



9:30 AM
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Season: All Year

Wildwood Park Trail

William L. Townsend

To Wildwood Canyon, Lizard Rock

5 miles round trip; 400-foot elevation gain

Return via Mountclef

7 miles round trip; 600-foot gain

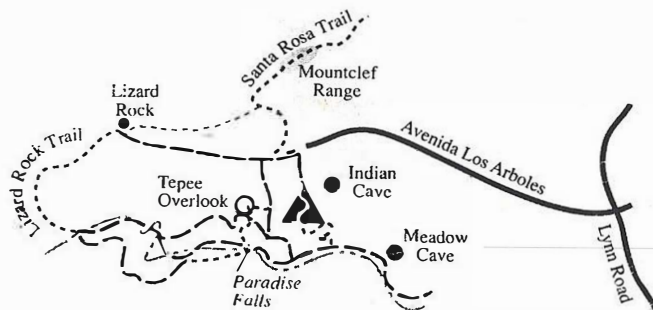
Wildwood Park is a tranquil retreat on the outskirts of fast-becoming-suburbanized Conejo Valley. Hikers can explore two intriguing sections of the park—gentle Wildwood Creek and Canyon and the more rugged Mountclef Ridge.

This intriguing new park with a dull name preserves 1,300 acres of canyonland and rocky cliffs. A special feature of the park is a waterfall called Paradise Falls.

Wildwood is a park-in-the-making. Plans are afoot to develop a nature center, complete with displays, exhibits and demonstrations by naturalists, and to revive a self-guided nature trail. Most of the park, however, will be left undeveloped. Quite a few school groups visit the park, which has a teepee lookout and some caves with interpretive displays inside.

Conjeo, the Spanish word for rabbit, was affixed to many geographical features in these parts. Missionary/explorer Father Font first applied it in the 18th Century. In 1803, Spanish authorities granted Rancho El Conejo to Jose Polanco and Ignacio Rodriguez. Today, a valley, a low range of mountains, a grade and a creek are among the *Conjeo* names on the land. Wildwood Park is bounded by Conejo Creek and its two seasonal branches—Arroyo Santa Rosa and Arroyo Conejo.

Before the park came into being, it belonged to a development company that leased it out to MGM studios which owned adjacent land. The epic film "Spartacus" was filmed here, and the set for "Dodge City" and "The Rifleman" were located on what is now Wildwood Park.



The park's trail system, while unsigned, is fairly extensive. Oak Grove, Eagle Point and Santee are a few of the many trails that crisscross the park. While circling the park, you'll make use of a half-dozen paths that I've collectively dubbed Wildwood Park Trail.

Directions to trailhead: From the Ventura Freeway (101) in Thousand Oaks, exit on Lynn Road. Drive 2 1/2 miles north to Avenida Los Arboles. Turn left and proceed a mile to the park entrance, then turn left and drive a half-mile down a dirt road to the parking area.

The Hike: From the parking area, descend down the dirt fire road into Wildwood Canyon. You'll soon reach a junction. A left will take you to Meadows Cave and a picnic area. Turn right and follow the trail along Wildwood Creek.

After a short while, you'll reach a side trail on your right that leads up to Tepee Overlook. After taking a look at the teepee, which looks more like a picnic ramada than anything Native American, you can return to the creek trail the way you came or via a longer route by continuing on the dirt road past the teepee.

The creekside trail bends north with Wildwood Creek then climbs the sage- and lemonade berry-covered north canyon wall. Below is tiny Paradise Falls. Beyond the falls, both the creekside trail and Oak Grove Nature Trail meander through the oaks to a picnic area.

Beyond the picnic area, the trail heads west and crosses the creek a couple times. Approaching the park's western boundary you'll get a whiff of the Hill Canyon Sewage Treatment Plant then turn sharply north on signed Lizard Rock Trail. This path rises steeply over a wildflower-splashed grassy slope, then turns east and brings you to the base of a handsome cluster of rocks. The rock's resemblance to a lizard is dubious, but the lizard's-eye-view from atop the rock is pretty good.

Clear-day views are good from Lizard Rock and even better from the central and eastern portion of the Mountclef Range. Far to the north you can see the Los Padres National Forest backcountry and the Condor Sanctuary above Fillmore and Santa Paula. More immediately to the north are the Las Posas Hill and Little Simi Valley. To the south is Conejo Valley. To the northeast are the Santa Susana Mountains, to the east are the Simi Hills. To the west are the Camarillo Hills and Oxnard Plain.

The trail heads east down the rocky ridgeline, passes an extensive prickly pear cactus patch and continues descending toward the main part of the park. Just before you return to familiar ground—the parking area and trails leading to it—you'll arrive at the signed junction with Santa Rosa Trail. For a nice option and some great views, follow this side trail as it ascends into rocky Mountclef Range. Up-top are some lumpy, pudding-like conglomerate rocks and a panorama of both wild and suburban Ventura County.