



OUTDOORS

Los Angeles Times

TRAIL MAP

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-Jordan Rane

How: Take the 91 freeway east from Los Angeles to the Yorba Linda/Weir Canyon exit in Orange County. Turn right onto Weir Canyon Road. Right at the third stoplight onto Serrano Avenue and an immediate right onto Canyon Creek Road. Left onto Sunset Ridge Road and right onto Hollow Oak Road, which dead-ends at a private gate. Entrance to Deer Canyon Park Reserve is on the left. Park on the street. Open from dawn to dusk every day. No entry fee.

What: 130-acre nature preserve in Anaheim Hills. Hilly terrain suitable for short hikes, mountain biking and equestrian use.

Where: Deer Canyon Park Reserve

The particulars

Fold along dotted lines

Take Me -- Deer Canyon Park Reserve

In a few hours, Deer Canyon Park Reserve will be hot and empty. But at 7:30 a.m., well before Orange County's late-spring heat wave kicks in, it's about as crowded as it ever gets: two hikers and four doe-eyed teenagers with cigarettes hiding under an oak tree.

Who else has heard of Deer Canyon Park Reserve - a well-concealed 130-acre patch of public wilderness surrounded by condominiums, highways and a golf course in the Anaheim Hills?

Not very many, says Barbara Stroud, who lives nearby. For three years she has escaped here at least once a week without running into any neighbors besides roadrunners, deer and bobcats.

The park's main entrance is a cul-de-sac marked by easy-to-miss signs that say "Welcome to your Anaheim City Park" and "Warning: Mountain Lion Country." At least half a dozen streets provide entry to this hilly, wooded ravine, which is an unmarked brown splotch on the Thomas Guide map, ringed with streets named Nightingale and Wildrose. City officials plan to add parking for more direct access, but not anytime soon.

Stroud leads the way into this secret garden of shoulder-high wildflowers and chirping birds. Heading south toward Deer Canyon's main vista point, a tall hill crowned with yellow flowers, scurrying rabbits and two giant electrical towers, we pass some horse tie-ups lost in the weeds and a few empty picnic tables. The shrub land is familiar enough, but it's unspoiled and accented with surprises - cactuses sitting under a few oaks here, a gorgeous wall of orange bougainvillea there. A couple of python-thick power lines buzz above the park's main artery, which was also used as an Edison service road, but they're easily lost in Deer Canyon's maze of nameless dirt tributaries, in various states of upkeep.

"I see signs of people having been down here," Stroud says. "But I barely ever actually see anyone here." Ditto for horses. One of the only multiuse nature facilities in the area, Deer Canyon is also open to mountain bikers, but we don't see them either.

The show-stealer is a yellow butterfly doing some solo acrobatics beside a gurgling stream. Stroud's pretty sure it's the same one she saw the last time she was here.

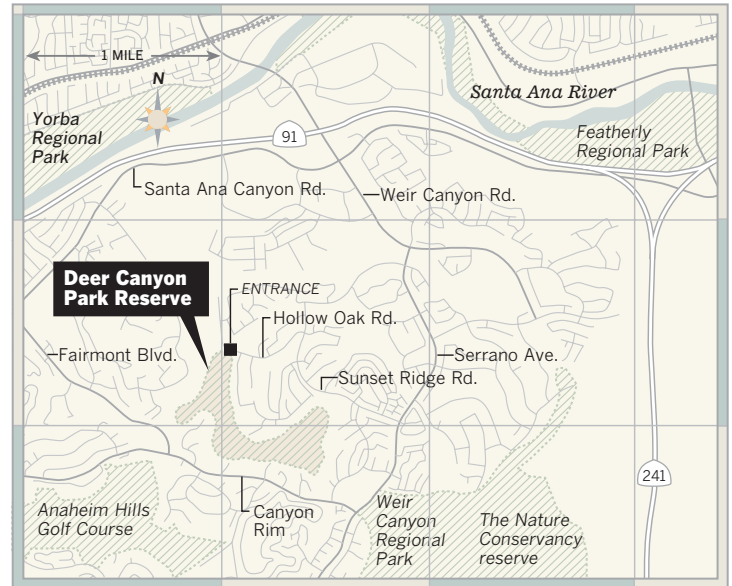
At the crest of the hill, we gaze down over Yorba Linda to the north, Orange to the south and, closer still, rows of manicured Anaheim Hills condos and gated McMansions.

"They have no idea this is right in their backyard," Stroud says.

We exit the park on another quiet street with houses featuring neatly trimmed yards, golden retrievers, basketball nets and, across the road, a woman doing some stationary hiking on a StairMaster in her garage.

If only she knew.

Trails: Various | Difficulty: Easy | Allowed:



PAUL D. RODRIGUEZ Los Angeles Times

