

Hike 18: Barbara's Lake (From Woods End)

Surface: Mostly dirt

Distance: 2.6 miles

Elevation Gain: 500 ft.

Barbara's Lake, named after Barbara Rabinowitsh, an environmentalist, who fought for twenty years to protect Laguna Coast Wilderness from development, is the largest natural lake in Orange County. It is tucked away behind the hills in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, more specifically in the area called James Dilley Greenbelt Preserve.

How to get there: Drive south on Laguna Canyon Rd. (Highway 133). Turn left onto El Toro Rd. At the intersection of Aliso Creek Rd. and El Toro Rd., make a u-turn and park in one of the several free parking slots in front of the entrance to Woods End Wilderness Preserve.

The Hike: From the entrance at Woods End, ascend the trail until you reach a T (mile 0.4). As you walk up, Leisure World homes become visible to the east and the Laguna Coast Wilderness Park to the west, south, and north.

At the T, the trail joins up with Ridgetop Fire Road. Go right and walk along the top of the ridge. In spring, you'll see lots of flowers and, on clear days, the unobstructed view of the wilderness area. After another 0.4 miles you'll come to a Y. Take the path on your left (Gravel Road) to begin a gradual descent into the rich riparian area. You get a peek-a-boo view of Barbara's Lake as you descend. After another 0.4 miles, you'll pass a pump house on the left. Then turn right onto Barbara's Lake Trail. This short, flat trail gives you an entire view of the lake. A brief description of the history of the lake is posted along the way.

After 0.3 miles, the trail begins to ascend rather quickly. The trail, most likely called the Edison Trail because of the power lines and electrical towers, is not only quite steep but also badly eroded. Please wear good athletic shoes and use caution while walking (for an easier, more gradual ascent, return the way you came). At mile 1.8, Edison Trail merges with Ridgetop Fire Road. Return the way you came.

If you haven't had enough walking, go past the junction of the Woods End trail and keep walking on Ridgetop Fire Road. Soon you will find yourself on a narrow ridge that goes up and down (but never gets too steep). On the right along Laguna Canyon Road, you see the rest of the James Dilley Greenbelt Preserve. At the very end of the trail, you may take the steep Blackjack Trail down to explore other trails that the park has to offer, but since the parking lot is currently closed (and your car is not there), take in the view of the hills, canyons, and the city of Aliso Viejo, and return the way you came. This side trip will add a total of 1.6 miles to your trip.

Please note: Dogs and pets are NOT allowed in Laguna Coast Wilderness Park. However, I encountered MANY local residents with their dogs when I went there (according to them, the "no dogs" rule is never enforced). No bikes or motorized vehicles are allowed.

Other useful information: If you want more information on Laguna Coast Wilderness Park, visit the park office at 20101 Laguna Canyon Rd. (where El Toro Rd. and Laguna Canyon Rd. meet) between 8:00 a.m. and 4:00 p.m. on a weekend and pick up a free map. Parking at the park office costs \$3 per vehicle.

On the web: <http://www.ocparks.com/lagunacoast/>.

