



Distance	6.5 miles
Total Elevation Gain/Loss	1800'/1800'
Hiking Time	3½ hours
Optional Map	USGS 7.5-min <i>Malibu Beach</i>
Best Times	October through May
Agency	NPS
Difficulty	★★★

This wide-ranging loop has a bit of what feels like genuine mountaineering—a mere class 2½ or 3 in climber's parlance, but exciting all the same. Save the trip for an exceptionally clear day, as I did, and you'll be rewarded with vistas that must be seen to be believed.

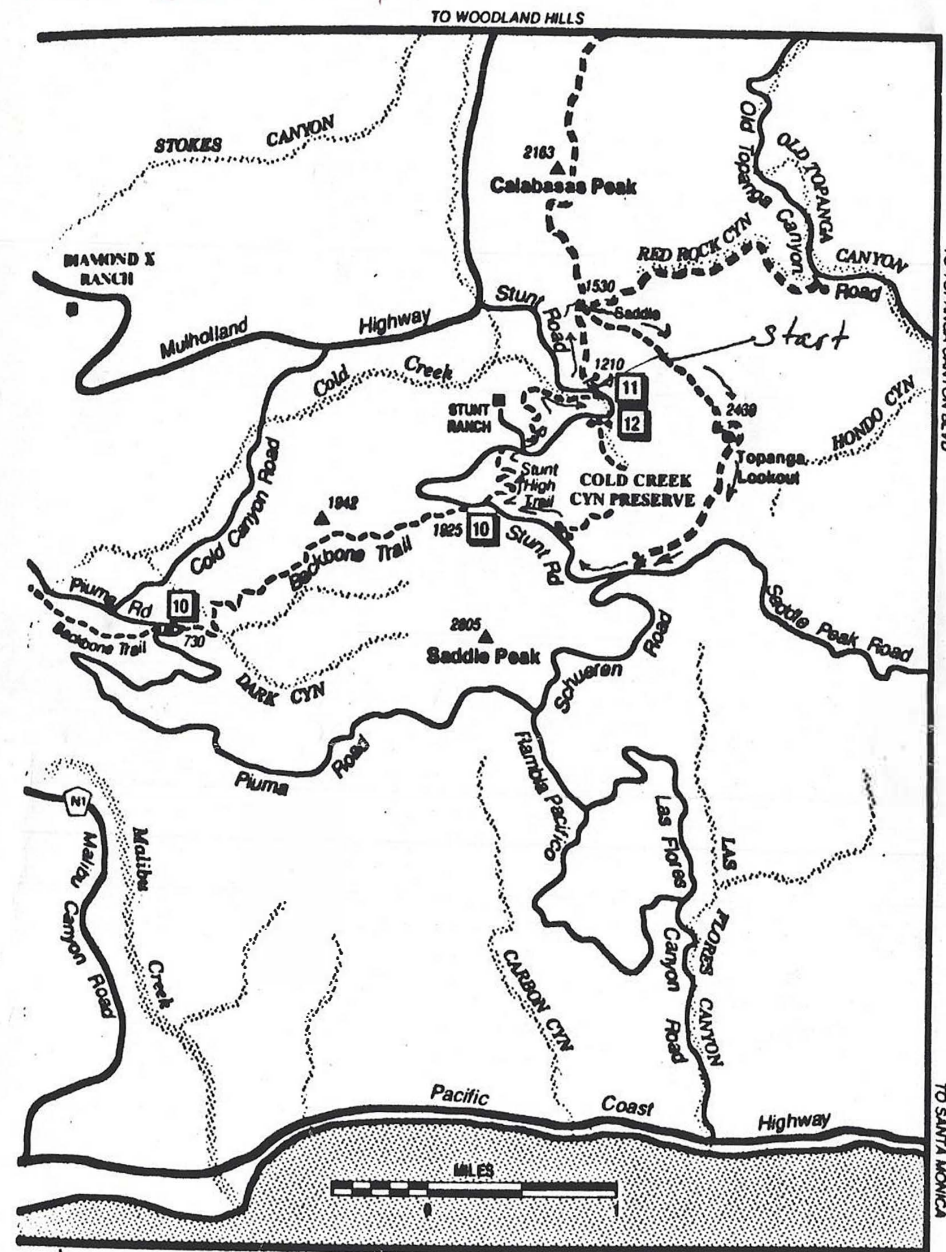
Begin, as in Trip 11, by hiking to the saddle at the head of Red Rock Canyon, 0.7 mile from Stunt Road. Take neither the road north to Calabassas Peak nor the road east into Red Rock Canyon below. Instead, turn sharply right and climb up a steep bulldozed road. The road soon peters out, but you can continue climbing to a 1766' knoll. There you can see what lies ahead: an undulating, brushy, knife-edge ridge, buttressed by tilted sandstone slabs and fins. A narrow, but well-beaten trail up the ridge testifies to its popularity as a mountaineer's route.

Make your way for a painstaking mile up and over or around the sandstone obstacles and through the brush until you reach the terminus of a fire road. Continue on this for an easy-going 0.4 mile, past a couple of striking columnar rock formations, to the foundation of the long-abandoned Topanga Fire Lookout (2.2 miles). Try to ignore the tons of discarded bottles and trash (it looks like a thousand drunken fools descended on the place) and concentrate instead on the stupefying view. A big section of the San Fernando Valley is visible, along with parts of the L.A. Basin and Santa Monica Bay. Downtown L.A.'s office towers point the way toward a low spot on the east horizon—San Geronio Pass—flanked by Southern

California's highest peaks (San Geronio and San Jacinto), over 100 miles away.

From the lookout site, walk south on the fire road to Saddle Peak Road (3.1 miles), where there's a better view of Santa Monica Bay and Santa Catalina Island. Over at the intersection of paved roads immediately west, bear right on Stunt Road. Walk easily downhill along Stunt Road for a bit over a mile, a not-unpleasant task since the road carries only light traffic and offers nice views throughout. (The future Backbone Trail, which will parallel this stretch, will someday provide an alternative to walking the road.) On the way down you'll pass by the upper gate for a trail through Cold Creek Canyon Preserve. The property is open for guided hikes, and may also be used by individuals if reserved three days or more in advance (see Appendix 4).

At a turnout on the right at mile-marker 3.0, you'll discover the top end of the Stunt High Trail. Follow the trail's winding course downhill for 0.8 mile through tall chaparral until you hit Stunt Road again. Turn right and walk 0.1 mile east along Stunt Road's left shoulder to the Stunt Ranch entrance road. Follow this for 0.1 mile north, then veer right to continue on the signed Stunt High Trail. Only a mile of walking remains: You wind through more chaparral, go down across a meadow to Cold Creek, and meet an old road paralleling the stream. The final, delightfully shaded stretch goes up along the creek and ends at your starting point, the large turnout at mile 1.0 on Stunt Road.



Directions: Take Malibu Canyon Rd to Piñon Rd. Right on Piñon Rd to Cold Canyon Rd. Left on Cold Canyon Rd to Mulholland Hwy. Right on Mulholland Hwy to Stunt Rd. Right on Stunt Rd. to large turn-out at 1.0 mile-marker (1 mile from Mulholland Hwy). Park and wait for hiker.

Note: Cross the pavement and pick up fire road that cuts across a hillside to the north. Hike to a road junction at a saddle. See Trip 12 for rest of hike.