

# San Mateo Canyon Wilderness Trails

**Trabuco Ranger District** (951) 736-1811  
**Cleveland National Forest**



**Wilderness trails are designated for hiking and equestrian use. No bicycles or motorized vehicles.**

**Registration required:** Day use sign-in at trailhead. **Overnight permit** issued by Trabuco District Office. (951) 736-1811.

**Plan ahead and prepare. Check on conditions before you visit. Take a Forest Service trail map. Carry plenty of water.**  
**Trails open year round. Best time to visit is October through May. Group size limited to 15.**

**DAY VISIT** - Sign in at the trailhead.  
**OVERNIGHT VISIT** requires free overnight permit.

Obtain permit from **Trabuco Ranger District office**  
(951) 736-1811 M-F 8-4:30

E-mail and faxed permit applications are welcome. Call for current forest information, road, and trail conditions; forest maps, overnight wilderness permits, and vendors.

## **Bear Canyon Trail (5W09)**

**Distance:** 3.2 miles Hwy 74 to Four Corners.

**Difficulty:** Easy to Moderate

**Elevation change:** 700 feet

**Parking:** The San Juan Loop Trailhead is located on Hwy 74 (Ortega Hwy) across from Ortega Oaks Candy Store.

**Access:** Trail begins south of Hwy 74, west of the store.

**Trail Notes:** Provides an out and back opportunity into the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness with a variety of options for the adventurous. The shortest journey takes you to popular Pigeon Springs, located near the head of Bear Canyon, a round trip of about 5.5 miles (8.9 km.). Seasonal water source at Pigeon Springs 2.7 miles from San Juan Loop parking lot. The Four Corners trail junction is another .5 miles (.8 km) farther up Bear Cyn.

## **Bear Canyon Trail to Sitton Peak**

**Distance:** 9.8 miles round-trip from Ortega Hwy.  
1.7 miles from Four Corners.

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous **Elevation gain:** 1300 ft

**Trail Notes:** From Four Corners, trail climbs west to the wilderness boundary then becomes Sitton Peak trail (7S09). 1.3 miles from 4 Corners to narrow trail (.4 mi) up to Sitton Peak summit (3,273 feet). Expansive views. Sitton Peak trail from wilderness boundary to the Lucas Canyon trail is 6.7 miles.

## **Bear Ridge Trail:**

**Distance** 1.5 miles **Difficulty:** easy

**Trail notes:** The Bear Ridge trail combined with the Bear Canyon Trail completes the Bear Canyon Loop Trail at 6.8 miles. It returns from Four Corners via the ridge then reconnects to the Bear Canyon trail.

## **Bluewater Trail (5W03)**

**Distance:** 4.3 miles **Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous  
**Elevation change:** 1800 feet

**Access:** The Bluewater trail can be reached from Bear Canyon, Lucas Canyon, Tenaja, San Mateo, and Verdugo trails.

## **Clark Trail (5W13)**

**Distance:** 5.5 miles

**Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous

**Elevation change:** 1,700 feet from San Mateo Creek to East Clark trailhead. 1300 feet from San Mateo Creek to Indian Potrero.

**Access:** The Clark trail can be reached from the Indian Potrero and the San Mateo Canyon trails.

**Trail Notes:** The East Clark trail includes two canyons, one of which is Cold Spring canyon with a heavy cover of oak and sycamores along the small stream.

## **Fisherman's Camp Trail (5W11)**

**Distance:** 1.6 miles **Difficulty:** Easy to moderate

**Elevation change:** 550 feet

**Parking:** I-15 to Clinton Keith Road, turn South on Tenaja Road for 9.9 miles, then right on Cleveland Forest road (7S04). Fisherman's Camp parking is 3 miles beyond forest gate at Tenaja trailhead. Limited parking.

