

# TEN LOST TRAILS OF THE LOS PADRES

Los Padres ForestWatch  
June 2012



# TEN LOST TRAILS OF THE LOS PADRES

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# ACCESSING YOUR PUBLIC LANDS



**The communities we call home, throughout California's Central Coast, benefit tremendously by having large expanses of open space in our backyard.** Places like the Los Padres National Forest provide clean air and drinking water to our towns and farms, enhance tourism and local businesses, and improve our quality of life. They also offer exciting recreation opportunities like hiking, bicycling, horseback riding, camping, fishing, hunting, and wildlife viewing. It's easy to understand why this land has been included in the national forest system and why people want and deserve to enjoy it.

Unfortunately, as neighboring land ownership changes, access to these public lands via established and historically used trails is no longer guaranteed. Over time, trailheads have been blocked off by gates and signs, restricting the public's access to public lands and funneling an increasing number of forest users onto a dwindling trail system. **This report highlights ten trails across the Los Padres National Forest where historic public access has been restricted.** The result is the compounding loss of public land access.

All is not lost though. The public does have the ability to stand up for their rights to access public lands. Government agencies are rarely enforcing right of access or pursuing the establishment of easements across private properties. Therefore, **the burden falls on the public and local land conservation organizations to preserve their own access to these special places.** Groups of concerned citizens are working with willing landowners to establish mutually-agreeable public access rights and restrictions. Under California law, the public has a right to continue to use historic trails if the trail was used by the public prior to 1972. This right can only be established in federal court, and only if people who used the trail prior to 1972 come forward and testify to establish proof of historic public access.

# WHAT YOU CAN DO

Public access to public lands is a deeply-rooted American tradition, and forest users must act now so that we can continue to enjoy these majestic landscapes for generations to come. Here's what you can do to help ensure the public's right of access to national forest lands:

- Defend the public's right to access public lands. **Write to your Forest Supervisor today** at Los Padres National Forest, Attn: Forest Supervisor, 6755 Hollister Ave., Suite 150, Santa Barbara, CA, 93117; Ask the agency to actively work to promote and restore public access along historically-used trails.
- **Support nonprofit organizations like Los Padres ForestWatch and local land trusts** who are working to preserve historic public access, by acquiring private land and by defending historic public access rights in court.
- **Help us gather and record information** of individuals who have used any of these trails prior to 1972. Photos, old maps, and hiking guides can all be used as evidence of historical use.
- Suggest that our state legislators enact a law similar to the Coastal Act of 1972 (which grants public access to the coast) that guarantees the right of public access to national forests, national parks, and other public lands. **Write or email your state legislators today!**



# MIDDLE FORK MATILIJA TRAIL

## OJAI

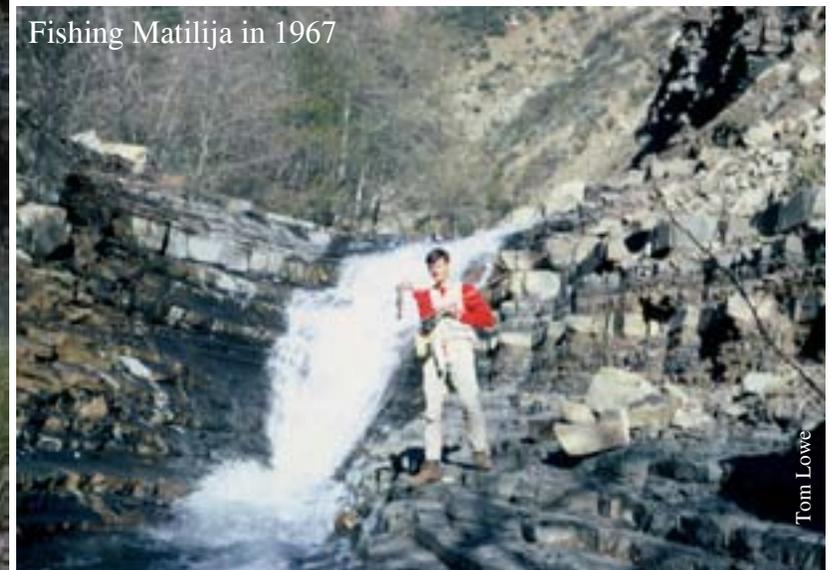
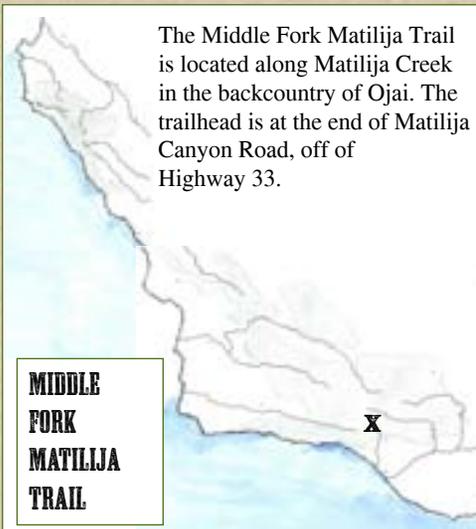
### TRAIL TALK

