

Chivo Canyon Trail

The Trail: The name of the trail is Spanish for “goat”. Once you have hiked the trail you will understand that the domestic goat is the only grazing animal that can make use of those side hills. The trail is 1.6 miles to its north northeasterly end, hence 3.2 miles up and back. The only parking for the trail is on the street -(Westwood Street north of Cottonwood Drive). From there access to Chivo Canyon is to the east down the road to the access road to the eastern side of the canyon and the storm water detention basin formed effected by the road fill across the canyon. This facility serves to reduce flood flows down-stream while detaining the peak flow for only a few hours. The road down into the canyon from Cottonwood Drive is intended to provide access to the area behind the detention facility so that accumulated sediments behind the dam can be cleaned out and trucked away every few years. The trail proceeds up the canyon for about 0.7 mile past the fork to the west, i.e., the Tapo Canyon Trail, at which point the trail extends to the northeast for about another 0.9 miles.

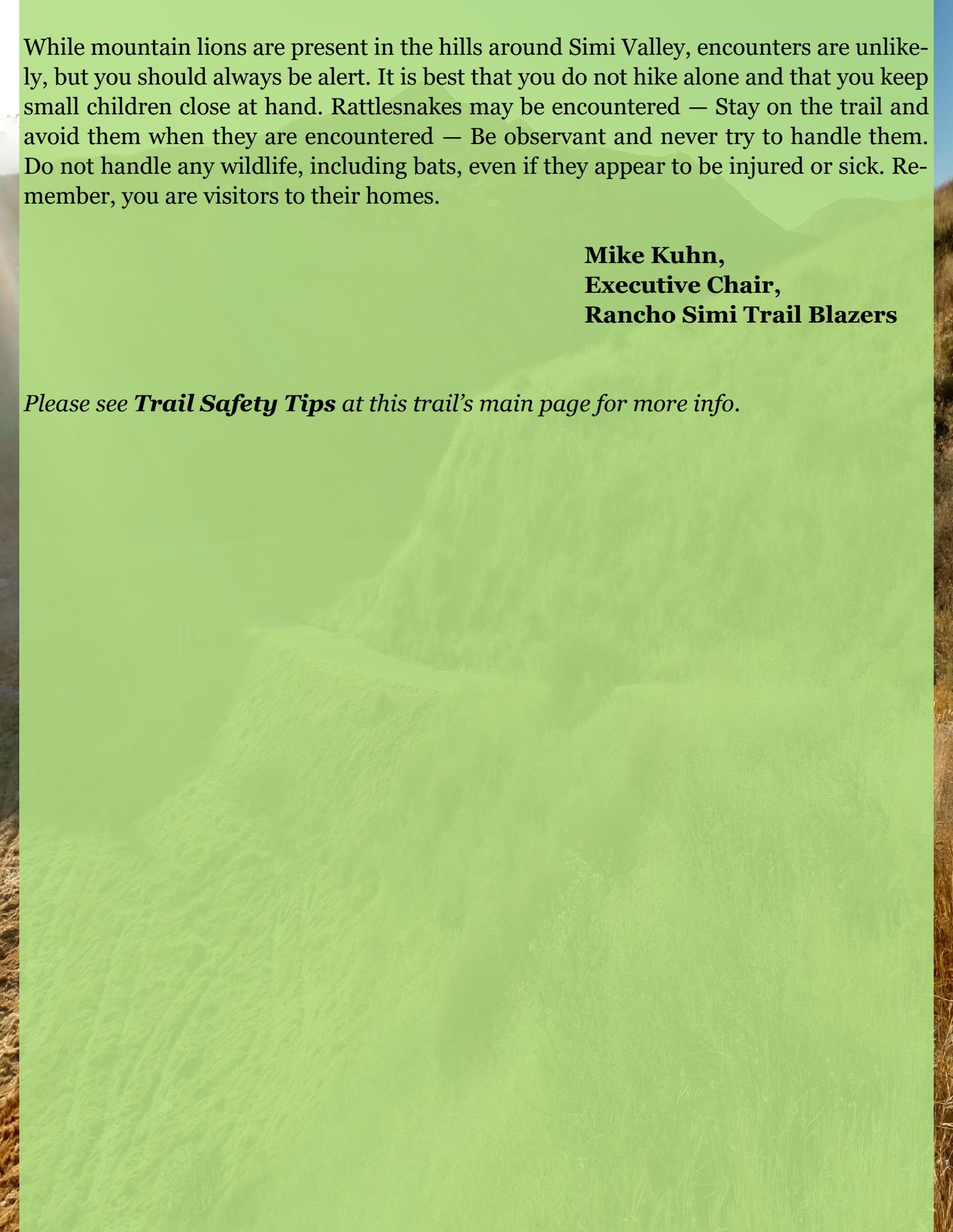
On the western side of the canyon, south of its intersection with the Tapo Canyon Trail, there are two areas with natural petroleum seeps. The seeps of oil are obvious and usually can be smelled before you get to them - depending on which way the wind is blowing. The previous owners of the land - the Marr family - are Texas oil folks. They purchased the “Marr Ranch” property because they were interested in the production of petroleum. The petroleum produced was shallow, relatively heavy crude. Some of the oil wells on the property produced oil for as long as 70 years. Whether the land produced enough oil to justify their investment is anybody’s guess. Certainly, the land provided other income streams over the years. One of those ventures started in recognition of the thirst for recreation during the mid-1920s. The Marr family set up a large camping lot subdivision and made many improvements, such as a club house, a swimming pool, horseshoe pits, tennis courts, a stable for horses, etc. Hundreds of lots were sold, many to eastern and midwestern investors. Then the Great Depression hit and nothing more happened. The Marr family offered to buy back what had been sold. Many, however, simply retained their dream lots in “California.” By the 1970s, 80s and 90s some lots had 12-40 heirs and many of the owners had not been paying their property taxes. The lots had been surveyed during the 1920s and turning points had been marked with wooden stakes. The bench mark used was elsewhere in the valley. So, it was no longer possible to determine where those lots were without resurveying the entire subdivision. A hopeless situation - until Global Positioning Surveying was made possible. In any case, there are still many privately owned lots in Chivo Canyon.

