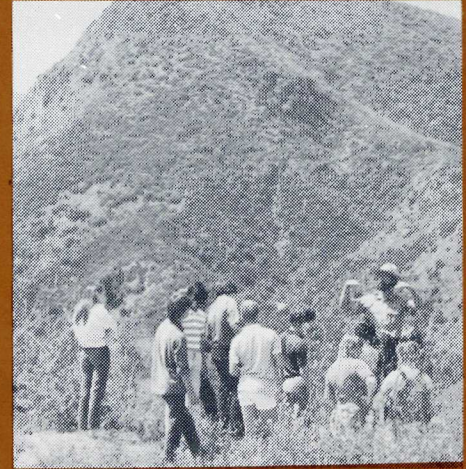
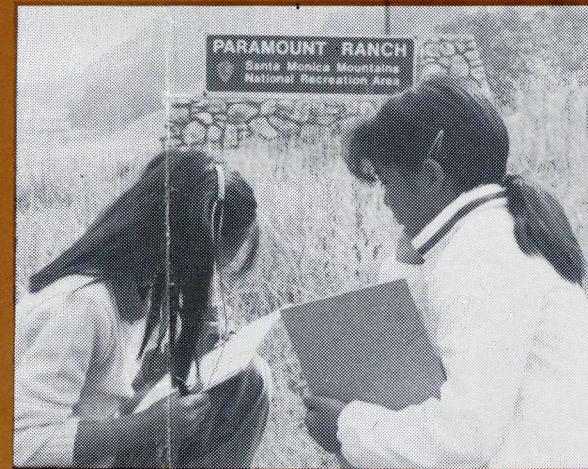


Paramount Ranch

Santa Monica Mountains
National Recreation Area

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



THE STORY OF A MOVIE RANCH

Cowboys, Indians, stampedes, and gunfights--America grew up with stories of the western frontier. During the 1800s most people got their images of the West from magazines, dime novels, and occasional visits to Wild West Shows. The twentieth century brought the West to life in an exciting, new way--moving pictures.

Southern California, once called the "cattle counties" because of all its ranches, seemed an ideal place for making western movies. In the early days filmmakers worked wherever they found a place that appealed to them. Sometimes residents of the San Fernando Valley found horses galloping through their yards or gunfights in their gardens. Eventually, complaints from angry residents forced moviemakers to do their creating away from the public streets.



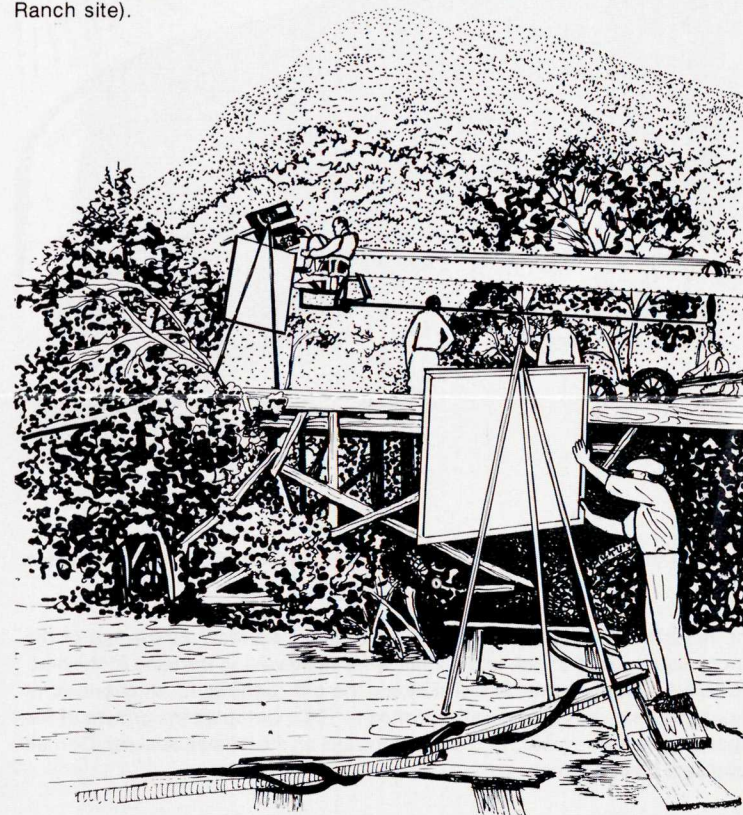
Jesse Laskey was one of those early filmmakers. He produced movies for W. W. Hawkinson, a New York theatre owner and film distributor. Together they formed Paramount Pictures Corporation. Laskey bought 2,000 acres of land in Burbank on which his company built movie sets as they were needed. By 1921 the land had so many sets and had been used so often that moviegoers could recognize the same location from one movie to the next. Buildings could be redecorated, but westerns had to have wide-open spaces. Laskey needed a new location.