*“Few hikes anywhere match the beauty and diversity of the Middle Fork of Matilija Canyon.”*

- Fred Volz, 1988,  
*Ojai Hikes*

This popular trail, less than 30 minutes outside Ojai, leads to swimming holes, unique geologic formations, and the beautiful Matilija Falls. Records and photos exist of people enjoying Matilija Falls as far back as 80 years ago. Recently the landowner of a private inholding that straddles the Middle Fork of Matilija Creek began intimidating hikers, bikers, and equestrians who were using this historic route. No other access to Matilija Falls exists. ForestWatch and a coalition of conservation organizations, local businesses, and outdoor enthusiasts banded together to preserve public access along this historic route. This group took statements from dozens of hikers who had hiked the trail in the 1970s or prior, thus establishing a case of historic use that will help to secure a permanent public trail easement.

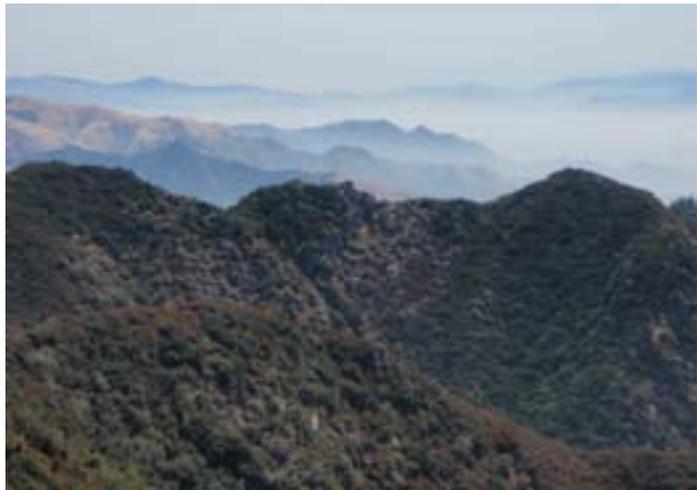
Interestingly, so much public attention was directed at the trail that the Forest Service stepped in to survey the situation and soon found that they already have an existing easement across the property. Three options now exist for the future of this trail: (1) determine the exact location of the historic Forest Service easement and reestablish it (the old path of access was known as the Bald Hills Trail and was along a ridgeline to the east of Matilija Creek;); (2) the property owner works with the Forest Service in selecting a new route across the property or; (3) the old easement is relinquished and the route remains as it has been the last few decades in the creekbed itself.



# SANTA PAULA PEAK TRAIL

## SANTA PAULA

The Santa Paula Peak Trail offers a challenging nine mile round-trip hike to the 4,911-foot mountain summit that can be found on official Forest Service maps from as far back as 1938 and still appears on today's current map. This is only trailhead between Piru and Santa Paula Canyon, rendering inaccessible 24 miles along the southern extent of the Los Padres National Forest. Access is currently blocked by a locked gate and "No Trespassing" signs on Timber Canyon Road just off of Highway 126. You were still able to drive 4.5 miles up Timber Canyon Road to the trailhead recently, as described in Dennis Gagnon's *Hike the Santa Barbara Backcountry*. The peak can still be accessed from the northwest by hiking up through Santa Paula Canyon and on through Bluff and Cienega Camps (a much longer and circuitous route), but approaching from the south side up Santa Paula Peak Trail is restricted.