**Access:** This trail takes you down to Fisherman's Camp and connects to the San Mateo and Tenaja trails.

**Trail notes:** Fisherman's Camp is a portal to many trails.

## **Indian Potrero Trail (6W08)**

**Distance:** 5.0 miles

**Access:** Public access is from the San Mateo and West Clark trails or from Oak Flats.

**"Distance"** refers to the length of trail described.

Add mileage for each connecting trail on your route!

***Take a trail map and carry plenty of water!***

Dogs must be restrained on a leash at all times.



Forest Service  
Pacific Southwest  
Region

Cleveland National Forest  
<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/cleveland/>  
Updated July 2007

## **LEAVE NO TRACE**

1. Plan ahead and prepare
2. Travel and camp on durable surfaces
3. Dispose of waste properly
4. Leave what you find
5. No wood or charcoal fires
6. Respect wildlife
7. Be considerate of other visitors.

### **Lucas Canyon Trail (6W13)**

**Distance:** 8.9 miles **Difficulty:** Moderate to strenuous  
**Elevation change:** 2800 feet

**Access:** The Lucas Canyon trail can be reached via the Sitton Peak Truck Trail or the Verdugo trail at 4 Corners  
**Trail notes:** Trail is extremely steep at each end and moderate in the middle.

### **Morgan Trail (5W02)**

**Distance:** 4.2 miles (Add 1.1 mile if exiting at Bear Canyon trailhead at Ortega Highway/Candy Store.

**Difficulty:** Moderate **Elevation change:** 720 feet  
**Access to Parking:** Highway 74 (Ortega Highway) to South Main Divide Road, then south 2.8 miles to the upper trailhead, located on the southeast side of the road. Access south end from Bear Canyon trail. Park at San Juan Loop parking lot on Hwy 74.

**Trail notes:** From trailhead on the South Main Divide road, the trail crosses a gentle divide and descends into Morrell Canyon. After exiting the canyon and traversing a broad ridge, the trail turns westward to skirt a private in-holding, crosses Morrell Canyon, characterized by oak woodlands, large boulders and grassy areas then traverses along the north side of Round Potrero (the round pasture) before resuming a descent to the junction with the Bear Canyon trail. Go north to reach the Ortega Hwy or south to continue on Bear Canyon trail.

### **Oak Flats (6W14)**

**Distance:** 1.0 miles  
**Difficulty:** Easy **Elevation change:** minor  
**Access:** This trail connects the Verdugo to the Lucas and Bluewater trail intersection.

**Trail notes:** Oak rimmed native grasslands. Bounded by the Verdugo trail to the north, the Bluewater trail on the east and the Lucas Canyon trail on the west, scenic Oak Flats is a good destination for a long (11.8) mile round trip from the Bear Canyon trailhead.

#### **ORTEGA HIGHWAY DRIVING DISTANCES:**

**LAKE ELSINORE:** From Grand Ave. at Hwy 74/Ortega Hwy. follow Ortega Hwy 5.5 miles to South Main Divide Road or 10.5 miles to Bear Canyon & San Juan Loop Parking Lot.

**ORANGE COUNTY:** From Interstate 5 follow Hwy 74/Ortega Hwy. for 19 miles to the Bear Canyon & San Juan Loop Parking Lot or 24.7 miles to South Main Divide Road.

### **San Mateo Trail (5W05)**

**Distance:** 8.5 miles **Difficulty:** Easy to Moderate  
**Elevation change:** 1,300 feet

**Access to Parking:** From Interstate 15, take Clinton Keith Road west, continue on Tenaja Road. Trailhead is 15 miles from I-15. See below for driving details.

**Access:** The San Mateo Canyon trail trailhead is at the Tenaja Falls Trailhead. The southwest end of trail connects to west Clark and Indian Potrero trails. This is a very remote and rugged section of the wilderness.

### **Tenaja Trail (5W07)**

**Distance:** 3.5 mi. from trailhead to Fisherman's camp. Add 1 mile along San Mateo trail then north 5.1 miles to \$ Corners. Total trail is 9.6 miles.

