

60 Hikes within 60 Miles

LOS ANGELES

INCLUDING SAN GABRIEL, VENTURA,
AND ORANGE COUNTIES

Laura Randall

San Vicente Mountain: Old Nike Missile Site

In Partnership with



MENASHA RIDGE PRESS
Birmingham, Alabama

Trails.com™

SAN VICENTE MOUNTAIN: OLD NIKE MISSILE SITE



KEY AT-A-GLANCE INFORMATION

LENGTH: 3 miles

CONFIGURATION: Out-and-back

DIFFICULTY: Easy

SCENERY: Wildflowers, valley, and canyon views

EXPOSURE: Sunny

TRAFFIC: Light

TRAIL SURFACE: Packed dirt

HIKING TIME: 1 hour

ACCESS: Free; park gate is open sunrise to sunset

MAPS: USGS Canoga Park

FACILITIES: Picnic tables, benches, rest-rooms

SPECIAL COMMENTS: For additional information, go to www.lamountains.com/parks.asp?parkid=54

► IN BRIEF

This easy Santa Monica Mountains hike begins at the east end of the dirt road extension of Mulholland Drive and maintains a steady ascent past sweeping views of the San Fernando Valley to a former Nike missile control site that has been turned into a mountaintop park.

► DESCRIPTION

This trail certainly isn't the most picturesque or serene of all the hikes in the Santa Monica Mountains trails, but it offers a unique peek at Cold War-era Los Angeles amid the multimillion-dollar mansions and mountain-bike culture that now mark the area, and it reminds the young that Nike wasn't always another word for sneaker. Between 1954 and 1968, this park was one of 16 missile control sites established to guard the skies of Los Angeles from a nuclear attack by Soviet planes. Situated on a mountaintop 1,950 feet above sea level with sweeping views of downtown L.A., the Pacific Ocean, and the San Fernando Valley, the area was considered an ideal site for detecting planes from up to 100 miles away. It closed in 1968, but the radar tower, guard shack, and barbed-wire fence remain. The Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy acquired the site in 1995, which planted oak trees, added picnic