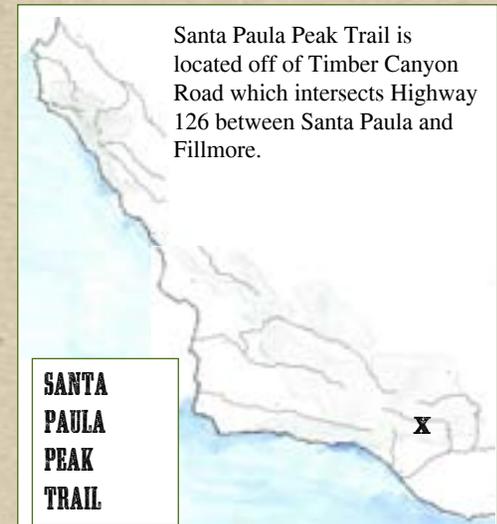
Though the current landowner does allow selective access to the trailhead by permission, future access is not guaranteed should the property change hands. It is up to the public at large to continue the effort to secure open access to Santa Paula Peak Trail.



## TRAIL TALK

*“The view to the west is remarkable, staring down on upper Ojai Valley. To the north is Devil’s Gate, the Sespe, Topa Topa... It is quite a vista.”*

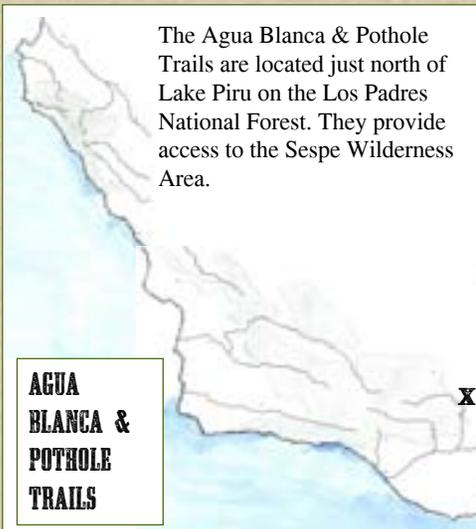
**- David Stillman,  
backcountry blogger**



## TRAIL TALK

*“For the hiker, one of the most intriguing routes through condor country is via the Pothole Trail.”*

*- John McKinney, 1991, The LA Times*



# AGUA BLANCA & POTHOLE TRAILS PIRU

The trailheads for these hikes are on the northern end of Lake Piru. To access them, forest users must pay a fee at the entrance gate to the Lake Piru Recreational Area, even if they are solely trying to access the Los Padres National Forest and the Sespe Wilderness Area. The only way to access the area is to pay the \$10-\$13 per day entrance fee (depending on the season) and then leave your car in the parking lots approximately four miles south of the trailheads. This fee can quickly become a financial barrier to those interested in a multi-day excursion into the forest; a week of backpacking can cost almost \$100 just to leave your car parked in the Lake Piru parking lots.

Local groups are working with the agencies involved in management of the area (the U.S. Forest Service and United Water Conservation District) to establish new trailheads for these hikes leading from the Lake Piru Recreational Area, in hopes of avoiding the fee and allowing continued access to the Sespe Wilderness.



# HOT SPRINGS TRAIL SANTA BARBARA



**SUCCESS  
STORY**

Montecito's Hot Springs Trail runs through Hot Springs Canyon where hikers experience a vast expanse of oaks, sycamores, chaparral, and creeks. About 1.3 miles into the hike there are wonderful ocean views and sandstone rock formations to enjoy. As part of a popular network of trails in the front-country of Montecito, Hot Springs Canyon has been enjoyed by recreational users for decades—even though it was privately owned. The canyon features unique mineral hot springs and the ruins of the former Hot Springs Resort, which existed there for more than 130 years before it burned in 1964.

The property encompassing Hot Springs Canyon consisted of six legal parcels (462 acres total) zoned for residential use. When it came up for sale the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County quickly swung into action with the goal of purchasing the property and placing it in public ownership so it could never be developed. In March of 2012 the goal was met, the property was purchased entirely with private contributions and Hot Springs Trail was thus forever protected. The Land Trust will now work to transfer ownership of the land over to the U.S. Forest Service so it becomes part of the Los Padres National Forest to be enjoyed in perpetuity.

