



Grizzly Flat Trail

Season: All Year

Big Tujunga Creek to Grizzly Flat

5 miles round trip; 900-foot elevation gain

During the last century, a large population of grizzlies roamed the San Gabriel Mountains. The bears frightened early miners and settlers, and in later years, had many a run-in with sportsmen and forest rangers. Big Tujunga Canyon was particularly attractive habitat to the big bears; in fact, the last wild grizzly in Southern California was killed in the lower reaches of the canyon in 1916.

These days you won't find any grizzlies atop Grizzly Flat, just a few hikers enjoying a pine-shaded retreat in the Angeles National Forest. Grizzly Flat Trail explores Tujunga Canyon, then rises into the storied hills where notorious highwayman Tiburcio Vasquez eluded a posse in 1874. Vasquez, after robbing a San Gabriel Valley rancher, rode over the top of the San Gabriels, descended north along a then-unnamed creek to Big Tujunga Canyon, and made good his escape. The unnamed creek, which cuts through the eastern edge of Grizzly Flat, has since been known as Vasquez Creek.

Big Tujunga Canyon—or "Big T" as it's sometimes nicknamed—has certainly felt the hand of man. Its creek has been dammed and diverted by the Los Angeles County Flood Control District. The purpose of these flood control efforts is to control the run-off of Big Tujunga Creek and prevent it from rushing into the eastern lowlands of the San Fernando Valley.

Damming a wild, but seasonal, mountain stream such as Big Tujunga solves one problem but creates another: when rains swell the creek, millions of cubic yards of sand and gravel are carried downstream and clog up flood control structures. Obviously, to be effective, a flood control reservoir should not be filled with rock debris. So the debris must be hauled away. But where?

The urban mountaineer may ponder a not altogether facetious question: If Los Angeles and its flood control projects keep growing and we keep carting away rock debris, will we one day haul our mountains entirely away?

Grizzly Flat Trail departs from Stonyvale Picnic Area, one of the less-visited locales in the front range of the San Gabriel Mountains. The trail, while not difficult, does require four crossings of Big Tujunga Creek, and should be avoided after heavy rains and during times of high water.

Directions to trailhead: From the Foothill Freeway (210) in Sunland,

exit on Sunland Boulevard and head west to Foothill, continuing west to Mount Gleason Avenue. Turn left and drive 1 1/2 miles to a stop sign. Turn right, proceed 6 miles to Vogel Flat Road, and turn right again. The road drops to a stop sign. To the right is a Forest Service fire station. Turn left and park by the Stonyvale Picnic Area.

The Hike: The trail, signed with the international hiking symbol, begins at a vehicle barrier at the east end of Stonyvale Picnic Area. Almost immediately you cross Big Tujunga Creek. Small trail markers keep you on the path, which crosses a boulder field and fords the creek three more times.

A bit more than a mile from the trailhead, Big Tujunga creek and canyon bend northeast, but the trail heads right, south. Soon you'll pass an abandoned trail register and begin ascending up oak- and chaparral-covered slopes. After a mile, you'll dip to a seasonal fern-lined creek, then ascend briefly to grassy Grizzly Flat. The Forest Service planted pines here in 1959, shortly after a fire scorched the slopes above Big Tujunga.

From Grizzly Flat you can make your way northeast a few hundred yards to spruce-shaded Vasquez Creek. Picnic here or at Grizzly Flat and return the same way.