► DIRECTIONS

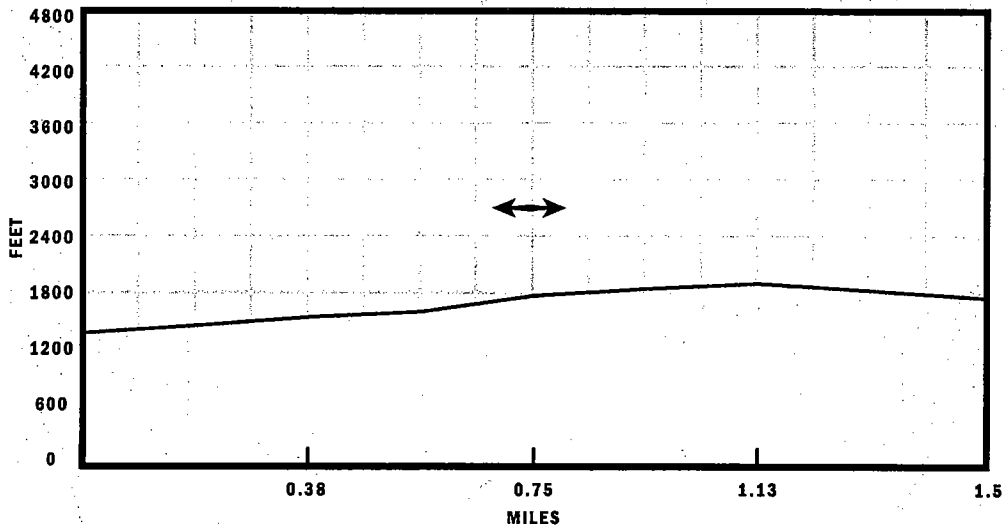
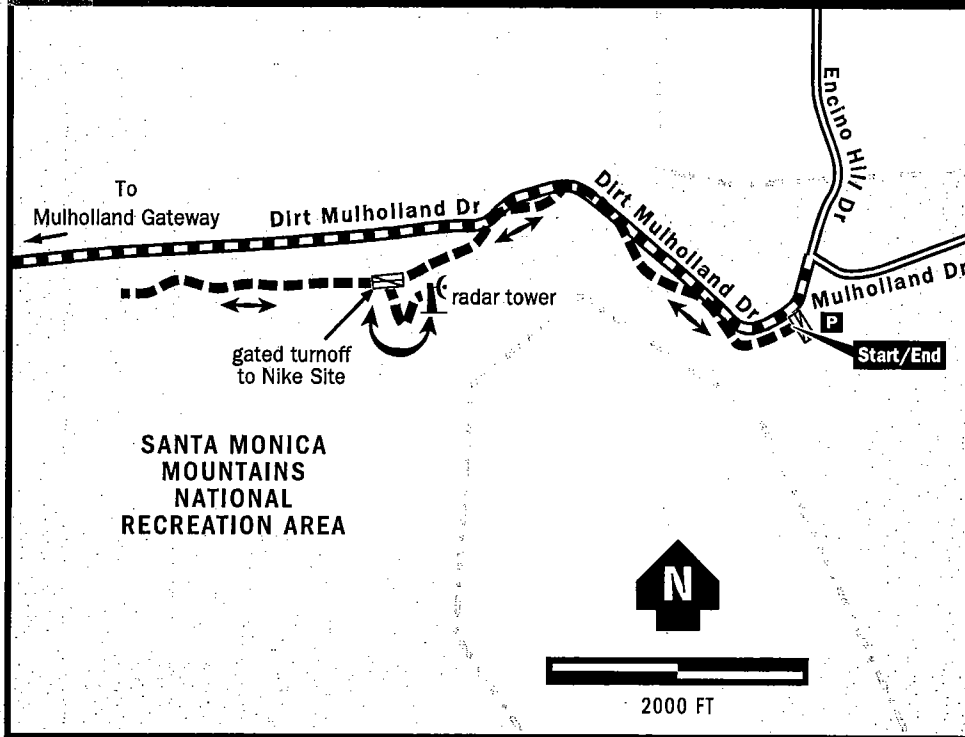
From the 405 Freeway, exit at Mulholland Drive and follow it 2.7 miles until it intersects with Encino Hills Drive. At the intersection of Encino Hills Drive, turn left onto Dirt Mulholland, an unpaved section of the road, and continue about a mile to a nondescript cluster of small buildings. Park by the chain-link fence and look for the fire-road gate. Keep in mind that the gate to Dirt Mulholland closes at sunset, and the road is often closed following heavy rains.

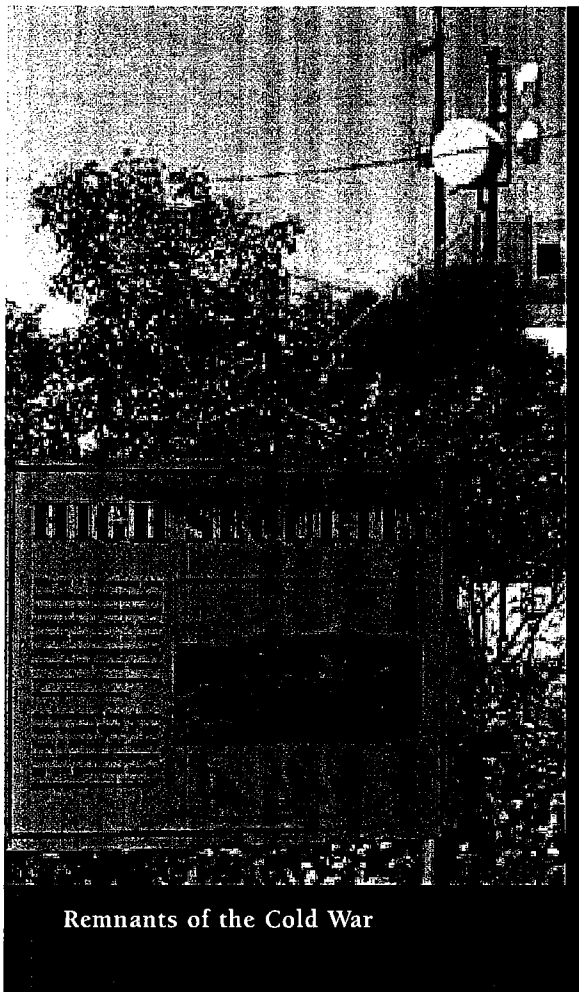
**UTM Trailhead Coordinates for
San Vicente Mountain:
Old Nike Missile Site**

