

Hike #486

4 Bouquet Canyon to Big Oak Spring, Sierra Pelona

HIKE LENGTH: ^{10 3/4}~~7~~ miles round trip; 1300' elevation gain

CLASSIFICATION: Moderate

SEASON: All year

TOPO MAP: Sleepy Valley

9/29/99
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Features

The Sierra Pelona—bare-topped, wind-buffed, lonely—forms a long arc across the northern mountains, separating Mint Canyon from first Bouquet Canyon and then Antelope Valley. Standing athwart the great wind funnel of Soledad Canyon, the crest is often battered by hurricane gusts. Sierra Pelona Lookout has recorded velocities of up to 100 miles per hour.

Nestled in protected recesses on the north slope of Sierra Pelona are isolated groves of live oak, some of them patriarchal in stature. According to the American Forestry Association's Big Tree Register, the world's largest recorded Canyon Live Oak—measuring 37 feet, 4 inches in trunk circumference—stands in a shallow draw on this north slope. Unfortunately, the tree was severely damaged in a brush fire many years ago. Today only its burned hulk remains, stark fingers pointing skyward.

This trip follows the Pacific Crest Trail up from Bouquet Canyon, visits Big Oak Spring and the charred remains of the world-record oak, and climbs to the top of Sierra Pelona for far-reaching vistas. Do it in summer, fall, winter or spring—but not on a windy day.

Description

From Antelope Valley Freeway (State Highway 14), turn west onto Palmdale Blvd., which becomes Elizabeth Lake Road. Follow it 9 miles, then turn left (south) on Bouquet Canyon Road, following it 5 miles to the Pacific Crest Trail crossing. Park in the clearing to your left (south).

Proceed up the signed PCT, climbing the north slope of chaparral-coated Sierra Pelona. As you gain altitude, you look down Bouquet

Canyon, pastoral with its ranch houses and spreading oaks, with Bouquet Reservoir occasionally visible in the distance. You cross a poor jeep road and drop briefly into the upper reaches of Martindale Canyon before climbing again in a westward direction to a junction with the big Oak Spring trail, 2 miles from the start. Leave the PCT and follow the unimproved side trail through a grove of fire-damaged oaks. In about 200 yards you round a point and see the remains of the champion oak up to your left. A distinct pathway climbs to Big Oak Spring, a trickle of water guarded by stinging nettles (painful if they penetrate the skin). Return to the junction and continue up the PCT, now climbing southward, to the bare crest of Sierra Pelona, 1 1/2 more miles. Your vista now is impressive, especially if you walk a short distance west along the ridgetop fire road. Southeast, across the broad trench of Soledad Canyon, are the peaks of the main range—Mounts Gleason, Pacifico, Waterman and Williamson. Northwestward are the long hogbacks of Liebre and Sawmill Mountains. And north is the desert—sprawling, sun-bleached, seemingly endless.

An option is to walk 3 miles east along the ridgetop fire road to Mt. McDill (5187') for an even better view. Descend the way you came. If you don't mind bushwhacking, you can drop down the old Big Tree Trail, its upper end 50 yards east of the Big Oak Spring Trail, to Bouquet Canyon Road, then walk 1/2 mile east along the highway to your car. This trail has not been maintained in recent years. ▲