yards to the south edge of the campground. A sign to your left indicates MT. HILLYER, 2 MILES. Proceed up the Mt. Hillyer Trail through open clusters of manzanita, scrub oak and Jeffrey pine, around a maze of giant granite boulders, to the broad summit of Mt. Hillyer. You can't see much from the forested top, but if you walk several hundred feet southwest onto the fire break, you are rewarded with a fine panorama of the rolling *bandido* country to the south and southeast, and the broad trench of Alder Creek dropping off to the west.

Return the same way or, if you can arrange a car shuttle, head north along the wide ridgetop trail to the dirt spur road that reaches up the north slope of Mt. Hillyer (see Trip 58). You can cut 2 miles off the round trip by driving to Horse Flats Campground. Turn left off Angeles Crest Highway 2½ miles north of Chilao, where a sign indicates SANTA CLARA DIVIDE ROAD, and proceed 2½ miles on this road to the campground.

Thomas Hike

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