**Difficulty:** Moderate/Strenuous **Elevation change:** 2600'  
**Access:** The southern portion of trail, a shaded canyon along San Mateo Creek, overlaps the San Mateo trail for 1 mile west of Fisherman's Camp. The northern section, a ridgeline trail (900' climb), ends at 4 Corners.

### **Tenaja Falls Trail (5W04)**

**Distance:** .7 mi to falls then 5.4 miles to the Morgan trail. Total trail length is 6.1 miles.

**Difficulty:** Moderate **Elevation change:** 1800 feet  
**Access to Parking:** From Interstate 15, take Clinton Keith Road west, continue right on Tenaja Road and right on Cleveland Forest Road. Trailhead is 15 miles from I-15. See below for driving details.

**Trail notes:** Tenaja Falls are dramatic when water is flowing. Surrounded by boulders and great views. Abundance of poison oak year round. A No Alcohol ordinance is in effect at this trailhead. The total miles from Morgan to Tenaja Falls is approximately 7.7 miles with an approximate gain 350 ft./loss 1200 ft. Upper Tenaja Falls trail connects to the Morgan trail 2.3 miles from South Main Divide.

### **Verdugo Trail (6W12)**

**Distance:** 3.3 miles **Difficulty:** Moderate to Strenuous  
**Elevation change:** 700 feet **Access:** Eastern trailhead is at Four Corners. Trail drops into upper Bluewater Canyon. Western connection at Lucas Canyon trail.

#### **DRIVING DIRECTIONS FROM I-15 TO TENAJA, FISHERMAN'S CAMP AND TENAJA FALLS TRAILHEADS:**

I-15 to Clinton Keith road, go west. Clinton Keith becomes Tenaja Road after 2 miles. Stay on Tenaja Road for another 8 miles to Cleveland Forest Road. Turn right on Cleveland Forest Road one mile to Wilderness boundary and Tenaja trailhead parking. Road becomes South Main Divide (7S04). Fisherman's Camp trailhead is another 3 miles north along road. Tenaja Falls trailhead is another 2 miles north. Ortega Highway (Hwy 74) is 15 miles north of Tenaja Falls.

*In 1964, Congress established the National Wilderness Preservation System under the Wilderness Act. Wilderness is found in 44 states and contributes to the ecological, economic and social health of our country.*

## **WILDERNESS REGULATIONS**

**Overnight stays** in the San Mateo Canyon Wilderness require a permit (free). Call (951) 736-1811 for information. Visitors carry their overnight permit with them.

**Day visitors** sign in at the trailhead.

**Group size** limited to total number of 15 heartbeats—human, horse, dog, or pack animal.

**Pack it in, Pack it out!** Pack out all refuse and toilet paper.

**Campsite Location:** Camp at least 100 feet from established routes, streams, springs and meadows.

**Sanitation:** Dispose of body waste and wash water more than 100 feet from trails, streams, springs, meadows and campsites. Use a shovel or hand trowel to dig a hole 6 inches deep. Cover and compact soil after use. Pack toilet paper out with other trash.

**Water:** Treat water taken from stream or creek before drinking.

**Stock:** Keep stock 100 feet from lakes, streams, and campsites. Keep stock single file on trails. Stay on trails. Bring sufficient food as grazing is prohibited. Water at rocky spot or from bucket. Choose campsite area able to withstand impact and does not require clearing. Use natural fiber ropes. Do not tie pack or saddle stock to trees except while loading or unloading. Always scatter manure piles to aid decomposition, discourage flies, and as a courtesy to others.

### **NO WOOD OR CHARCOAL FIRES IN THE SAN MATEO CANYON WILDERNESS.**

Use portable liquid or solid fuel stoves only.

**Firearms / hunting:** No target shooting allowed. Discharging of firearms is permitted only for the taking of game during appropriate hunting seasons. Hunting License required.