He found the right spot near Agoura, a portion of the old Rancho Las Virgenes. Paramount Pictures purchased approximately 4,000 acres of ranchland that seemed to contain every possible type of scenery--rolling meadows, oak and walnut groves, streams, canyons, and even a mountain that looked like a miniature version of the company's logo. For much of the year the golden, dry grass and dark green hillsides had the look of the prairie lands, perfect for westerns. When winter rains brought green grass and flowers to the meadow, the ranch could represent locations from around the world. It was San Francisco for Wells Fargo in 1914 and the Far East for The Adventures of Marco Polo in 1936. For Tom Sawyer in 1938, one of the creeks was dammed up to create a wide shallow version of the Mississippi River.

Since the ranch was so far from the studio in Burbank, most of the props and equipment were kept out at the ranch. The studio built a woodworking shop for building sets and raised large metal sheds for storing vehicles, equipment,

and props. They also had a bunkhouse for housing wranglers and a commissary that could feed up to 500 people each day. During these golden years, all the activity at Paramount Ranch made it an exciting place to be.

But times changed. The power of the studios diminished, costs soared, and the financially lean years of World War II virtually eliminated use of the ranch for filming. By 1946 Paramount Studios sold the ranch. For the next few years it was just another spot on the Southern California landscape. Then in 1952 Bill Hertz bought 326 acres of the ranch (this acreage is now the Paramount Ranch site).