## TRAIL TALK

*“Hot Springs Canyon is a labor of love that will be enjoyed by generations to come.”*

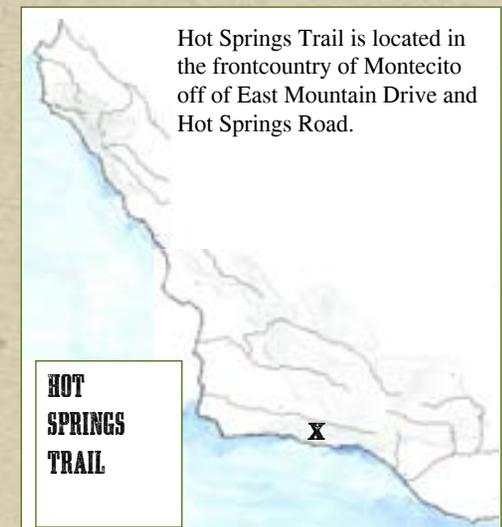
**- Michael Feeney,  
Executive Director,  
The Land Trust  
for Santa Barbara  
County**



Michael Feeney



Michelle Rhea



# TRAIL TALK

*“The people I have talked to are excited about being able to walk up in the mountains they enjoy viewing every day.”*

**- Bud Girard,  
Co-Chair, Friends  
of Franklin Trail**



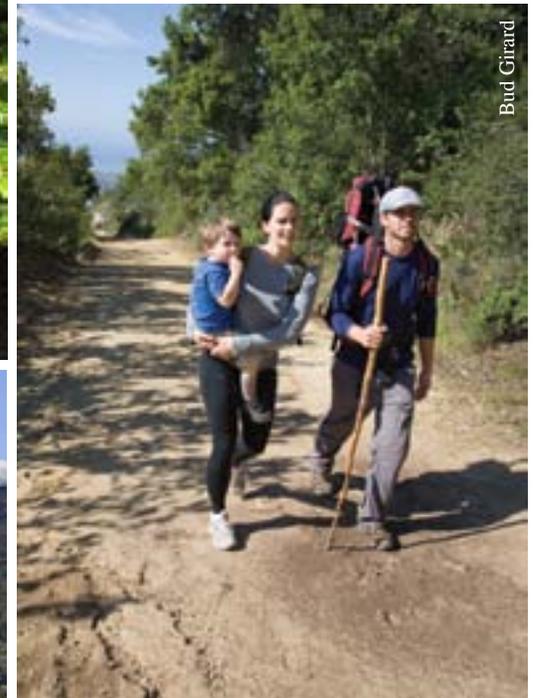
# FRANKLIN TRAIL CARPINTERIA



For many years, there has not been a direct link from Carpinteria to any of the wonderful trails in its surrounding frontcountry mountains. Trailheads for the Franklin Trail and the Rincon Trail were both closed off from public access in the 1970s, but unlike so many other stories of blocked public access, this one may have a happy ending. In 2011, a group of dedicated Carpinteria community members created Friends of Franklin Trail to reopen the historic Franklin Trail which runs from Carpinteria High School up and over the Santa Ynez Mountains to Jameson Lake.

Working cooperatively with landowners, the County of Santa Barbara, and the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County, Friends of Franklin Trail raised the more than \$450,000 needed to complete construction of the trail. With a school district license and three easements obtained by County Parks in place, the trail project will involve a range of construction projects with the goal of total completion in 2013.

Once complete, the Franklin Trail will provide five miles of multi-use trail for hikers, bikers and equestrians, connecting Carpinteria to the Los Padres National Forest and its beloved backcountry.



Bud Girard

# ROCKY RIDGE & BULL RIDGE TRAILS CUYAMA VALLEY

These two trails are located in the remote Cuyama Valley, two hours from Santa Barbara between Interstate 5 and Highway 101. They appear on Forest Service maps from 1926 until the present, and driving to their trailheads is mentioned in hiking books published as recently as the 1990s. Rocky Ridge Trail follows a creek up Lion Canyon to a ridgeline with views of endless chaparral and the Cuyama Valley. At the top of the trail sits Painted Rock, a significant collection of pictographs. The Bull Ridge Trail is an old jeep trail that follows the top of Bull Ridge through heavy chaparral, and then descends more steeply via some switchbacks to the bottom of Newsome Canyon.

