

24 Sam Merrill Trail—Altadena to Echo Mountain

5 miles round trip; 1400' elevation gain

Classification: Moderate

Season: November-May

Topo maps: Pasadena, Mt. Wilson

FEATURES

If it were not for the efforts of a handful of public-spirited and sentimental Pasadena and Altadena citizens, the Mount Lowe Railway would be all but forgotten today. These people have given freely of their time and effort in restorative projects, enabling today's visitor to relive some of this bygone era when cable cars and trolleys climbed high on the mountain.

One of these volunteer efforts was the construction and maintenance of the Sam Merrill Trail from Altadena to Echo Mountain. The trail was built during the '30s by Charles Warner and the Forest Conservation Club of Pasadena to replace the original, overgrown footpath. During the '40s it was maintained and improved by Samuel Merrill of Altadena, retired clerk of the Superior Court of Los Angeles. After Merrill's death in 1948, the pathway was named in his honor. Today it is kept in good condition by the Altadena Trail Blazers, a group of high school and college students who care about their local mountains.

Back in the early years of the Mount Lowe Railway, Echo Mountain was known as "The White City." Perched on top were two hotels—Echo Mountain House and The Chalet—a powerhouse, a machine shop, a dormitory, a reservoir, a small zoo, the Mt. Lowe Observatory and, so it would not be forgotten after dark, the world's most powerful searchlight. All but the searchlight were painted white, clearly visible from the valley below. To reach the White City, tourists were hoisted up the cable incline in "White Chariots."

Through a series of fires and windstorms, the White City was destroyed—Echo Mountain House first (1900), then all but the observatory (1905), and finally the observatory itself (1928). The incline was abandoned in 1938.

Tom Kiyohara

One Hundred Hikes

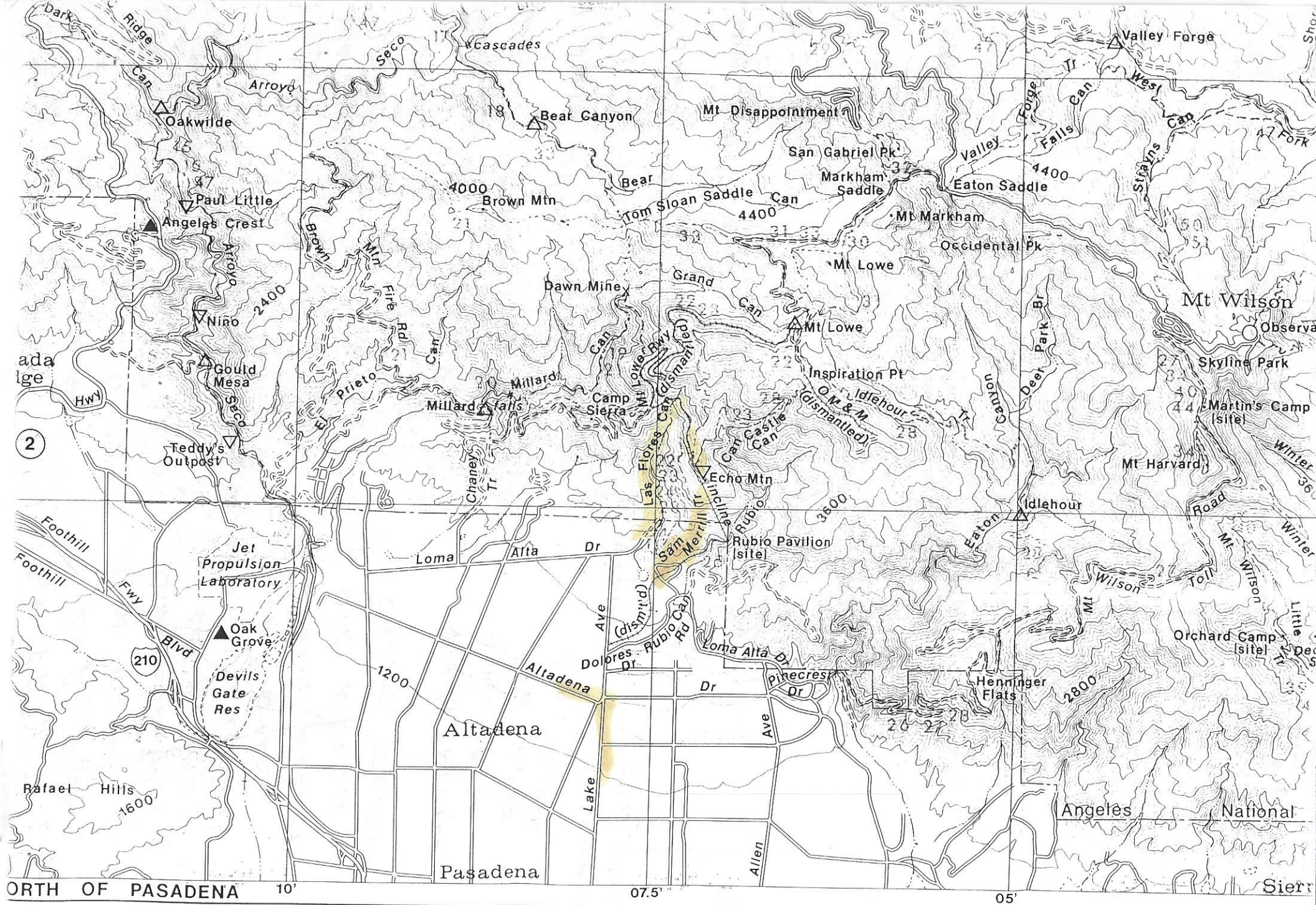
Nothing but ruins remain today. To commemorate what once was here, a bronze plaque is embedded in cement next to the old incline bullwheel. Among the foundations, young Coulter pines and incense cedars, planted by conservation groups in 1941 and 1948, are growing tall.

This trip takes you up the Sam Merrill Trail to Echo Mountain, gives you a guided tour of where once stood the White City, and returns you the same way.

DESCRIPTION

Drive to the north end of Lake Avenue in Altadena and park alongside the road. To your right (east), marked by a sign painted on a stone pillar, is the beginning of the Sam Merrill Trail to Echo Mountain.

Follow the trail east alongside a fence, then down across Las Flores Canyon, and up the east slope of the canyon. After three zigzagging miles, you reach the ridge behind (north of) Echo Mountain. Here you intersect the old railway bed (see Trip 23). Turn right (south) and follow the railway bed about 100 yards to the Echo Mountain ruins. You come first to the commemorative plaque and the old incline bullwheel, embedded in cement. Just beyond, the wall on your left is the foundation of Echo Mountain House, and the pile of concrete rubble ahead is what remains of the incline depot and powerhouse, dynamited by the Forest Service in 1959. From the steps of Echo Mountain House, you can look directly down the incline bed, descending 1300' into Rubio Canyon. (Do not descend the incline; footing is loose and it is dangerous.) East of the Echo Mountain House site, 100' down the ridge, is the site of the Chalet. Nothing remains of this first hotel. The Mt. Lowe Observatory, housing a 13-inch telescope, was located behind Echo Mountain, ¼ mile up the ridge. Directly below the observatory was the reservoir. (Several sections of the trail were washed out following the Pinecrest fire in 1979 and heavy rain in February 1980. Volunteer work has now made the trail passable, but proceed with care. In the event new washouts occur on the precipitous middle section, proceed directly up the ridge from the powerline crossing, halfway up, to Echo Mountain, steep but not difficult.)



10' NORTH OF PASADENA

07.5'

05'