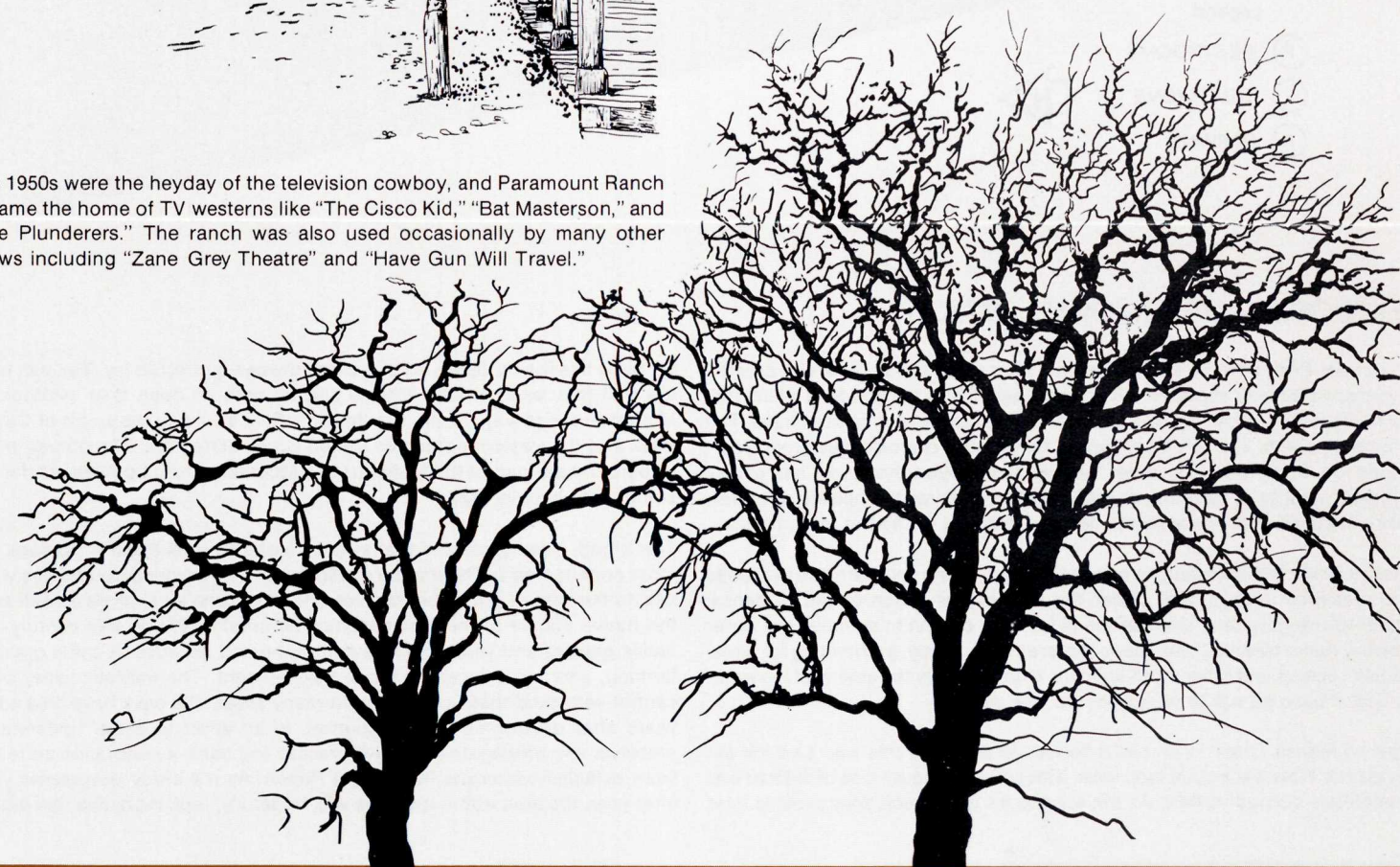
Hertz added a few horses and set about to make his romantic dreams of being a cowboy come true. With a cigar in one hand, a head full of memories of western movies, and a work crew of three teenagers, he created a western setting on his ranch. The ends of the metal storage sheds built by Paramount became the first buildings in his "western mining town." Later he linked them together and expanded the town by adding parts of sets salvaged from the back lot at Twentieth Century Fox Studios.



The 1950s were the heyday of the television cowboy, and Paramount Ranch became the home of TV westerns like "The Cisco Kid," "Bat Masterson," and "The Plunderers." The ranch was also used occasionally by many other shows including "Zane Grey Theatre" and "Have Gun Will Travel."

Today westerns no longer dominate either the movie or television screen. Although Paramount Ranch has no resident production company, it's like a well-established character actor that continues to be used for commercials, television, and feature films. It has been seen in movies such as Helter Skelter and Reds, for episodes of television programs including "CHiPs," "BJ and the Bear," and "The Fall Guy," and has helped sell everything from hot dogs to women's jeans.

The Western Town, now aged and weathered, is one of the few remaining western sets still accessible for use by independent production companies. And today's moviemakers are discovering something the old Paramount directors learned a long time ago. Paramount Ranch has many personalities and moods, each holding its own appeal and special beauty.

