

BRING XTRA WATER
Hiking

nowhere fast

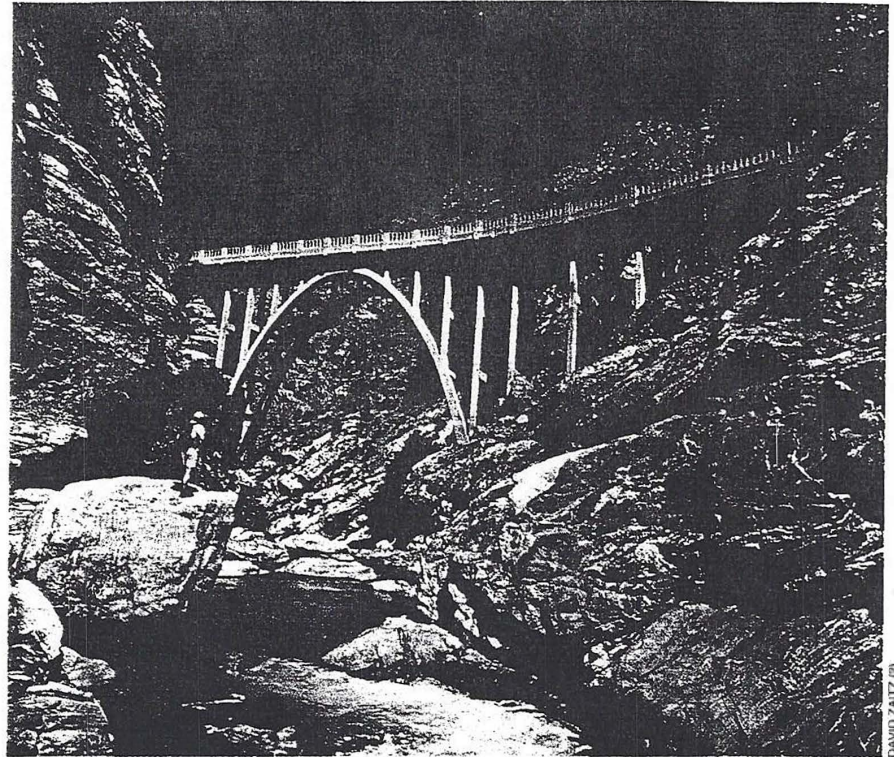
■ Hiking in the San Gabriel Mountains is pleasant enough, but when your destination is the Bridge to Nowhere, the scenic rewards take a quantum leap. Miles from the nearest car, this amazing relic spans one of Southern California's deepest gorges—the result of an ill-fated scheme in the 1930s to build a road up the precipitous East Fork of the San Gabriel River to the Angeles Crest Highway. In 1938, record rainfall and floods obliterated the road, leaving a pristine bridge stranded in the wilderness.

Though no car has ever crossed the bridge, L.A.-area hikers have been making pilgrimages ever since—including my friends and me.

And so we set out along the trail to the bridge. Early on we encounter a pair of gold panners. A mile upstream, an overhang partly obscures a short, manmade dam of river rocks. We can't resist taking turns leaping into the cool rushing water. And it's just as well: Around mile 3, the trail strays farther from the alder-shaded river into an opening where the sun beats down relentlessly. The chocolate-colored canyon walls are striated with white markings that look as if they came from a giant toothpaste tube. About halfway to the bridge, I spot Swan Rock, known for its graceful, swanlike shape.

A switchback then takes us up the old, overgrown roadbed. At the Narrows, the river drops below us as the canyon walls pinch in. About a mile farther, the bridge finally comes into view.

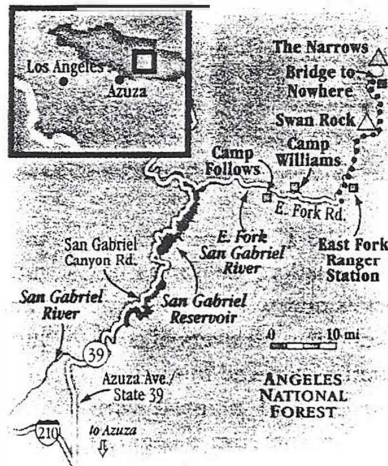
Except for a few cracks, nothing mars this perfectly preserved remnant of the Depression years. Suspended overhead along a rusted iron cable is the anvil-shaped pulley that once ferried building material across the gap. By crossing to the other side, we get a better view of the concrete arch supporting the structure. The river cas-



DAVID ZATZ (P)

The Bridge to Nowhere (a.k.a. the Narrows Bridge) rises up out of the San Gabriels like a prehistoric creature.

PLAN 20 STREAM CROSSINGS WITH WATER OVER YOUR ANKLES



WHERE: From I-10 or I-210, exit Azusa Ave. (State 39) north into the Angeles National Forest. Drive 10 miles along San Gabriel Canyon Rd. (State 39); turn right at E. Fork Rd. Follow it 7 miles to its terminus at East Fork Ranger Station.

DISTANCE: 5 miles one way.
COST: Adventure Pass (required), \$5 per day, available at San Gabriel Canyon Entrance Station, Camp Williams, and Camp Follows.

FYI: River crossings can be treacherous after storms.

CONTACT: San Gabriel River Ranger Station; (626) 335-1251.

ades over boulders 250 feet below, forming frothy rapids and placid emerald pools. We descend into the gorge, surrounded by rushing water and cool rock.

After a picnic, a dip, and a long, lazy rest, we head back. This time, it's downhill most of the way. Our path illuminated by a bit of orange sky, we chase the dwindling sunlight back to the trailhead, leaving the Bridge to Nowhere behind. — Mark Ebrman

MAP: CHRISTOPH DIEMANN