To access the trailheads the public has long had to cross over private property. The Forest Service has not had any legal public easements across this property to the forest boundary, although a ranger hut was stationed at the trailhead several decades ago. Despite that, the trails were regularly used until a new oil company purchased the property. The company blocked off the trailheads at the end of Perkins Road with a gate that is quickly encountered after turning off Highway 166. The Forest Service has attempted to establish public easements with the new owner to provide access to the trails but no headway has been made.



Roy Randall



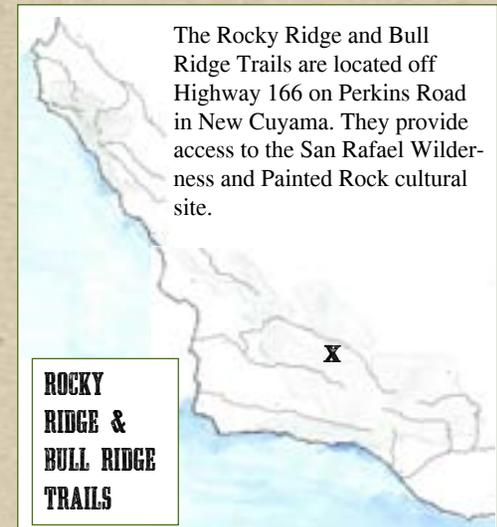
View down Lion Canyon to the Cuyama Valley

Craig Carey

## TRAIL TALK

*“In the springtime the wildflower displays are exceptional. A mystical air seems to shroud the whole place.”*

**- Dennis Gagon,  
1986, from *Hike  
The Santa Barbara  
Backcountry***



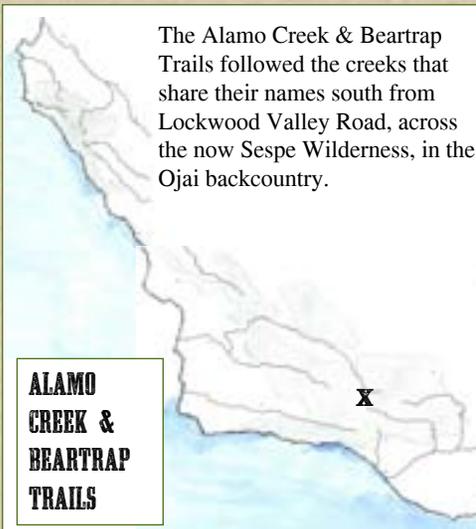
The Rocky Ridge and Bull Ridge Trails are located off Highway 166 on Perkins Road in New Cuyama. They provide access to the San Rafael Wilderness and Painted Rock cultural site.

**ROCKY  
RIDGE &  
BULL RIDGE  
TRAILS**

## TRAIL TALK

*“...follow the Beartrap Trail (23W02) over a ridge and down to Upper Reyes Camp in 3 miles.”*

**- Dennis Gagon, 1974, from *Hiking The Santa Barbara Backcountry***



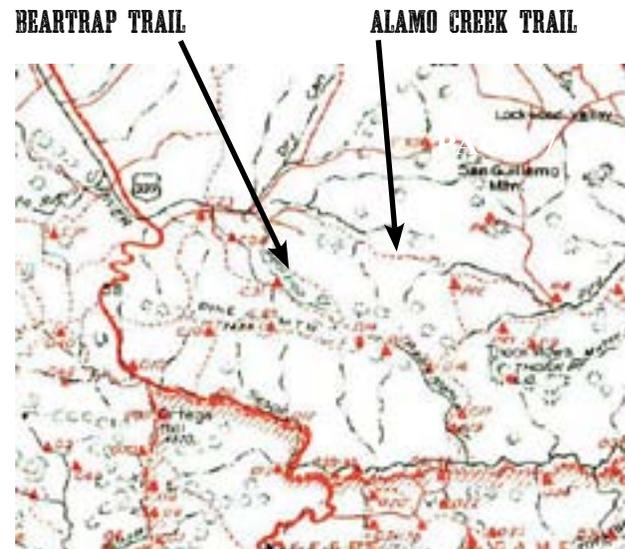
# ALAMO CREEK & BEARTRAP TRAILS LOCKWOOD VALLEY

Seen distinctly on old Forest Service maps, and described in detail in old hiking books, the trails along Alamo Creek and Beartrap Creek were historically used as connectors from the Cuyama River headwaters to backcountry locations in the area that is now called the Sespe Wilderness Area.

