

Hiking Mount Baden-Powell

by Modern Hiker on June 18, 2009



A moderately challenging 8-mile trek up the north face of one of the tallest mountains in the San Gabriels. Fans of switchbacks will love the march to the top of this peak, which rewards hikers with a stunning ridge, 1500-year-old limber pines, a small monument to the founder of the Boy Scouts, and a mostly-bare summit with tremendous panoramic views of the landscape. A popular trail, but definitely on the list of must-dos for the Angeles National Forest.

The Basics:

- Distance: 8 miles round trip.
- Elevation Gain: 2807 feet
- Time: About 4-5 hours, with breaks
- Trail Condition: Excellent.

This is a well-maintained and well-traveled trail that's a popular route for day hikers and as a short side-trip for Pacific Crest Trail through-hikers. It's a single trail from the trailhead to the summit, with the one major junction clearly marked. Parts of the official trail may still have snow on them late into the season, but there is an extensive system of use-trails to avoid these obstacles.

How To get There:

From the 210 in La Canada Flintridge, take the Angeles Crest Highway 50.3 miles to Vincent Gap. There is a moderately sized parking lot there, with access to several trails and a vault toilet. Park here and display your Adventure Pass. The trailhead is at the western corner of the lot. Alternatively, you can also reach this trailhead from I-15. In the Cajon Pass, take the CA-138 exit toward Palmdale and travel 8.6 miles on the 138 to the junction with the Angeles Crest Highway. From there, Vincent Gap is just under 14 miles.

The Notables:

- High elevation peak with few trees – great panoramic views of the surrounding landscape
- Challenging ascent with dozens of switchbacks
- Breathtaking ridge trail near the summit
- Alpine scenery
- Small monument to Lord Robert Baden-Powell, the founder of the Boy Scouts
- An ancient limber pine grove, including one tree that's over 1500 years old

The scenery of the trail is nothing spectacular for most of the trek, but the thick evergreen forest is a very-welcome respite from the drudgery of city life, and as you ascend, you'll be able to see more of the Antelope Valley to the north or, if you're lucky, some leftover wildflower blooms.

About a mile in, there is a small bench at a switchback, overlooking the mountains to the east of Baden-Powell. In another 0.7 miles and 8 switchbacks, there is a short spur trail to Lamel Spring, which – of course – should be treated before you drink any water. You'll also pass this great knotted tree:

Mount Baden-Powell had long been cut-off from many L.A. area hikers, due to the closure of the Angeles Crest Highway. Since the road fully re-opened, we no longer have to drive around the eastern edge of the San Gabriels to come in from Wrightwood, and can reach this popular peak with an easy (albeit long) drive from the La Canada Flintridge entrance to the Angeles National Forest.

When the road re-opened, this was the first mountain I hiked, and it is definitely worth taking the time to get to.

The trailhead is clearly marked from the road, and has a large parking area and outhouses. While this can be a crowded trail – popular with day-hikers, backpackers, Boy Scouts, and Pacific Crest Trail through-hikers, don't let that discourage you from hiking it. There are also a few other trails that leave from this parking lot – so don't worry if you see a lot of cars when you pull in. You're not going to find much flat ground to rest your legs, here. Just count the switchbacks and you'll be fine.

Head toward the western corner of the lot, then hop on the Pacific Crest Trail and start hiking. The trail is mostly shaded by pines at this elevation, and has a moderate but very consistent grade. You're not going to find much flat ground to rest your legs, here. Just count the switchbacks and you'll be fine.

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It was at this elevation – about 3 miles in and just under 8500 feet – that the trees got more gnarled from the weather, and the views of the Antelope Valley to the north became much clearer.

At about the 3.9 mark, the formerly just-pleasant trail takes a turn toward the dramatic. Here, a short, unmarked use-trail will lead you to a small, ancient grove of limber pines, some of which have been sitting on this windswept ridge for a thousand years.

When you're done soaking in the views here, continue on the trail along a short summit ridge with a sharp drop to the left. The Pacific Crest Trail bypasses Baden-Powell's summit, heading west toward Islip Saddle. Ignore this and continue on the marked path toward the Baden-Powell summit, making sure to take time out to stop at the "Wally" Waldron Tree – a particularly hardy limber pine that's estimated to be more than 1500 years old.

From there, it's less than a tenth of a mile up to the bare cap of Baden-Powell, adorned with a small concrete monument to peak's namesake.

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