

Las Lajas Canyon Trail

The Trail: The trailhead is located on the northern side of Evening Sky Drive. Park on the northern side of the road. The trail extends 5.5 miles to the northeast along the bottom of the canyon. It is a maintained road. From there you may use the Rocky Fire Road to connect to the top of the ridge to the south, which connects to the top of the Chumash Trail or to continue along the fire road to Santa Susana Pass. Trail parking is available along Evening Sky Drive, primarily on the north side of the road.

History: Las Lajas Canyon may have been used during the Spanish and/or Mexican periods as an alternative route to or from Simi Valley. The name *llajas* has no meaning in Spanish. On all of the old maps back into the Mexican period and into the early American period the word "Llajas" is rendered as "Lajas." (What appears as a double "l" in Spanish is actually a separate letter of the alphabet.) *Lajas* in Spanish means "layered rocks," which seems apt given the geology of the canyon. The current rendition of the name seems to be a mistake on the part of the U.S. Geological Survey.

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Most of the lands adjacent to the canyon is now owned by the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District. However, from the first or second decade of the 20th Century it was owned by the Marr family, whose interest in the lands was for the potential for oil production. Wells were drilled and oil was produced for a few decades. However, what was produced was a shallow heavy crude in small quantities. During the second decade of the century the Marr family subdivided some of their land in the Tapo Street area. During the mid-1920s they recorded a subdivision on much of the undevelopable portion of the ranch. They had sold hundreds of those lots as part of a recreational develop. They built a clubhouse, with a commercial kitchen, a dance floor, a swimming pool, tennis courts, a barn and stable for horses, among other amenities. It was part of the great optimism of the roaring 20s. Then came the great depression. The Marr Ranch development collapsed. The Marr family did offer to refund ever body's investment - that is to buy back those parcels. However, many held onto their land. Over the years five or more generations have passed. Some parcels now have 50 or more owners. Nearly all of the undevelopable part of the ranch was acquired by the park district, but those still privately owned parcels remain. Homes were built on only two of those lots. They are no more. Some of those still privately owned lots are in Las Lajas Canyon.

Those owners have a right of access. There also is at least one working ranch at the eastern end of the road. What this means is that vehicular traffic may occasionally be encountered. Fortunately, the silence of the canyon makes it easy to hear vehicular traffic.

Geology: The geology along the trail begins in the Santa Susana Formation (of Paleocene age), which is a dark gray micaceous clayey shale with thin sandstone strata of marine origin. After the first mile and continuing for about one-half mile, you enter the Llajas Formation (Eocene age), which is a gray micaceous claystone/siltstone and a light gray to tan soft semi-friable sandstone, which is of marine origin. After about a third of a mile you move into the Monterey Formation (middle Miocene age), which is thinly bedded, soft clayey to calcareous shale of marine origin. Granted, the geology looks much the same but has its origins over several million years.

Plant Life: Plant life in the canyon and on the surrounding hills has been affected from the high frequency of wild fires. The result is Mediterranean annual grasses with herbaceous annuals and scattered shrubs. Some purple needle-grass, a California native, is present occasionally along the roadway.

Four plant associations are present: Coast sage scrub is present mainly on south-facing slopes. Some plants you may encounter include California sagebrush, coyote brush, California brickelbush, hoary-leaf ceanothus, soap plant, stinking gourd, giant rye, bush sunflower, pine-leaf golden bush, California yucca, golden yarrow, toyon, coast golden bush, deer weed, bush mallow, laurel sumac, sugar bush, yellow bush monkey flower, coast live oak, hollyleaf red berry, castor bean, black, purple, and white sages, blue elderberry, and many, many others.

Chaparral is present mainly on north-facing slopes. When mature, chaparral forms a nearly continuous cover of evergreen perennial shrubs. However, since wildfires have reoccurred so often over the past decades, those north-facing slopes containing grasslands with scattered chaparral species. (From the bottom of the canyon it is somewhat hard to identify all of the kinds of plants on the hillsides.) Some of them include chamise, California sagebrush, coyote brush, California brickellbush, hoary-leaved ceanothus, soap plant, California mountain mahogany, California dodder, bush sunflower, yerba santa, California buckwheat, golden yarrow, toyon, prickly phlox, deer weed, bush mallow, laurel sumac, sugar bush, lemonade berry, bush monkey flower, wishbone bush, peony, hollyleaf cherry, coast live oak, scrub oak, chaparral current, purple and black sages, blue elderberry, white and purple nightshades, among many others.

Oak Woodland is present along most of the lower slopes. All of the oaks are coast live oaks. Poison oak as well as many other species also occur. Riparian species include Fremont cottonwoods, California sycamores, giant rye, mule fat, and arroyo willows, and many other species.

Animal Life: Animal life that may be observed from the road include; birds, such as turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, great horned, barn and burrowing owls, California quail, mourning doves, road runners, Anna's hummingbirds, common flickers, crows, ravens, various sparrows, among others; reptiles, such as Great Basin fence and San Diego alligator lizards, southern Pacific rattlesnakes, gopher snakes, and California king snakes; mammals, such as various bats, brush rabbits, desert cottontails, California ground squirrels, agile Kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky woodrats, coyotes, gray foxes, ringtail cats (very nocturnal - so rarely observed), southern California weasels, striped skunks, bobcats, mountain lions, mule deer, and, periodically, black bears. For many of these mammals their presence are known by their tracks.

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.*