

Hike 21 : Laguna Coast Wilderness Park – Laurel Canyon/Willow Canyon Loop

Surface: Dirt

Distance: 3.7 miles (sample hike)

Elevation Gain: 600 ft. (sample hike)

Hours: Sat. & Sun., 8:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Laguna Coast Wilderness Park (Hikes 15 and 18*) encompasses 6,500 acres of coastal sage scrub, chaparral, oak, sycamore, and interesting sandstone formations. Combined with Crystal Cove State Park, which is immediately adjacent to Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, you can enjoy miles and miles of great hiking and trail running.

How to get there: From the Vistas, take 405 south and go south on Laguna Canyon Road (133) towards Laguna Beach. After 5 miles, you will go underneath the toll road (73).

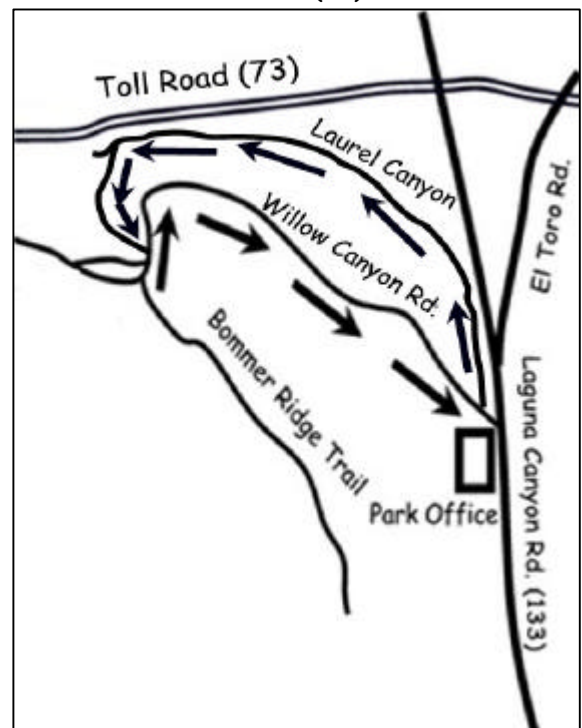
Turn into the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park parking lot on the right. Parking fee is \$3 per vehicle. The gate is locked at 4:00 p.m., so give yourself plenty of time to complete the hike before then. On weekends, you may park your car across from the park entrance; however, on weekdays, your car will get towed.

What to do first: Go into the visitor center, sign in, and obtain a detailed map. There is some other interesting information, such as a brochure on native vegetations, also available at the visitor center.

Please note: Dogs and pets are not allowed in the park.

Sample hike:

With nearly 20 miles of various trails, you will find what you are looking for in this park, whether it's good aerobic exercise or beautiful scenery. Here's a sample hike that allows you to marvel at the intricate sandstone formations and escape the hustle and bustle of the city within the first 10 minutes of the hike.



From the parking lot, take the Laurel Canyon Trail to the right. For the first 10 minutes, the trail goes parallel to Laguna Canyon Road. Soon thereafter, however, you will find yourself in Myst** -like country, with massive sandstone cliffs with interesting arches and caves on one side and wide grassland on the other. Alongside the trail, you will find fiesta flowers, silver puffs, and yarrows, among many other plants. The trail remains flat amidst bushes of coastal sagebrush and fern as the canyon narrows. At mile 0.9, you will cross the stream for the first time. From this point on, the trail ascends steadily and at times steeply amongst oaks and sycamores. This is a good place to turn around if you wish to enjoy a non-strenuous stroll on a flat surface. You will be rewarded with a view of a waterfall (in the spring) if you decide to tough it out.

At mile 1.8, you will come to a junction with a fire road. Go left and continue uphill for another 1/2 miles until you reach the junction with Willow Canyon Road. For a spectacular view, take a short detour to the right to Bommer Ridge (the trail on the far right or the second one from the right). On a clear day, you can see the San Gabriel Mountains to the northwest, local Saddleback Mountains to the northeast, and Santa Catalina Island to the south. Turn around and follow Willow Canyon Road all the way down to the visitor center. The descent is mostly gradual, and the trail is wide and even. Unlike the Laurel Canyon Trail, which is dedicated to hikers, Willow Canyon Road is open to equestrians and mountain bikers, so please use caution as you descend on the trail that overlooks the canyon and sandstone formations that you passed several miles ago.

*Hikes 15, 18, and all other hikes that have been introduced in the past newsletters can be found on the web at http://www.turtlerockvista.org/get_module.php?popup_id=1299.

**Myst is a popular computer game from the early 1990's.