

74A SAN GABRIEL WILDERNESS: Highway 39 to the WEST FORK of SAN GABRIEL RIVER and on to BEAR CANYON along LOWER BEAR CREEK TRAIL

6 Miles RT; 1025 ft Elevation Gain on the Bear Creek Trail to the first Wilderness Camp

OR 8 Miles RT; 600 ft Elevation Gain along the West Fork to Big Mermaids & Little Mermaids

Classification: Moderate(Bear Creek) OR Easy  
Topo maps: Crystal Lake, Azusa, Glendora

DATE: 21 OCTOBER 1992 TIME: 9:40 DEPARTURE

DIRECTIONS: Drive North up Highway 39 to the junction of the North and West forks of the San Gabriel River, 11½ miles from Azusa after Interstate 210. Park near day use parking area.

THE HIKE: On the south side of the bridge over the West Fork, pass a locked gate and walk up the paved access road that follows the stream. In one mile you reach the junction of the West Fork and Bear Creek. By boulder-hopping across or detouring a hundred yards west to a concrete bridge, you squiggle past the rock wall and walk on the squashy ground to the trail alongside the west bank of Bear Creek. Should the stream level of the West Fork be so high that boulders are covered, you would find it difficult wading in crossing this swift stream.

BEAR CREEK TRAIL: This trail penetrates further into the San Gabriel Wilderness than the few trails around the perimeter, such as Devils Canyon and Twin Peaks. Following Bear Creek, the trail passes under scattered alders and oaks, and crosses grassy flats to reach the Bear Creek wilderness campsite. Above this rugged camp, you scramble across boulders where the creek turns into a rocky wash until the forest again covers the trail. There are two more wilderness camps upstream distanced about a mile apart, before the trail starts the climb up to Smith Saddle. After lunch, return the way you have travelled.

ALTERNATE HIKE: From the Bear Creek junction,

continue westward along the streamside paved road crossing the bridge to the north bank. Continue along the north bank awhile mostly in the sun. Recross the stream and then, follow the shadier south bank the rest of the way. The north slopes of the West Fork are blanketed by dense chaparral, while the steeper south flanks are covered with big-cone spruce. The road continues to Glenn Trail Camp, shaded much of the way by oak, alder, maple and spruce. With the rugged portals of Big Mermaids Canyon and Little Mermaids Canyon, the side walls steepen, with sheer rock cliffs here and there, you have walked about four miles. Three miles further is Glenn Trail Camp. An additional mile is Cogswell Dam and Reservoir built in the '30s for floods. After partaking of lunch streamside, return to Highway 39 and the refreshments.

