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## SAN ANTONIO RIDGE TRAVERSE | IRON MOUNTAIN TO MT. BALDY



### DISCLAIMER

There are a handful of cross country hikes here in the Southern California Wilderness that push the limits of the word "adventure" for several reasons. They are extremely remote locations that most people will never have the pleasure of seeing. A consequence of their isolated location is that rescue is highly unlikely in the case of an emergency.

That being said, it is the responsibility of the few that are capable of reaching these locations to practice safety when traveling to them.

- Double and triple check your supplies (especially water).
- Check weather conditions right before you lose cell service.
- Always be aware of your surroundings.
- Always let someone know where you are going and what time you intend to return.
- Use the [Leave No Trace](#) principles.

TRVRS Apparel is all for encouraging new and exciting adventures, but part of the adventure is doing adequate research ahead of time to assure a safe and fun trip which is why we've decided to document these back country hikes. Stay safe!

# DIRECTIONS TO THE TRAILHEAD

## From the 210 Freeway:

- Take exit 40 for Azusa Ave / CA-39 North.  
(The Mobile Gas station on your left is a good place to pick up an adventure pass if you don't already have one.)
- You will continue on San Gabriel Canyon Rd (Highway 39) for 11 miles until you reach East Fork Rd
- Make a Right on East Fork Rd and continue for 5 miles until you reach Camp Bonita Rd
- Turn Left on Camp Bonita Rd and continue .8 miles to the Parking lot at the end of the road.

Alternatively, you can use [Google Maps](#) to route you there.

## OVERVIEW



The San Antonio Ridge Traverse is an extremely difficult and desolate cross country hike located almost purely inside of the Sheep Mountain Wilderness of Southern California's Angeles National Forest. The trail starts near Azusa Canyon's Heaton Flat Campground of the East Fork (popularly known for its famous "Bridge to Nowhere" hike) and makes it way up to Iron Mountain. For most, this section is enough of a challenge, as Big Iron is arguably the hardest mountain to climb in the San Gabriel range, and yet, the San Antonio Ridge Traverse continues eastward from this peak toward Mount Baldy, the tallest peak in the Los Angeles County. The trip climbs over 10,000 feet in under 13 miles and includes breath taking views of Mt. Baden Powell, Pine Mountain Ridge, the Cucamonga Wilderness, and essentially all of Southern California. I will again note that this trek should be reserved for those who have an adequate amount of experience in fitness and back country adventures.

*Here is my account of this trail...*

## EAST FORK AND THE HEATON FLATS TRAILHEAD

After spending a few minutes re-checking my pack, I locked the car and made a move for the trailhead. I packed 2.75 liters of water, a can of coconut water, a homemade turkey club wrap, one apple, one banana, and a few random energy bars. If there is anything I needed to sustain mental clarity on the trail, it was salt, electrolytes, carbohydrates, potassium, and water. I was good for at least 20 miles.

**3:38 am** - I left the East Fork parking lot feeling great for only having slept 1.5 hours, thanks to a quick stop at the gas station for an iced coffee. Within a few moments, I had already begun to jog. Part of me knew that if I kept up a strong pace, I'd make it up to Iron before sunrise. The other part knew that I should focus on reserving my energy, as I would need it later. I ended up finding a happy medium and within a half a mile, I had approached Heaton Flat Campground and its big wooden sign featuring a map of most of the Sheep Mountain Wilderness. I continued onto the Heaton Flat trail head, which



is obscurely located behind this sign.

## ENTERING THE SHEEP MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS



**4:15 am** - After passing the first saddle which splits two ways (North and South), I took a short break to de-layer, and continued North. Within a hundred feet, I ran into the infamous sign that says "Entering Sheep Mountain Wilderness" (2 miles, 1,100 feet climbed) This was the moment where the days goal really came into my mind full force. The first goal was complete and all I had left was to exit the Sheep Mountain Wilderness through the other side.