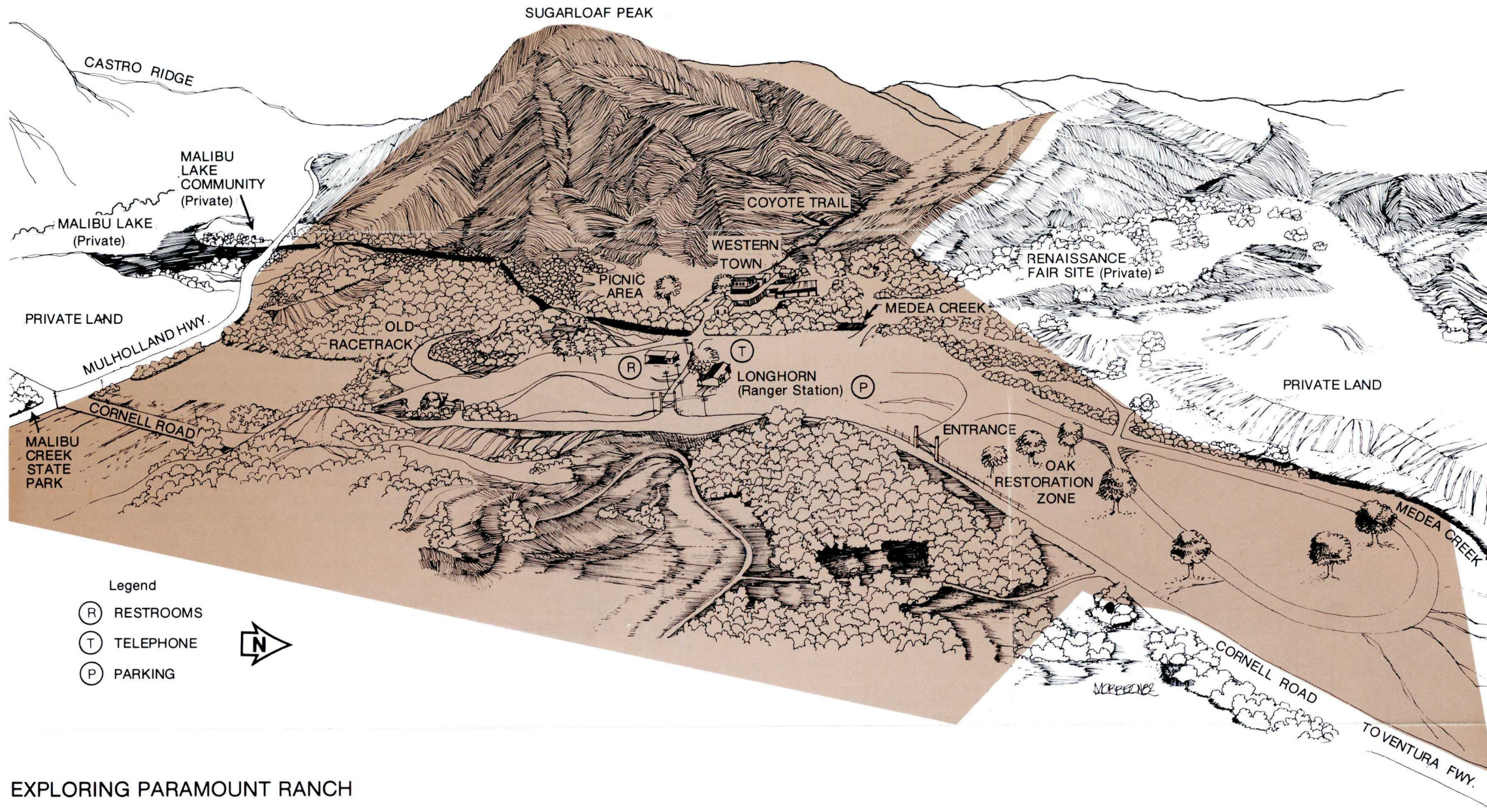


Paramount Ranch

To protect yourself and the resources of Paramount Ranch, please:

- keep vehicles on designated open roads and parking areas
- keep pets leashed and under control at all times
- refrain from smoking or building campfires
- avoid contact with water in Medea Creek
- leave plants and animals where you find them; this is their home

- remember the Western Town is only a set, walk carefully on the boardwalks and do not lean or climb on the buildings
- respect the private property of our neighbors
- watch out for and avoid rattlesnakes and poison oak.



EXPLORING PARAMOUNT RANCH

Sugarloaf Peak dominates the skyline. This rugged basalt peak was created by volcanic activity about 15 million years ago. On its north side, a hiking trail follows the streambed up the canyon to a small grove of sycamore trees. The chaparral plants like scrub oak, laurel sumac, and chamise stay green year-round on Sugarloaf. The other side of the canyon, however, has a very different look to it. Here the coastal sage-scrub gives the hillside a reddish color in summer as these plants become dormant in the hot, dry months.