Beyond the terminus of the trail the canyon runs through a deep gorge. Up-stream of the gorge is a water well, which provided the water used on the Marr Ranch. Remnants of the pipeline that conducted the water can still be observed along the trail south of the eastern terminus of the Tapo Canyon Trail.

Geology: The geology along this trail involves three separate geological units. From south to north - the first is the Las Lajas Formation, which is of marine origin and is of middle Eocene age (i.e., deposited roughly 45 million year ago). It is made up of mica-ceous claystone-siltstone and is soft to semi-friable sandstone - commonly fossiliferous. A little less than a half a mile up the canyon, it is crossed by the Simi-Santa Rosa Fault, which trends generally east-west. On the north side of the fault line is the Santa Susana Formation, which is of marine origin and of Paleocene age (i.e., roughly 60 million years). About 1,000 feet further on you are back in the Las Lajas Formation, the first hundred feet or so is a basal cobble conglomerate, which is made up of cobbles of granitic, metavolcanic and quartzitic rocks in a sandy matrix. Then you will encounter more of the Las Lajas Formation as previously described. After another half mile the surrounding geology is made up of the Sespe Formation, which is a nonmarine fluvialite of Oligocene and late Eocene age (i.e., 42-22 million years of age).

Plant Life: Plant life in the canyon generally can be classified as coastal sage scrub. Plant species encounter on May 5, 2020, using common names, were salt cedar, mule fat, bush sunflower, deerweed, coast live oak, California buckwheat, California pepper (native to Peru), yellow star thistle, wild oats, red and ripgut bromes, hare barley, Russian thistle, yellow sweet clover, telegraph weed, California sage brush, black and Mediterranean mustards, bush and common mallows, wishbone plant, purple needle grass, broad-leaved cattail, silver puff, prickly sow-thistle, sticky phacelia, black sage, tree tobacco (native to Brazil - highly toxic), red-stemmed filaree, yellow bush monkeyflower, horehound, quail bush, mugwort, bindweed, blue elderberry, arroyo and sandbar willows, Santa Barbara locoweed, Fremont cottonwood, purple nightshade, cliff aster, golden yarrow, laurel sumac, sugar bush, branching phacelia, woolly-blue curls, narrow-leaved bedstraw, arroyo lupine, Catalina and yellow mariposa lily, coyote brush, Indian paintbrush, toyon, jimsonweed, blue dicks, prickly lettuce, yuncus, and red willow.

Animal Life: Animals that may be observed along the trail include birds, such as turkey vultures, California quail, red-tailed and red-shouldered hawks, great-horned and barn owls, poor-wills, mourning doves, road runners, Anna's hummingbirds, common flickers, black phoebes, common ravens, common crows, Brewer's black birds, California towhees, white-crowned and English sparrows; reptiles such as southern Pacific rattlesnakes, two-striped garter snakes, San Diego gopher snakes, California king snakes, two striped racers, blind snakes, Great Basin fence lizards, and San Diego alligator lizards; and mammals, such as brush and desert cottontail rabbits, California ground squirrels, Botta's pocket gophers, many types of bats, agile kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky-footed woodrats, gray foxes, coyotes, ring-tailed cats (normally active for only 2-3 hours during the dead of night - so they are rarely seen even though they are common), southern California weasels, badgers, striped skunks, bobcats and mountain lions.



While mountain lions are present in the hills around Simi Valley, encounters are unlikely, but you should always be alert. It is best that you do not hike alone and that you keep small children close at hand. Rattlesnakes may be encountered — Stay on the trail and avoid them when they are encountered — Be observant and never try to handle them. Do not handle any wildlife, including bats, even if they appear to be injured or sick. Remember, you are visitors to their homes.

**Mike Kuhn,
Executive Chair,
Rancho Simi Trail Blazers**

*Please see **Trail Safety Tips** at this trail's main page for more info.*