



Traveling southeast past Highway 74, you'll enter the Southern Santa Rosas. If you venture onto the trails in this area, you'll be visiting places known to few, even locals. The highest peaks – pine and fir clad Santa Rosa (8,070 feet) and Toro (8,716 feet) – don't jump out at you like Mount San Jacinto does. (Look for the bull's horns of Toro Peak above Palm Desert.) The landmarks here are subtle, and the vegetation varied. Pinyon-juniper forests adorn the mid-elevation country. On lower slopes, hikers dodge agave spears and the so-called "jumping" cholla cactus. Cahuilla Indians once harvested pinyon nuts, acorns, yucca fibers and wild game on these slopes, and left behind many of the trails you may walk on today.

Cactus Spring Trail

11.7 miles, elevation change of 2,639 feet, strenuous.

The Cactus Spring Trail reaches into the heart of the Santa Rosa Wilderness, one of the most rugged and remote areas in Southern California. Access is from the Sawmill Trailhead off Highway 74 near the community of Pinyon. Several distinct trail segments provide a variety of experiences. At 2.5 miles, the trail crosses Horsethief Creek – a perfect stopover destination. The creek normally flows year round while tall shade trees reach skyward between steep canyon walls. En route, hikers encounter cactus gardens, pinyon pines, and junipers – and in wet years, profuse spring wildflowers. Look for the abandoned dolomite mine along the way.

Ambitious hikers can aim for Cactus Spring, 4 miles from the trailhead, or Agua Alta Spring 8.8 miles out. Not far from Cactus Spring, the Guadalupe Trail branches off to La Quinta Cove. Or complete the 17.6 mile route to Martinez Canyon Trailhead. Scenic views, intimate canyons, and solitude characterize these hikes. The trail beyond Cactus Spring, however, is difficult to follow. Hikers venturing past this point should be experienced and well prepared. There is little shade and water is scarce, so carry an ample supply.

Boo Hoff Trail

8.8 miles, elevation change of 1,916 feet, strenuous.

To walk the Boo Hoff Trail is to trace the history of trail use in the Santa Rosas. The trail started as an historic Indian path and was later improved by the Desert Riders, an equestrian group that did much to protect and enhance our trails. It's named for a founder of the group. Access the trail from the top of La Quinta Cove.

As you venture from the urban edge of La Quinta into the Santa Rosa Wilderness, you'll soon forget how close you are to civilization. Up here, stately ocotillos burst with green leaves a few days after a rain. Barrel cacti cling to the rugged slopes. You are now in the habitat of the bighorn sheep, so keep an eye out for them. Please stay on the trail to limit your impact.

Along the way, enjoy spectacular vistas of the Salton Sea and the peaks of San Jacinto and San Gorgonio. You may continue deeper into the Santa Rosa Wilderness via the Guadalupe Trail, which can be difficult to follow in places – hiker rescues are not uncommon here. This is a strenuous hike so be sure you know the route and are prepared. You can also stay on the Boo Hoff as it heads east toward Lake Cahuilla; end your hike here if you have arranged for a shuttle. Or loop back to La Quinta Cove via the Cove to Lake Trail – a roundtrip distance of 12 miles.

Randall Henderson Trail

2.4 miles, elevation change of 423 feet, easy.

This easy trail offers a good introduction to desert hiking for the novice. Starting at the National Monument Visitor Center on Highway 74, this loop trail – named for a founder of Palm Desert – gently rises about 400 feet over its 2.4 mile route. Typical plants of the Colorado Desert, such as creosote bush and cholla cactus, adorn the trail as it meanders through small canyons and across low ridges. Check with Visitor Center staff for times and dates of guided hikes during the fall and winter months. Parking is available at the Visitor Center during operating hours, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. (October-April) and 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. (May-September).