

Rocky Peak Trail

THE TRAIL: The Rocky Peak Trail can be accessed from the 118 Freeway or Santa Susana Pass Rd. The trailhead is located at the end of Rocky Peak Rd., due north. The property is owned by the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy.

The trail is in the form of a fire road, which is broad and clear of vegetation. Rocky Peak is 2.5 miles from the trailhead and rises approximately 1,200 feet. The trail rises rapidly, with views of both valleys. Some 0.8 miles from the trailhead, there is a “rock house” on the left for which stone and mortar were used to enclose a natural rock shelter. The rock house was probably built as part of a movie set. Across the road from the rock house is a natural cave above the road that is worth exploring. The pictographs in the cave are modern.

The Rocky Peak Road intersects the Hummingbird Trail a few hundred feet up the road. It is 2.3 miles from that point down the Hummingbird Trail to Kuehner Drive in Simi Valley. From the top of the trail, a side trail to the east extends approximately one quarter of a mile to a point overlooking both valleys. On the right side as one begins the trail to the east is an old cistern that was used for fire fighting purposes before helicopters were used.

The actual Rocky Peak is about 1,000 feet to the northeast. The top of the peak is the boundary between Los Angeles and Ventura counties. From the trail summit, it is 1.3 miles to the trail juncture with the Chumash Trail. The trail continues for approximately another 1.2 miles to another summit, which marks the end of the publicly owned land. The hike from the trailhead is a 10-mile round trip.

This trail, along with the Hummingbird and Chumash trails, is very popular with mountain bikers. Hikers and bikers as well should obey the rules of the trail and be courteous when in the presence of other users of the trail.

The Volunteer Trail Safety Service under the Rancho Simi Recreation and Park District patrols the trail. If you would like information on how to become a volunteer with the District, you may call the District’s Volunteer Coordinator at (805) 584-4453.

GEOLOGY: Most of the Rocky Peak Trail is located in the Chatsworth Formation, which is the name that geologists have given to the massive sandstone formations at the eastern end of Simi Valley. The formation is upper Cretaceous Period in age, dating from approximately 70-75 million years ago. At some point the Chatsworth Formation was uplifted above sea level, and the upper portion of the formation was eroded away before new marine sediments were superimposed on the resulting landscape.

The Chatsworth Formation is composed primarily of light gray, fine to medium grained sandstone strata, which are from a few feet to 20-30 feet in thickness. When exposed to air, the rock weathers to a warm tan color. Occasional beds of siltstone and cobbles are present. The formation was deposited in the deep ocean at a depth of 4,000 to 5,000 feet by turbidity currents, i.e., massive submarine landslides from the continental shelf into submarine canyons. Those turbidity currents were often a half-mile or more in width and ten or more miles long. As a result, few fossils survived the grinding action of the long journey into the ocean depths. In between those catastrophic events, there were quiet periods without turbidity currents when silt and clay particles rained down from the surface of the ocean as fines carried long distances into the ocean from heavy runoff from the land. Those fines became the siltstone strata.

The formation is part of the North Pacific Plate, which is moving to the northwest at a current rate of about 2.5 inches per year. Because of the collision with the North American Plate along the San Andreas Fault, the margin of the North Pacific Plate has been uplifted and tilted to the northwest from 20-40 degrees.

There are many joints, vertical to the bedding plains, in the sandstone strata. Those joints, combined with the contacts between strata and cavernous weathering of the sandstone have resulted in fascinating rock formations, including deep crevasses and caves.

About 50 yards beyond the trail junction with the Chumash Trail, the ridge is cut by the southern branch of the Simi-Santa Rosa fault. Evidence of faulting is very evident in the road cut on the eastern side of the road.

Just beyond that point you move into the Simi Conglomerate Member of the Santa Susana Formation, which has an unconforming contact with the Chatsworth Formation. Very quickly you move into a dark gray clayey shale of the Santa Susana Formation. As one progresses into Los Angeles County, near the top of the hill, you move into the much younger and fossiliferous Pico Formation. This formation is mostly soft, friable, nearly white, medium to coarse-grained sandstone with many bivalve shells, especially in hard calcareous reefs, and shell coquina, which were deposited in shallow marine lagoonal conditions.

PLANT LIFE: Two plant communities are present along the Rock Peak Trail. On the warmer and sunnier south, southeast and southwest facing slopes, the plant life is composed primarily of coastal sage scrub species. Common species include California sagebrush, yucca, coyote brush, California brickelbush, Santa Susana tarplant, California buckwheat, ashleaf buckwheat, deerweed, California dodder, giant rye, bush and slender sunflowers, dove weed, yerba santa, golden yarrow, narrow-leaved bedstraw, California everlasting, bladderpod, silver lotus, horehound, wishbone bush, laurel sumac, sugar bush, black sage, purple nightshade and hollyleaf cherry. Many exotic naturalized annual grasses and weeds are present along with annual plants.

The chaparral occupies most north-facing slopes. That community is made up of ever-green shrubs with small hard leaves. This fire-climax vegetation is made up of plants which resprout from the root crowns following brush fires. Characteristic plants include chamise, hoary-leafed ceanothus, California mountain mahogany, toyon, laurel sumac, bush monkey flower, hollyleaf redberry, poison oak, coast live oak, eastwood manzanita, lance-leafed liveforever, Santa Susana tarplant, and fuchsia-flowered gooseberry. Many of the coast sage scrub and the chaparral species occur in both communities.

Of special interest along the trail is the Santa Susana tarplant, which is a state-designated “rare” plant. It grows primarily out of the cracks in sandstone, and has a very limited range that is focused on the eastern end of Simi Valley, and other sites with massive sandstone. Just south of the rock house are bay laurel trees.

The yucca is also of special interest in that it has given us the name “Tapo.” The Ventureño Chumash Indian village in Tapo Canyon was named for this plant and was called *ta’apu*. To the Indians the area around the village became “the Tapo” and the trail to *ta’apu* was Tapo Canyon.

ANIMAL LIFE: Animals that may be observed along the trail include: mainly birds, such as turkey vultures, red-tailed hawks, great-horned owls (mainly at night), California quail, California towhees, mourning doves, common crows, ravens, road runners, mockingbirds, white-crowned sparrows; reptiles, such as southern Pacific rattlesnakes, two-striped garter snakes, San Diego gopher snakes, California king snakes, San Diego alligator lizards, Great Basin fence lizards, San Diego/California horned lizards; and mammals, such as brush rabbits, desert cottontails, California ground squirrels, agile kangaroo rats, deer mice, dusky woodrats, coyotes, striped skunks, raccoons, mule deer, 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.*