Accessible into the 1960s, the Beartrap Trail left the Reyes Creek Roadhead uphill through chaparral, traversed “stately bigcone spruce sentinels,” and eventually dropped down to Beartrap Campground (which is still used today along the Gene Marshall Piedra Blanca National Recreation Trail). This campground was the site of bear-trapping operations by the Reyes family when grizzlies still roamed the Los Padres! This trail may be resurrected in the future if permission is secured to cross the small piece of private property that Beartrap Trail crosses near its northern terminus.

Alamo Creek Trail at one time led away from the spur of road just east of the Reyes Creek trailhead and connected to Fishbowls Campground. Official Forest Service maps from 1938, 1939, and 1944 show the trail, as well as 1944 and 1945 War Department maps. Sadly the trail has long since disappeared due to loss of access from Lockwood Valley Road, and thus loss of any trail maintenance.

### 1938 LOS PADRES NATIONAL FOREST MAP



Looking down Beartrap canyon



# STONY CREEK & AGUA ESCONDIDO ARROYO GRANDE

## TRAIL TALK

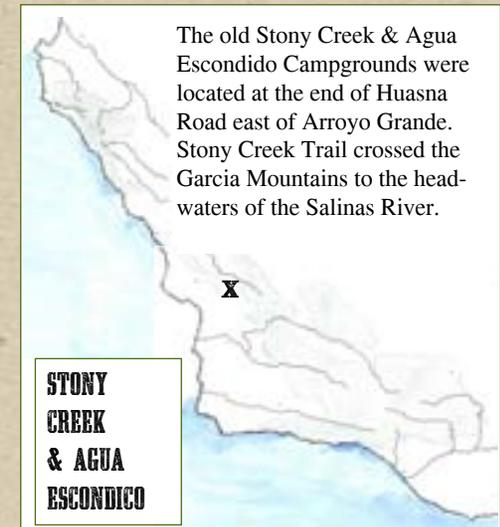
To call the Huasna Valley of San Luis Obispo County picturesque is a gross understatement. This historic access point to the Los Padres is as beautiful as it gets. The Stony Creek Trail and Stony Creek and Agua Escondido Campgrounds are clearly visible on Forest Service maps from the 1960s, and the trail is still visible on maps today. Unfortunately, surveys of the area revealed that the campgrounds (near and at the terminus of Huasna Road) were actually on private property, and because of this all facilities were removed. The private property owners then placed a gate near the turnoff to Avenales Observation Point, and recently placed another where the old Agua Escondido Campground sat, so general access to the Garcia Wilderness and the Stony Creek Trail is lost. Ironically, this road was included in a 2004 publication of scenic California byways, but today it is no longer even open.

*“The area around Stony Creek is as beautiful as any in the Los Padres, with rugged, untrammelled terrain, and sweeping views.”*

**- Mike Stiles,  
veteran hiker**



The Stony Creek Trail lead to the old Avenales Ranger Station from the Stony Creek Campground; 5.5 miles through the Garcia Wilderness Area.



## TRAIL TALK

# DEANGULO TRAIL BIG SUR



*“The real reason to hike the DeAngulo Trail is that it’s an eccentric, Big Sur kind of affair.”*

**- Barry Parr, 2007,  
Explore! Big Sur  
Country**

The DeAngulo Trail of Big Sur climbs from Highway 1 (3 miles north of Julia Pfeiffer Burns State Park) to Coast Ridge Road, with beautiful coastal views to the west and Ventana’s nearly mile-high peaks to the east. More than 3,000 feet in elevation is gained in the 3.5 mile climb to Coast Ridge Road.