UTM Zone (WGS84) 11S

Easting 361432

Northing 377389





Remnants of the Cold War

tables, and turned the officers' barracks into restrooms. It's a strange place for a picnic, with the disassembled radar tower and barbed-wire fence looming above, and it seems to attract more mountain bikers looking for a pit stop than hikers. But it's quieter than most other Santa Monica Mountains trails, and the panoramic views are tough to match.

From the dirt parking lot, walk around the fire-road gate and follow the wide dirt path up a gradual incline. The path is flanked by yellow wildflowers in the spring. To the right are wide-open views of the San Fernando Valley. The next mile is completely exposed, so come prepared with a hat and plenty of sunscreen, especially during the hot summer months. There aren't many landmarks or items of interest until you reach a dilapidated guard shack and chain-link fence after about a mile or so. Look for the sign LA96C—the name bestowed by the U.S. Army on the military site—and head left up the dirt path. Soon you will come to a T. A small parking lot (for authorized vehi-

cles only) and public restrooms are on the right; on the left are picnic tables, the radar tower, and a couple of interpretive signs that explain the site's former role.

One sign explains the reason for the site's closure. In the 1960s, the United States and the Soviets had developed intercontinental ballistic missiles that traveled so fast and so high that they rendered the Nike missiles obsolete. Another sign details the site's use of a bulky computer system that "recorded, plotted and coordinated every event to locate, intercept and destroy an enemy target." The work these computers, which occupied an entire building, did in 1961 can be done by handheld computer today. Also, according to a *Los Angeles Times* story about the park's grand opening, soldiers kept a garden with cactus and other plants to pass the time and "as a sign of hope." Another interesting tidbit: For security purposes, the soldiers weren't allowed to know how the entire missile defense system worked, so their knowledge was limited to their specific jobs.

From the T, turn left and walk up to the former helicopter platform (now the site of picnic tables and clusters of young oak trees), then climb the steps to the slate-gray tower platform. From here, it is 15 miles to downtown Los Angeles and 10 miles to Venice Beach. If it's a clear day, you can check out the city-to-ocean views, though with decidedly less intensity than the Army officers who staffed the site once did. The place still has an ominous Cold War-era feel to it and doesn't exactly encourage lingering. I was here on a stifling hot day in May, though, and that may have added to the unwelcoming feel.

On returning to the guard station, you can either head back to the parking lot or turn left on Dirt Mulholland to extend the hike by another mile or more. The path is flat and the scenery is similar to the first mile of the hike: wildflowers, coastal sage scrub, and views of the valley to the north and chaparral-draped mountains to the south. The dirt road continues another 8 miles or so past Mulholland Gateway Park and links to other Santa Monica Mountains trails, including Caballero Canyon, Temescal Ridge, and Hub Junction.

▶ NEARBY ACTIVITIES

Encino Town Center has a five-screen movie theater and many shops and restaurants. From the entrance to Dirt Mulholland, drive straight on Encino Hills Drive about 2 miles to Hayvenhurst Drive. Turn left on Hayvenhurst and follow it to Ventura Boulevard. Turn left, and drive about 1 mile until you see Encino Town Center on the right. The address is 17200 Ventura Boulevard, between Amestoy and Louise avenues.

