



There's no sign to alert you when you've crossed from the San Jacintos to the Northern Santa Rosa Mountains. But you'll know you're there when you reach the Indian Canyons, home to the largest system of native fan palm oases in the United States. East of Palm Canyon divide there's less of an alpine feel to the mountains and more desert influence.

While the San Jacintos claim photogenic star power, the Santa Rosas have a mystery that's equally appealing. You'll hop over endless boulders, climb alluvial fans, and stroll through dry washes. Pinyon pine and yucca dot the rolling plateaus at higher elevations. The Santa Rosas are home to an extraordinary diversity of plants and animals, including the endangered Peninsular bighorn sheep.

This area is accessible from many points, including the Indian Canyons in Palm Springs or the National Monument Visitor Center on Highway 74 in Palm Desert.

Palm Canyon Trail

16 miles, elevation change of 3,566 feet, strenuous.

From the Indian Canyons Trading Post, Palm Canyon Trail heads south in and along the canyon all the way to Highway 74 – 16 miles and 3,566 vertical feet away. Along the way, hikers experience a fascinating transition from Sonoran desert fan palm oases to cool pinyon juniper forest. The hike is also a lesson in geology. Watch for exposed bedrock tipped by the giant fault that separates the San Jacinto Mountains from the Santa Rosas.

Called "Trail of a Thousand Shrines," this was a major Cahuilla Indian route from the valley to the mountains. The canyon provided water, food, and other important resources for the native Cahuilla. The trail shrines may be gone, but archaeology still abounds. Please leave artifacts undisturbed for others to discover.

For a one-to-two-hour hike, follow Palm Canyon Trail through the main oasis, returning via Victor Trail on the cliff overlooking the canyon. To explore the upper reaches of Palm Canyon, stay on the trail as it heads south. You'll meander in and out of verdant oases for many miles.

For those who can cover long distances and navigate by map, there are many enticing destinations along Palm Canyon Trail: Little Paradise, Agua Bonita Spring, Hidden Falls, and trail connections up to the Pacific Crest Trail on the Desert Divide. Caution: Palm Canyon is a torrent during storms but has few reliable waterholes in drought. Stay on the trail and ask about local trail conditions when venturing beyond the main oasis.

Art Smith Trail

8.3 miles, elevation change of 1,465 feet, strenuous.

This is truly one of the signature trails in the National Monument, offering scenic views across the Coachella Valley to the Little San Bernardino Mountains and Joshua Tree National Park, and over the bustling cities of Palm Desert and Rancho Mirage. Hikers escape the sights and sounds of the urban area as the trail climbs through hidden canyons and alongside lush palm oases. Although the oases beckon, stick close to the trail to avoid disturbing desert animals that depend on these vital habitats.

Named for the longtime trail boss of the Desert Riders equestrian club, the Art Smith Trail starts at Highway 74 near the Visitor Center. You'll gain more than 1,400 feet in 8.3 miles, then come to the trail's intersection with Dunn Road, but don't expect to be picked up here as the road is closed to vehicle traffic. To travel another 8 miles to Palm Springs, pick up the Hahn Buena Vista Trail followed by the Wild Horse and Garstin Trails. Or you can descend to Cathedral City by way of Dunn Road and Cathedral Canyon Trail.

Hopalong Cassidy Trail

8.3 miles, elevation change of 1,345 feet, strenuous.

Hiking the Hopalong Cassidy Trail – named for the famous movie cowboy of the 1940s and '50s – is like taking a low-level airplane flight over residential enclaves and golf courses in Palm Desert. In places the trail clings to the mountainside while it slices across the escarpment. Be warned: You'll have to earn the great views along this rollercoaster trail. Whether you start at the Art Smith Trailhead – which requires a 1.5mile jaunt before you reach the "Hoppy" – or behind the Desert Crossing shopping center, you'll climb and descend again and again along the entire 8.3mile route.

For shorter hikes on the Hopalong Cassidy Trail, access the trail via the Homestead Trail from Homme-Adams Park, the Gabby Hayes Trail from Cahuilla Hills Park, or the Herb Jeffries Train near Fox Canyon just north of Cahuilla Hills Park. Once you're south of Homme-Adams Park, however, your only exit options are to turn around or go the distance.