

Runkle Canyon Trail

HISTORY: What became the Runkle Ranch was Parcel B on the 1887-1888 subdivision map of the offerings of the Simi Land and Water Company. The ranch ran from the Arroyo Simi to the top of the ridge of the Simi Hills. The 2,780.91 acre parcel was sold to the Runkle family, which ran cattle primarily on the lower portions of the property. The Southern Pacific Milling Company eventually quarried sand and gravel in the upper reaches of the canyon - exploiting the "Simi conglomerate" member of the Santa Susana Formation. The material was moved by a conveyor system to the upper reaches of the main canyon for processing. The abandoned quarry and remnants of the operation are still present - if you know what to look for. The old quarry site is now revegetated by the passage of time. The "Runkle Reservoir" appears on the U. S. Geological Survey as a seven and a half-mile topographic quadrangle (1952, photo revised 1967). The dam, which was constructed by the old Ventura County Flood Control District, was intended to reduce peak down-stream runoff - thus providing some flood protection.

THE TRAIL: The trail begins at the southeastern corner of Runkle Park, which is located at the southern end of Fir Street. The trail runs south southeast down the western side of the canyon to the stormwater detention basin and then the trail switches to the eastern side of the canyon bottom. The trail there rises as a well maintained road over the high point on the cascade structure and then continues to the south southeast for about a half a mile where it turns to the southeast through the old quarry and then up into the hills for more than a mile onto the rolling uplands west of Burro Flats.

GEOLOGY: The valley bottom consists of alluvial fill of sand, gravel and clayey material. The hillsides above the valley bottom are made up of the Santa Susana Formation, i.e., gray micaceous clay stone and siltstone with thin sandstone beds. The formation is of Pliocene age - roughly 3.5 to 1.6 million years. The upper canyon, where the sand and gravel quarry was, is part of the Simi Conglomerate member of the Santa Susana Formation. It is made up of smooth cobbles of quartzite, metavolcanic and granitic detritus in a hard sandstone matrix. On the south side of the road leading into the quarry area are two massive granitic boulders - too big to be handled by the rock crusher. They are indicative of a very high energy strata within the Simi Conglomerates. Toward the top of the ridge you get into the Chatsworth Formation, which marks the end of the Cretaceous Period - the end of which is of about 66 million years of age and marks the end of the age of the dinosaurs. The Chatsworth Formation is of marine origin and is made up of light brown medium grained sandstone in thick strata with thin strata of siltstone. When you pass the western entrance to the Boeing property you go back into the Santa Susana Formation. That boundary marks the Burro Flats Fault.

PLANTS: Three different plant associations are present along the trail. These include: a) riparian; b) coastal sage scrub; and c) chaparral. The reality is that because differences in elevation and the complexity of slope aspects the coastal sage scrub and the chaparral plant associations are somewhat mixed. Most north-facing slopes are dominated by chaparral species and south-facing slopes, especially at lower elevations, are dominated by coastal sage scrub species. Nonetheless, some plant species are present in both plant associations.

Riparian species include arroyo willows, tamarisk, mule fat, Fremont cottonwood, western sycamore, California black walnut, blue elderberry, wild cucumber, coyote brush, purple nightshade, tree tobacco, vervain, cobweb thistle, spiny cocklebur, poison oak, California pepper (from Peru), and many herbaceous species.

Coastal sage scrub and chaparral species include winter vetch, telegraph weed, deer weed, red-stemmed and long-beaked filagree, Mediterranean and black mustard, laurel sumac, lemonade berry, coast live oak, wand and California buckwheat, bush sunflower, purple and black sages, California sagebrush, red and holly-leaved red berry, purple needlegrass, birch leaf mountain mahogany, bush monkeyflower, California aster, purple nightshade, arroyo and bush lupine, toyon, hairy-leaved and hoary leaf ceanothus, chaparral yucca, black and purple sages, two-tone everlasting, yerba santa, dodder, bush mallow, California peony, fiesta flower, eucrypta, hoarhound, chamise, cliff aster, chaparral morning glory, and many other annual species.

ANIMAL LIFE: Mammals that you may encounter or see the tracks of include several species of bats, desert cottontail, brush rabbits, voles, California meadow mouse, Botta's pocket gopher, California ground squirrel, striped skunk, bobcats, mountain lions, gray fox, coyotes, raccoons, ringtailed cat, dusky-footed woodrats, agile kangaroo rat, southern California weasel, and mule deer. Birds may include scrub jay, mockingbird, lesser goldfinch, Anna's hummingbird, turkey vulture, golden eagle, red-tailed hawk, barn owl, burrowing owl, raven, crow, California towhee, road runner, California quail, and meadow lark, among many others. Reptiles may include the western fence and alligator lizards, coachwhip snake, California king snake, San Diego gopher snake, and Pacific rattlesnake.

While mountain lions are present in the hills around Simi Valley, encounters are unlikely, but you should always be alert. It is best that you do not hike alone, and that you keep small children close at hand. Rattlesnakes may be encountered — Stay on the trail and avoid them when they are encountered — Be observant and never try to handle them. Do not handle any wildlife, including bats, even if they appear to be injured or sick. Remember, you are visitors to their homes.

**Mike Kuhn,
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