After passing the sign, the trail made a quick switchback which brought me to the top of some rolling hills with clear views of the goal (Iron Mountain) to the North. It would be another mile before I dropped down into Allison Saddle (4.3 miles, 4,600 feet climbed). Every other time I had done this hike with groups, we would take a nice long break here and for good reason. Allison saddle features a small, shaded nook perfect for a 4-6 person hiking group to drop their bags and enjoy a small snack. It also happens to be located just before the real climb begins.

## BAGGING BIG IRON

**5:15 am** - The next 3 miles to the peak feature 3,400 feet of gain and a hefty amount of it is just after Allison Saddle. The good news is that unlike the last section of the trail, it is mostly a steady climb just after mile 5. A steady, ridiculously steep, gruelling climb with excellent views of Rattlesnake Peak and South Hawkins, as well as Iron Mountains Southwest ridge, and the East fork in between. On the otherside, there was Mount Baldy, which I don't recommend looking at if you are planning on attempting the Traverse.

**6:50 am** - I made it to Iron Mountain's summit just in time to watch the sun rise over Mt. Baldy. This couldn't have been timed better because I would have been afraid to continue onto the ridge in the dark. I took a short break to collect myself, refuel, and add a layer of clothing to the mix. The time for speed had passed. The next two miles would be very slow going.

After taking a few pictures and eating half of a turkey bacon wrap, I began to descend the trail. Within 5 minutes, I was already using my hands to down climb small exposed sections. I had to stop several times to slow my heart rate, which I blame mostly on coffee and adrenaline, but this was definitely an odd experience for me. I felt...anxious? This trend of down climbing loose boulder continues for the

entirety of mile 8 and the hardest part was saved for last.

## **GUN SIGHT NOTCH**



The name alone begs for this section to have its own paragraph. I haven't been able to find any information on how it found its name. Gun Sight Notch is the final and probably the most difficult Class 3 exposed descent you will deal with on the SART (San Antonio Ridge Traverse). However, if you look closely and take your time, you'll realize the best route is straight down from the top (facing east) and success should come fairly easily. I made it past Gun Sight Notch and continued toward the second peak of the day, but not without looking back after I was done. Its quite view from the bottom and knowing that I completed it gave me a little extra confidence for what was to come.

## **ASCENDING MOUNT BALDY**





I should note that after Gun Sight notch, you'll still have two large rolling hills to climb before the final ascent. Both of which cover a grand total of 2 miles with about 800 feet of vertical gain. In most cases, this would probably have been a nice jog for me, but the coffee had worn off, the energy from the last meal was spent, and the trail, which stays mostly on the north side of the ridge, was covered in icy sections. I kept trying to avoid the ice by going around the south side of the ridge only to find myself surrounded by chaparral and Manzanita.



**9:30 am** - By the time I had finally reached the base of Mt. Baldy, I was burned out again, so I took a short break to load up on sugar and pressed on. Within moments, I was on Baldy's icy north slope. I took another few minutes to attach my crampons. This was my first time using both crampons and an ice axe, and even though I had spent a good amount of time researching their optimal use, I was at first terrified that I'd end up sliding down the mountain. After taking only a few steps, I was laughing at how



easy it was for me to climb directly up to the peak. I was in heaven. No switchbacks, and no trail to follow. Just pure ascent.



**11:30 am** - I had reached West Baldy at mile 11.5 after climbing over 9,500 feet, but I was completely drained. The worst thing about finally reaching this pseudo peak is that baldy still looks very far away once you're there. However, the one thing I recommend is to look back at all that you have accomplished as soon as you have topped out. The ridge is already such a spectacular view from here, that looking back knowing that you trekked across all of it, should definitely give you a much needed boost of energy.

## THE DEVILS BACKBONE



After a few minutes trying to wave down commercial airlines for rescue, I decided that I would continue down the Register Ridge trail to get back home as fast as possible. So, I made my way down the east slope of Baldy. Fortunately, about 200 feet before I reached the trail junction, I saw three strangers coming up the trail. Without hesitation, I asked them whether or not the Ski Lift was open. IT WAS!

