



# Southern California Hiking

by Kevin Jackson

**H**iking is a great way to get out into the backcountry while building your fitness along the way – and the perfect sunny weather in Southern California leaves us no reason to miss out on the expansive trail system provided by the state. Southern California has a wide variety of hiking opportunities, from backyard family trails to multi-day hikes through the spectacular Sierra Nevada Mountains.

Whether you are new to hiking or an experienced backpacker, your safety, and that of your group, should be your primary concern before you depart on any hike. More often than not unfavorable situations on the trail can be avoided by proper preparation and planning. Going hiking can be a great experience but you want to be sure to follow a few basic steps before walking out the door.

First, never leave for a hike without informing a responsible person about where you will be hiking, who you will be with, the route you are going to take, the time you will be leaving and the approximate time you will be returning. Second, make sure you have the park service information and phone numbers should there be an emergency. In the event of an emergency carry a small first-aid kit as well as ex-

tra clothing and rain gear. Finally, be sure you and your group have plenty of food and water even for shorter day hikes. A large portion of Southern California hiking is in desert climate and therefore fluid intake is extremely important. In 90-degree weather a hiker can lose approximately one pint of water per 70 pounds of body weight every hour! When hiking with children take more frequent water breaks, as they tend to lose water faster than adults and are not as likely to notice the effects.

Leaving the front country can often be a great family experience, and getting your little ones out onto the trail is an incredible opportunity for them to learn about the outdoors while exercising at the same time. When taking your children hiking try these helpful tips to make their experience rewarding and safe.

- Keep hiking speed and distances within physical as well as fun limits – a good way to judge the pace of your children is to take turns letting them assume the lead.
- Enjoy the journey as much as the destination – stop frequently to observe nature and those little things that a child finds fascinating.
- Make your children's feet a priority – sturdy boots that fit properly will allow them to focus on the fun and adventure of a hike. At

the first sign of redness or blistering feet, apply moleskin.

- Respect the outdoors – set an example by carrying out your trash and following park regulations.
- Have each child carry a small daypack or hip pack – the pack should contain water, a survival whistle, flashlight or headlamp, a brightly-colored poncho, emergency blanket, extra socks, extra food and a small first-aid kit.

Hiking with family or friends is always a great time... until you get halfway up the first incline and your lower back starts screaming, your thighs begin to cramp up and your lungs burn. Hiking requires more from your muscles than walking alone, and it's a good idea to train for this activity.

If you are training for a multi-day hike or just want to get out on the local trails in your neighborhood try these fitness tips to improve your stamina and reduce overall muscle soreness. Hiking involves almost every muscle group in the body, and therefore requires a well-rounded fitness program incorporating strength and resistance training, cardiovascular training, and of course stretching.

For strength-training exercises, focus on developing your quadriceps by performing

squats and lunges without weight. Start with your arms extended to the sides, keep your heels close together and ensure that your weight is balanced. Squat or lunge a comfortable distance so that you maintain your balance and then push yourself back up again. Repeat this at least 10 times each day to start with and gradually work up to 20, 30, 40 and finally 50 repetitions as you gain strength.

For cardiovascular endurance try the stair stepper or elevated treadmill and walk 10-15 minutes with the aim of increasing your distance and speed each week. An example of cardiovascular training for a five-mile hike would include walking for 30 to 45 minutes, three days

a week, varying the incline. On the fourth day, do a longer walk – preferably outside on hilly terrain. Each week, increase the length of your walk until you're doing at least two-thirds the distance of your first hike.

Stretching exercises should focus on hamstrings, calves, hip flexors and lower back. Yoga is a great option for targeting all of these body parts. Another stretching tip for hikers is to massage the plantar fascia, a band of tissue running beneath the foot, by rolling a tennis ball under your arches and the bottom of the foot to release tension. The will reduce the pain in your foot after a long hike and help prevent extended aching.

When discussing gear your first concern should be footwear. Look for a boot with a solid sole and one with a high ankle. Most trails in Southern California are very rocky and a strong sole is critical for longer walks. The high ankle helps to prevent sprains and provides added support on uneven terrain. Remember to break your shoes in several weeks in advance, and at the first sign of hot spots on your feet remove your socks, dry your feet, and apply moleskin or second skin to prevent blisters.

Wherever your outdoor adventures may lead you, please be knowledgeable, safe and of course environmentally responsible by practicing "leave no trace" principles. 🌲

## Southern California Classics

Hike	Location	Roundtrip Distance	Difficulty
Mt. San Jacinto	Palm Springs	11 miles	Strenuous
Thousand Island Lake Loop	Mammoth Lakes	15.6 miles	Moderate - Strenuous
Parker Mesa Overlook - Topanga State Park	Los Angeles	6 miles	Easy
El Moro Canyon & Crystal Cove State Park	Laguna Beach	3.6 miles	Easy - Moderate
Mt. Woodson	Poway	6.4 miles	Moderate



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\* 7 day safari extension available upon request.

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