OTP Hike #0072

Hike for "Experienced Hikers"
4/24/91

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Mount Zion Trail

From Chantry Flat, a loop around Mount Zion via Gabrielino, Winter Creek and Mount Zion Trails
9 miles round trip; 1,500-foot elevation gain

Zion, the name of one of the hills of Jerusalem on which the City of David was built, and which became the center of Jewish life and worship, is also the name of a peak in the San Gabriel Mountains above Arcadia.

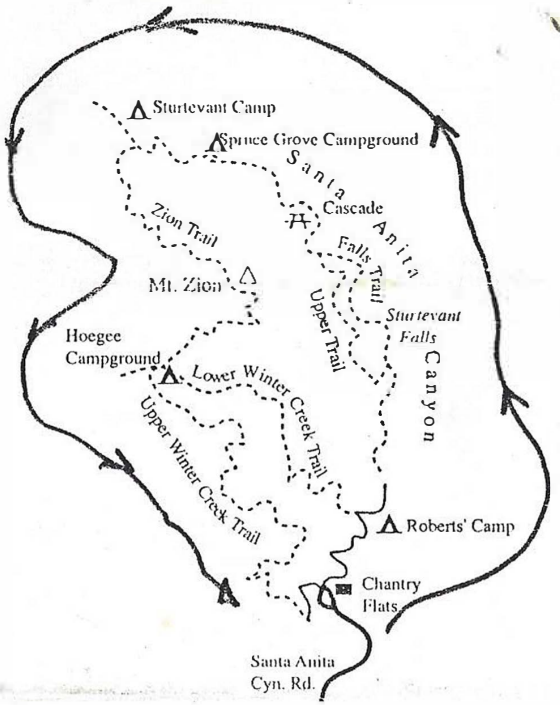
Mount Zion Trail was one of many paths constructed by turn-of-the-century pioneer packer/entrepreneur Wilbur Sturtevant. Sturtevant had constructed Sturtevant's Winter Camp, a creekside refuge from city life on the banks of Winter Creek, and Camp Sturtevant in upper Santa Anita Canyon. Obviously he needed to connect his camps, so in 1896 he began constructing a three-mile link in the Sturtevant Trail that would later be known as Mount Zion Trail. The first mile and a half of trail up Mount Zion from Winter Creek was a killer construct a thousand-foot climb over the steep and rocky shoulder of Mount Zion.

Long after Sturtevant finished his trail, the pioneer was asked why he elected to climb over Mount Zion rathert han around it. Replied Sturtevant: "Well, I'm a pretty stubborn sort of man; a fellow told me it would be better to go around, so I went over."

At least stubborn Sturtevant had an easier time of it building the second half of his trail, which led down Mount Zion into Santa Anita Canyon. Here the slope was gentle, the trail shaded by tall trees.

For two decades, until a trail was built up Santa Anita Canyon in 1916, Mount Zion Trail was the primary route to Camp Sturtevant and the backcountry beyond. A 1953 fire scorched Mount Zion, and subsequent rains, landslides and erosion destroyed part of the trail. By the 1960s, chaparral had covered the trail and made it impassable. Fortunately, this historic path was rescued from oblivion by Sierra Club volunteers and an informal group of San Gabriel Mountains afficionados who call themselves the "Big Santa Anita Gang." Mount Zion Trail was reconstructed and reopened to public use in the spring of 1987.

Mount Zion Trail allows the modern mountaineer to make a grand loop by connecting the Winter Creek and Gabrielino Trails. Those hikers not quite up for a 9-mile trip can enjoy a shorter 5 mile-loop along the Winter Creek Trail, or a walk along the Gabrielino Trail to Sturtevant Falls. With a half-dozen interconnecting trails accessible from Chantry Flat Picnic Area, you can plan your own perfect hike.



Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Arcadia, exit on Santa Anita Avenue and drive six miles north to its end at Chantry Flat. The trail begins across the road from the parking area. A tiny store at the edge of the parking lot sells maps and refreshments.

The Hike: Descend three-quarters of a mile on the paved fire road, part of the signed Gabrielino Trail, into Big Santa Anita Canyon. At the bottom of the canyon, you will cross a footbridge near the confluence of Big Santa Anita and Winter creeks.

After crossing the bridge, look left for the signed Lower Winter Creek Trail. Following the bubbling creek, the trail tunnels beneath the boughs of oak and alder, willow and bay.

After crossing Winter Creek, you'll arrive at Hoegee Camp, 2 1/2 miles from the trailhead. In 1908, Arie Hoegee and his family built a resort here that soon became a popular destination for Mount Wilson-bound hikers. The resort was a casualty of the great flood of 1938, but a trail camp named for the Hoegees stands on the site of the old resort and offers the modern-day hiker a tranquil picnic site or rest stop.

Walk through the campground until you spot a tiny tombstone-shaped trail sign. Cross Winter Creek here and bear left on the trail. After a short while, you'll arrive at a signed junction with Mount Zion Trail. Those in