Relief washed over me and I continued to stumble down the rest of the Devils Backbone trail toward

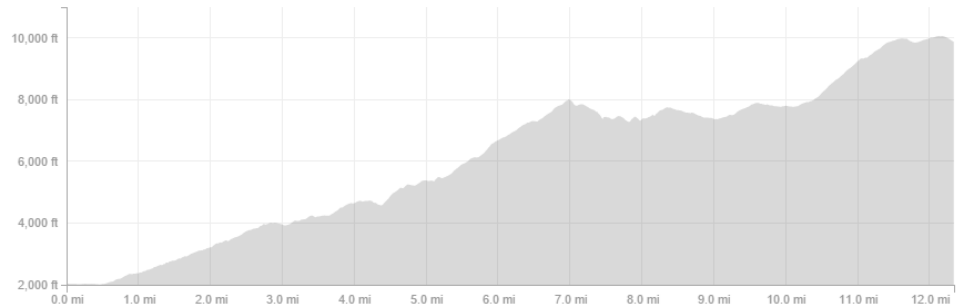


the Top of the Notch Restaurant where I bought a lift ticket.

## SUCCESS

I was in the clear. The Bartender must have noticed how thrashed I looked when he asked me about the hike. I let him know that I started in Azusa Canyon. He paused for a second trying to figure out how the two areas connected. So I gave him a brief description of the journey and he congratulated me, noting that it was the furthest he had heard of anyone hiking from. I chuckled and thought of all the ultra runners I knew who had completed the 11-peak traverse. Maybe, one day...

## ELEVATION PROFILE



**Total Distance (to peak):** 12.2 miles

**Total Elevation (feet):** 10,056 feet

**Time to completion:** 8 hours, 30 minutes (East Fork Parking lot to Mt. Baldy Summit)

*\*\*\*If you are planning to complete this hike, please be aware that this is definitely a fast time. I have trained as a trail runner for several years. The first time I completed it with a strong group of hikers and finished in just over 14 hours from car to car. This is a much more realistic time for a group.*

## RESOURCES

[San Antonio Ridge Traverse - GPX FILE](#)

[San Antonio Ridge Traverese - STRAVA ACCOUNT](#)



**RICARDO SORIA JR**

Author

## 7 RESPONSES



**MANNY HERRERA**

March 22, 2016

This sounds amazing. I want to do this sometime soon but would love to go with someone who has completed it before.



**RICARDO SORIA**

March 01, 2016

Thanks @Frank, it was definitely my favorite part! I'm glad I was able to get some mountaineering in before winter conditions had left.

**FRANK**

March 01, 2016

great write up! Such an impressive time, ascending west baldy in snow must have been so nice!

**RICARDO SORIA**

February 29, 2016

@Augie Medina Thank you! and yes, my girlfriend picked me up at Manker Flat after I was finished. I've also completed your suggested hike of the North Ridge. I loved it. I have a trip report on that one too, but on a forum, not this site. I will add it to this site soon if I can find time. Or I might just do it again when I get a chance. It was a beautiful ridge worth doing again.

**AUGIE MEDINA**

February 29, 2016

Great job. Someone picked you up at the end and transported you back to East Fork trailhead for your car? I did it from Manker Flat up the Ski Hut Trail over the ridge to Iron and to the East Fork TH several years ago. Another challenging hike of Iron is from East Fork TH along the East Fork through The Narrows to Fish Fork and ascend Iron's north face, then back to East Fork TH by the regular trail. I think you'd enjoy that one.

**MOUNTAINFIEND**

February 29, 2016

Great write up! This is definitely the toughest and most rewarding trek in our local mountains. I can't wait to do this route again!

**BOGGS**

February 29, 2016

Way to go! Kick ass write up. Inspiring!

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