Medea Creek winds through a band of willows. At the southern end of the site the creekbed widens, and under the willows lies a rich carpet of dense, water-loving greenery. Even as the mountains dry out in summer, the water flowing down Medea Creek keeps this area cool, shady, and inviting for birds, rabbits, lizards and other small animals. Unfortunately the quality of the water is bad. Please do not drink, or go into, the water.

East of Medea Creek is an old roadbed. At one time this was a sports car racetrack. Now it is a quiet loop walk. The hill on the south side of the trail was completely burned in 1982. As the scrub oaks grow back, they provide food

for birds like the nuthatch, rufous-sided towhee and scrub jay. You can walk the trail that leads around the hill and up onto an open area overlooking Mulholland Highway. At the top this hill offers a view to the south of Castro Peak and the western portion of Malibu Creek State Park. The homes in the foreground are part of the Malibu Lake Mountain Club, a private residential community built in 1927.

The broad, open grassland that sweeps along Cornell Road is perhaps the most endangered of Paramount's resources. Oak-studded floodplains were vital to the lives of grizzly bears, deer, and many smaller animals as well as to the native people of the Santa Monica Mountains. Within this century the native grasses and valley oaks have disappeared because of cattle grazing, farming, and, more recently, urban development. The majestic valley oaks cannot withstand these pressures. In many areas, the oaks have died a few years after development has occurred. In an effort to better understand, preserve, and propagate the native grasses and oaks, a restoration zone has been established here at Paramount Ranch. As the study progresses year after year, the area within the zone will, hopefully, look more like this region

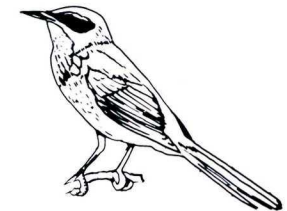
did when the Chumash Indians hunted bears and harvested wild chia seeds nearby.

The hillside east of Cornell Road is a pleasant backdrop for the rest of the ranch. Here groves of oak and walnut trees nestle along the base of the hills, providing a shady oasis. A trail follows the old roadbed to an overlook of Paramount Ranch. This area also burned in 1982. Compare the growth of the sages on these sunny slopes to the scrub oaks on the hillside between Cornell Road and Medea Creek.

Across Mulholland Highway is Malibu Creek State Park, with 15 miles of hiking and equestrian trails. The rolling hills and oak-dotted grasslands along Mulholland contrast sharply with the south side of Malibu Creek. Here the park land is more dramatic with some mountain peaks reaching over 2,000 feet in elevation. Hiking or horseback riding along the trails is the only way to see this wild and rugged backcountry. Malibu Creek State Park is open year-round, but like all recreation sites within Santa Monica Mountains Recreation Area, it may be closed at any time by high fire danger.

PLANNING YOUR VISIT

Paramount Ranch is open daily for walking, picnicking, and equestrian uses. A self-guided nature trail leads up Coyote Canyon behind the Western Town. Guided tours and evening programs can be presented by rangers or docents. Check the bulletin boards or program schedule for details. Paramount Ranch is also available for organized activities such as festivals or group picnics. For information contact National Park Service Headquarters in Woodland Hills at (818) 888-3770 (voice or TTY).



Paramount Ranch is located outside of Agoura, California, south of the Ventura (101) Freeway. Turn left at the Kanan Road exit and drive ¾ of a mile to Cornell Road. Turn left onto Cornell Road. Paramount Ranch is 2½ miles south. You can also reach Paramount Ranch from Mulholland Highway by turning north on Cornell Road. The entrance is ¾ of a mile north. A ranger station is located at the southern end of the parking area.

Paramount Ranch is a part of Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, a unit of the National Park System. A superintendent, whose address is 22900 Ventura Blvd., #140, Woodland Hills, CA 91364, is in immediate charge of the park.