Besides the gorgeous views, the reason to get out and enjoy the DeAngulo Trail is that it is a successful example of landowner cooperation in creation of a permanent access easement, and has an element of Big Sur lore that is always fun. The trail is named after Jaime DeAngulo, an internationally acclaimed anthropologist who was an authority on California Indian languages; it is said he dressed as a long haired bandit and lived like a bohemian. He willed his property for public use in the 1950s but included a reversion clause that if the trail goes unused for 5 years the easement reverts to the landowner and public right of passage is lost. Needless to say, wonderful volunteers have diligently taken up the cause and care for the trail so all can enjoy it. Today hikers encounter a well maintained trail and amazing re-growth of areas burned in the Basin Complex Fire of 2008, including charred live oak trees covered with new green leaves - the promise of another cycle beginning.



The DeAngulo Trail in 1975



Keith Vandevere

# LITTLE SUR TRAIL

## BIG SUR

The Little Sur Trail appears on Forest Service maps as far back as the 1920s and continues to appear on the current map of the Los Padres National Forest. The trail follows the south fork of the Little Sur River across private property and into the national forest near Pico Blanco Campground. Pico Blanco peak is perhaps the most distinctive and immediately recognizable peak in central California's Big Sur region; it is considered a sacred mountain from which all life originated in the native traditions of the area. It is also reportedly the largest limestone deposit in the state making it of interest to the private company that now holds ownership over it, Graniterock Company, though their application to quarry on the mountain was denied by the California Coastal Commission.

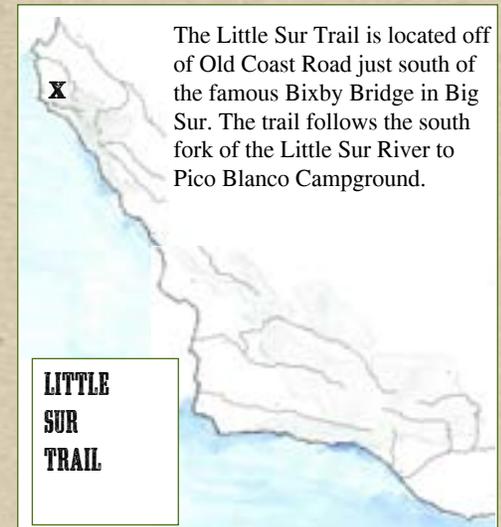
Though Graniterock (and the El Sur Ranch, the other landowner with land surrounding the Little Sur Trail) currently allow people to cross their property to the national forest boundary, there are 'Warning' signs in place indicating the public may be hiking on eggshells. The signs list a set of eleven "rules" that hikers must obey as they cross the private lands and serve to intimidate forest users and make them feel unwelcome. The situation is tenuous as access rights can be withdrawn at any time, especially if the land ever changes hands. A permanent, secure easement should be pursued to guarantee the public right of access into the future.



## TRAIL TALK

*“The scenic Little Sur Trail is among a handful of coastal access points to the Ventana Wilderness.”*

**- Mike Splain,  
Executive Director,  
Ventana Wilderness  
Alliance**





**Los Padres ForestWatch**  
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**Santa Barbara, CA 93102**

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**info@LPFW.org**  
**www.LPFW.org**

# **ABOUT**

## **LOS PADRES FORESTWATCH**

In 2004, ForestWatch began as a small group of local forest advocates. Today, we've grown to become one of our region's premiere land conservation forces. We are the only nonprofit organization focused solely on protecting our region's public lands—from the Big Sur coast to the Carrizo Plain, and from the rugged backcountry of Ventura to Monterey counties—from damage caused by oil drilling, illegal off-road vehicle abuse, unmanaged livestock grazing, and uncontrolled development. We promote responsible access to our public lands, and collaborate with landowners, forest users, and government agencies to restore public access along historic routes.

**LOCAL** Our headquarters are right here on the Central Coast. We live, work, and play here every day, giving us a unique understanding of the many ways our communities value these majestic lands.

**EFFECTIVE** Our bottom line is simple – every action we take must result in direct, on-the-ground protection for our public lands. We're a small organization with a big vision, and our proven track record speaks for itself.

**COMMITTED** These are public lands, and we're committed to ensuring that they're managed for the public's benefit. From beginning to end, we take great efforts to collaborate and negotiate. But when all else fails, we file strategic appeals and lawsuits to enforce our nation's environmental protection laws.

**DIVERSE** We work with a variety of folks from all walks of life who share a common goal - protecting and restoring our region's public lands.