**Resource Protection:** Do not shortcut trail switchbacks. Shortcuts enable soil erosion and can impact the habitat and watershed. Do not create, cut or maintain non-system trails. Cutting or damaging trees alive or dead is prohibited. Volunteer and help us maintain this resource.

***Mechanized and motorized vehicles and equipment (including chainsaws, bicycles, carts) are prohibited.***

Use of non-motorized wheelchairs for persons requiring assistance is allowable.

## **Trabuco Ranger District**

1147 E. Sixth Street Corona, CA 92879  
Phone (951) 736-1811 Fax:(951) 736-3200

Call or visit for information, current forest and road conditions, maps, overnight wilderness permits, Annual Forest Adventure Pass and, vendors who sell forest passes and maps.

### **Cleveland National Forest website**

[Http://fsweb.cleveland.r5.fs.fed.us](http://fsweb.cleveland.r5.fs.fed.us)

**CNF Emergency Phone:** weekends and evenings  
**Dispatch (619) 557-5262**

## **Recreation Use Fee Area**

Trailhead parking requires parking fees. The Annual Forest Adventure Pass is recommended. Nearest day use fees stations include: San Juan Loop parking lot, Tenaja trailhead or Tenaja Falls trailhead. Place the receipt, or your Annual Pass, on your dashboard.

Annual Pass: \$30. Day Pass/Day Use fee: \$5

Fees are waived twice each year:

National Trails Day - first Saturday of June

Public Lands Appreciation Day - last Saturday of Sept.

## **Santa Ana Mountains Natural History Association**

For information on interpretive programs presented on the Trabuco Ranger District, contact the SAMNHA website at: [www.freewebs.com/santaanamountains](http://www.freewebs.com/santaanamountains) or call the Trabuco District volunteer coordinator.

## **Volunteer Opportunities!**

The Trabuco Ranger District has a wide variety of volunteer opportunities available including trail, recreation site, and sign maintenance; habitat restoration; road and trail patrols; program development; and clerical. Eagle Scout and Community Service projects are also available. Call the district volunteer coordinator at (951) 736-1811.

