



[Roam-O-Rama](#)

Arroyo Seco & Monument Loop

By [Jerry Schad](#) | Published Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2010

"In Memory of Col. F. C. Marshall and 1st Lt. C. L. Webber who fell at this spot Dec. 7, 1922." Without this inscription, the presence of an old 12-cylinder engine permanently mounted in stone atop remote Airplane Ridge wouldn't make a lot of sense to hikers passing by. The looping hike in Cuyamaca Rancho State Park described here visits the Airplane Monument along with plenty of territory nicely recovering from the ravages of 2003's Cedar Fire.

To get to the starting point, follow Highway 79 15.2 miles south from Julian or 7.6 miles north from I-8 at Descanso to reach a large parking area and equestrian trailhead just south of the Sweetwater River bridge. This trailhead is located at mile 4.9, according to the Highway 79 mile markers.

From that starting point, walk north over the bridge and immediately turn left on a short spur trail that hooks up with the West Side Trail. Continue north about 0.4 mile, paralleling the highway, and then bear left on Japacha Fire Road. You now wind uphill, following the south side of the Japacha Creek canyon. After about 0.8 mile, you cross the flowing (in winter and spring, at least) creek. Bracken fern, sword fern, thimbleberry, and wild strawberry thrive in the shade of oaks and sycamores along the creek bottom. The trees themselves are staging a slow but sure recovery from the fire.

Turning northeast to follow a shady draw, you soon come to a spur trail leading to Japacha Spring. The water merely dribbles from cracks in the bedrock, but nearby are some flat rocks to rest upon in a shady area.

Go back down to Japacha Fire Road and follow it north to the West Mesa Trail, where you turn left (southwest). Climb gradually through encroaching chaparral and nascent oak/pine forest, and cross Japacha Creek once again. Now watch carefully for the small side path — on the right about 0.2 mile past the creek crossing — leading to the Airplane Monument. You can sit on the stone bench there while a breeze fans you and look northward toward Arrowmakers Ridge and distant Stonewall Peak.

Returning to the West Mesa Trail, you continue around a hairpin turn, doubling back to the northwest to follow the top of Airplane Ridge. (The Monument Trail branches south from the hairpin turn, providing a shortcut to Green Valley Campground if you want to bail out of this trip early.) Continue for one mile along the top of the ridge, staying left at the next junction. Then, just afterward, turn left on a narrow, poorly maintained segment of the California Riding and Hiking Trail. The trail descends rapidly on a series of long switchbacks (watch for poison oak here) and passes an intermittent spring marked by an old water trough. Turn left at the bottom of the trail and continue downhill into Arroyo Seco Primitive Camp. The camp lies at the south end of a wide meadow frequented by mule deer and other wildlife.

Past the campground, continue downhill on Arroyo Seco Road toward Green Valley Campground, 1.5 miles away. Before you reach the campground take the cutoff trail on the left that slants over to West Side Trail. Then follow West Side Trail over to the Sweetwater River bridge.

