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## A Hiker's Paradise: Santa Ysabel County Preserve West



Santa Ysabel West Preserve. Photo by Angela McLaughlin

By Angela McLaughlin - Ramona Home Journal • Thu, Mar 23, 2017

Grazing cattle dot the oak-covered, rolling hillsides, as ground squirrels scamper from hole to hole. An abundance of wildlife may be found on our next hike — Santa Ysabel West Preserve.

With more than 1,500 acres of land, there is ample space to explore. To reach the trailhead, take Highway 78 toward Julian. You will find the dirt parking lot on the left side of the road before you enter the town of Santa Ysabel.

From the parking lot, you will enter through a gate onto Lower Creek Trail. Make sure to latch the gate

behind you, as the land is used for grazing cattle. Dogs are welcome on this trail but they must be kept on a leash.

The first part of the trail is gentle and relatively flat, but after about a half a mile, it follows the hillside with a fairly steep climb.

Near the top, the grade eases somewhat — though it still climbs — offering a stretch of easier hiking.

The views of the surrounding area from this point are fantastic, with cows grazing in the distance and large boulders scattered across the terrain. Pause to catch your breath and take in the amazing scenery surrounding you, as coyotes, turkeys and other wildlife are often seen from this vantage point.

There are two picnic areas on the first trail, and with the steep ascent, they make for great resting and rehydrating spots.

The trail climbs quite a bit in the first section, and toward the end there are several steep downhill sections to be aware of. The trail is rocky at certain spots, and the loose gravel and dirt may be a slip hazard going downhill if you are not paying attention to your footing.

At one point before the second picnic area, the trail will cross over a seasonal stream. Following periods of heavy rainfall, hikers should be careful when crossing the water and aware that some areas of the trail may be closed to prevent further trail damage.

After about two miles, you will come to a "Y" in the trail. Novice hikers or those looking for a less demanding hike may opt to turn around at this point.

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If you choose to continue on, the trail forms a loop consisting of the Upper Creek Trail, Coast to Crest Trail and Ridge Trail (there is also a Shortcut Trail). As this area is in the back part of the preserve, wildlife viewing is at its finest. You will also find another picnic spot along this part of the hike.

If tackled in its entirety, this hike is around 5.5 miles long with an elevation change of more than 1,200 feet. Though the dirt trail is well maintained, the steep inclines and declines make for a more challenging hike, and it may be considered moderate in terms of difficulty.

Visitors should remember to stay on the marked trail to avoid habitat destruction and make sure to bring out anything that is brought in. There are many areas of little to no shade, so plan to hike during a cooler time of day and pack plenty of water and sunscreen. As the weather warms and rattlesnakes become more active, be sure to keep an eye out during any hiking adventure.

This time of year is perfect to explore the trails of Santa Ysabel Preserve. With the recent rains, the normally golden hills have an emerald hue. Before the heat of summer hits, get in touch with nature on this hike through the rolling terrain of Santa Ysabel.

For information or to recommend a trail, email [angelamclaughlin@ramonajournal.com](mailto:angelamclaughlin@ramonajournal.com).

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