## **Wilderness Use Restrictions:**

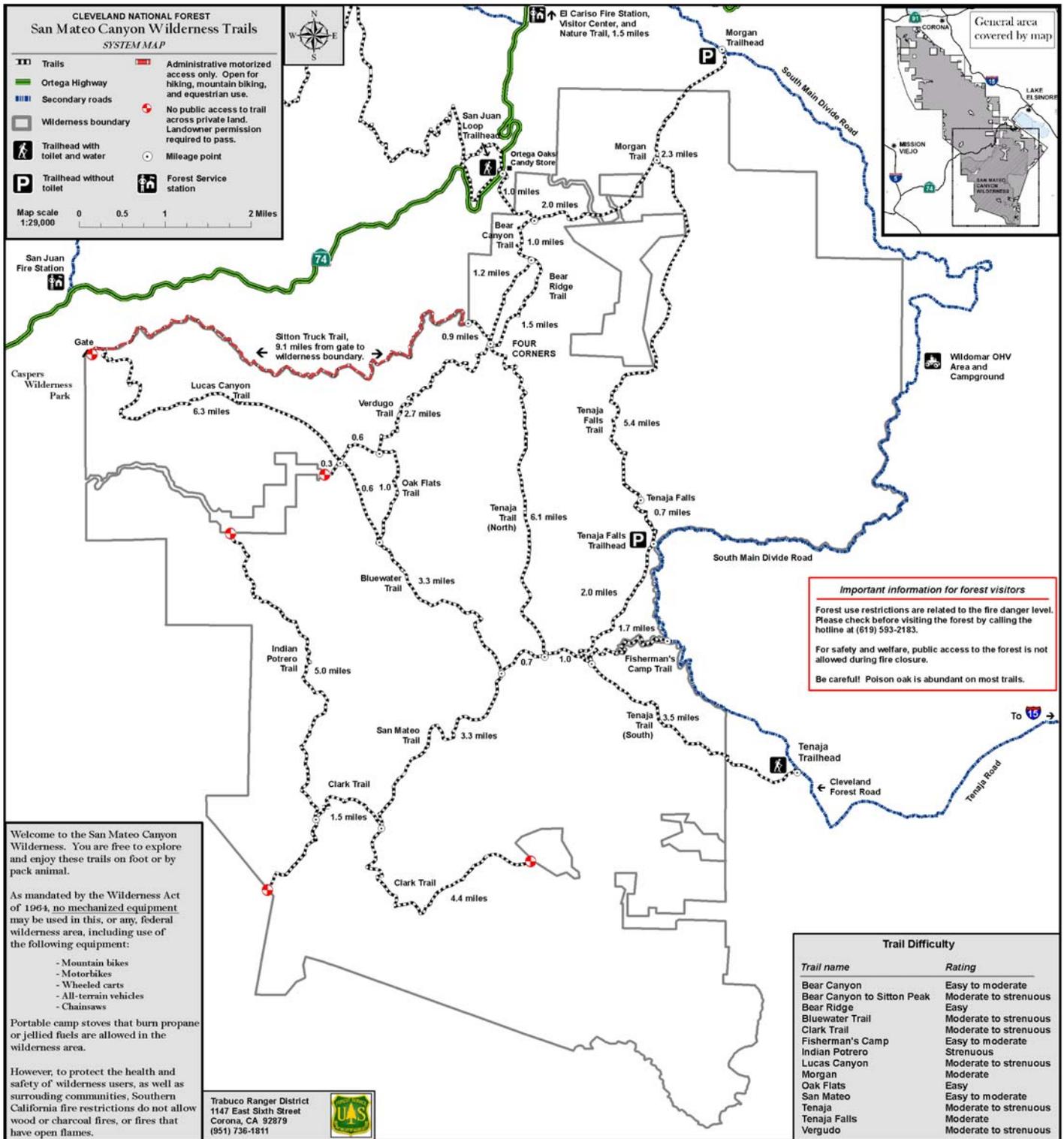
Pursuant to 36 CFR, Section 261.50(a) & (b), the following Act is prohibited within all National Forest Wilderness Areas, Forest Service, U. S. Department of Agriculture: Possessing or using a wagon, cart, wheelbarrow, bicycle or other vehicle. Wheelchairs OK.

### **NO MOUNTAIN BIKES OR MOTORBIKES.**

Violation of the above prohibited Act is punishable by a fine of not more than \$5000 and/or imprisonment for not more than six (6) months (16 USC 551; PL 98-473).

The U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) prohibits discrimination in all its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, genetic information, political beliefs, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program. (Not all prohibited bases apply to all programs.) Persons with disabilities who require alternative means for communication of program information (Braille, large print, audiotape, etc.) should contact USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TDD). To file a complaint of discrimination, Write to USDA, Director, Office of Civil Rights, 1400 Independence Avenue, S.W., Washington, D.C. 20250-9410 or call (800) 795-3272 (voice) or (202) 720-6382 (TDD). USDA is an equal opportunity provider and employer.

*Wilderness lands are designated by Congress for preservation and protection in their natural condition and provide outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation.*



Chaparral and coastal sage scrub dominate the landscape of the **San Mateo Canyon Wilderness**. Many deep drainages hide a lush growth of vegetation, with oak woodlands thick in the lower elevations. Interesting geological formations. Annual rainfall averages 15 to 20 inches, most of it falling in winter and early spring; flash floods rip through narrow canyons in heavy downpours. Spring brings a wealth of wildflower blooms. Summer tends to be very hot and dry, though you may find small pools in San Mateo Canyon most of year. Keep an eye open for wildlife: 139 bird species, 37 mammal species, 46 reptile and amphibian species, seven species of fish. Lizards, rattlesnakes and coyotes may be seen; the elusive mountain lion is present but rarely seen. Poison oak may be abundant.