



If you approach the National Monument from the west via San Geronio Pass, you'll first encounter Mount San Jacinto (10,834 feet), a landmark peak that is sacred to Indians all over Southern California. The San Jacinto Mountains are the high point of the Peninsular Ranges that run south from here to form the backbone of Baja California. In these mountains, topped with granite domes and spires, you'll feel like you're in a Sierra Club calendar. Mule deer and woodpeckers forage in forests of ponderosa and Jeffrey pine; streams slash through meadows dotted with lemon lily and azalea blossoms.

Often compared to the Sierra Nevada for their craggy elegance, the San Jacintos are accessible from the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway or from trailheads in Idyllwild. For hikers, the keyword is "steep." The mountains are famous for their vertical relief and their peacefulness – the rapid rise effectively mutes the buzz of cities below.

## Devils Slide Trail

2.5 miles, elevation change of 1,623 feet, strenuous.

From Humber Park in Idyllwild, Devils Slide Trail climbs steeply out of Strawberry Valley. As you climb, you'll enjoy good views of Lily and Suicide Rocks. Upon reaching Saddle Junction, where five trails meet, your options for continuing include an ascent of Tahquitz Peak (8,846 feet), an easy stroll to Skunk Cabbage Meadow, or a trek to San Jacinto Peak. Be sure to obtain a wilderness permit before starting up the trail.

If San Jacinto Peak is your goal, take the trail to the left of the saddle and climb steeply up the ridge following signs to Wellman divide. Along the way there is a large cienega with (usually) a good showing of wildflowers in spring and summer. Two miles after passing Wellman Divide, you'll reach the summit, which affords superb views of the Santa Rosa Mountains as well as Mount San Geronio, the highest peak in Southern California at 11,499 feet. This is a strenuous roundtrip hike of more than 14 miles with an elevation gain of over 4,000 feet.

**Be prepared!**

## Tramway to San Jacinto Peak

5.5 miles, elevation change of 2,455 feet, strenuous.

The easiest and most popular hike to the peak begins at the Mountain Station of the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. Leaving the Tram, descend into Long Valley and self-register for a Wilderness permit at the Mount San Jacinto State Park ranger station. Past the ranger station the trail traverses the tree-covered flanks of Long Valley Creek until reaching the broad grassy meadow of Round Valley. Deer are plentiful and relatively tame if you keep your distance.

Round Valley has numerous campsites for overnight hikers. Be sure to obtain a permit for camping before leaving the ranger station (reservations are a good idea, but not required). You'll quickly discover that the trail from Round Valley to Wellman Divide is the steepest part of the hike, but this section is only one mile long. From here follow the clearly signed trail to the peak. This approach is easier than the hike from Idyllwild, but is still strenuous with an 11 mile roundtrip and elevation gain of about 2,500 feet.

## Long Valley Loop Trail

1.2 miles, elevation change of 138 feet, easy.

For an aerial view of Palm Springs and other desert cities without boarding an airplane, try the Long Valley Loop. This short, easy hike circles Long Valley and includes overlooks of the Coachella Valley, with views as far as the Salton Sea.

From the Tram's Mountain Station, descend into Long Valley via the concrete path. The trail (to your left) that begins where the concrete ends is clearly signed. Most years, visitors enjoy abundant wildflowers and birdlife as they walk alongside Long Valley Creek, which flows in springs and early summer.

## Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail

The San Jacinto Mountains portion of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) has been called the most diverse of all the segments. The entire 2,600 mile trail stretches from Mexico to Canada. From the high point in this section, hikers going north descend some 7,000 feet in about 20 miles, passing through varied terrain from pine forest to desert scrub. Hikers who decide to take on the entire 57 mile San Jacinto leg of the PCT will need to consult a guidebook to navigate the sometimes confusing network of trails – it's not a straight shot. Finding water along the way is also a challenge, so long distance hikers are advised to carry a minimum of four liters of water to start, and plan to replenish at a spring or a water source off the trail.

To get started, or to sample the route, drive 23 miles up Highway 74 from Palm Desert and look for the PCT sign and trailhead to your right along a straight stretch of the road, about one mile east of Highway 371. Or to start from the bottom and hike uphill, begin from the village of Snow Creek near the junction of Highway 111 and Interstate 10. (Be sure to park before the village sign on Snow Creek Road, not in the village itself.)

From Highway 74, the PCT takes you through a tangle of Manzanita, yucca, and ribbonwood. Six miles from the start, the trail tops out on a long ridge called the Desert Divide, following it for roughly 20 miles. (Near the junction of the PCT and the ridge, the detour to Live Oak Spring makes for a bucolic lunch stop or turnaround.) Eventually you come to a major intersection of trails at Saddle Junction, and then pass Strawberry Cienega en route to another long ridge-walk atop Fuller Ridge. Finally, you tackle the famous switchbacks – a descent that seems to some hikers to take forever – to a paved road that leads to Snow Creek Village. The official end of this section is under the I10 freeway at Haugen Lehmann Way, but many hikers jump off the trail at the village.