

# Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park



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### **CALIFORNIA STATE PARKS**

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### **Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park**

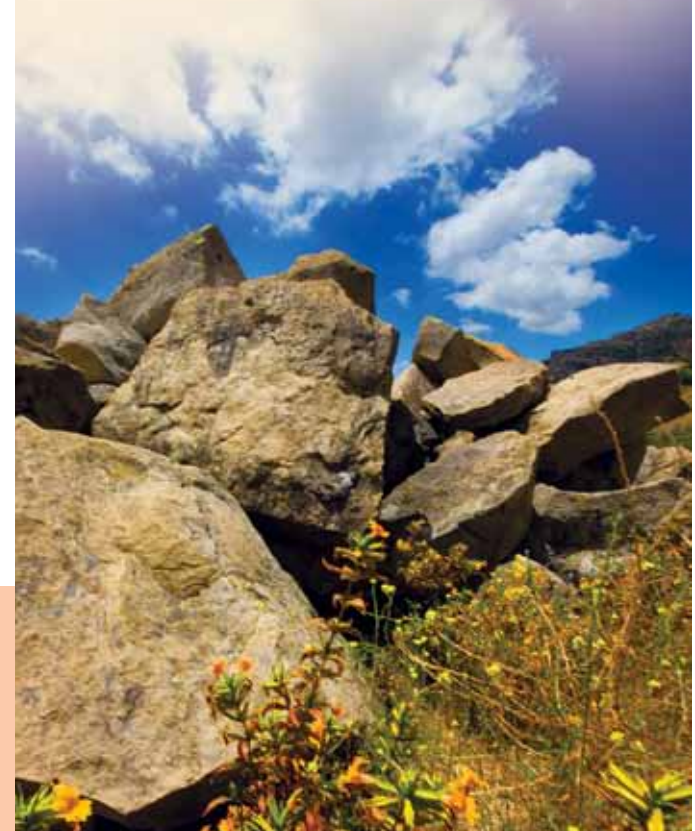
**22400 Devonshire Street**

**Chatsworth, CA 91311**

**(818) 784-4849**

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*The story of Santa  
Susana Pass includes an  
ancient Indian hunting  
trail, rocks used as shelter  
by native people, and  
hair-raising stagecoach  
trips down Devil's Slide.*



**S**anta Susana Pass State Historic Park—where the Simi Hills meet the Santa Susana Mountains—is rich in natural and cultural significance. Its largely undisturbed landscape contains part of a historic transportation corridor between Missions San Buenaventura and San Fernando. The park's Santa Susana Stage Road was once a segment of the famous Butterfield Overland Stage Route, and was also used by Wells, Fargo & Company as a route between Los Angeles and Santa Barbara.

### **PARK HISTORY**

#### **California Indians**

Three native groups lived here before European contact—Chumash to the west, Tongva to the east, and to the north, a group called Tataviam.

The steep road through the Santa Susana Mountains was originally a trail created by the travels of game animals, and used by the native people to track and hunt them. Spanish colonists used the trail for horses, *carretas* (ox carts) and herding livestock.

The arrival of Europeans brought diseases to which the Indians had no resistance. Many Chumash, Tongva and Tataviam people died from smallpox, measles and other diseases.

Today, descendants of these local native groups still live in the area and have revived many of their ancient traditions.

#### **Santa Susana Pass**

Between 1850 and 1861, Indian laborers widened the trail over the pass to accommodate stagecoaches and flat-bottomed mud wagons. The high wheels of these lighter, less-expensive versions of traditional stagecoaches kept the wagon high above the muddy roads.

The trail's precipitous drop earned it the name "Devil's Slide." Drivers employed various strategies to keep from losing control of the stagecoach. Often during the descent, drivers asked passengers to get out and walk, or to carry rocks with which to block the wheels. Mules and horses were blindfolded and coaxed to descend the pass. At times the iron rims of the locked coach wheels sparked against the sandstone. One passenger described seeing a "streak of fire" caused by the wagons' brake shoes rubbing against the iron wheel rims.

The Santa Susana Stage Road is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.



*Mud wagon*

#### **The Spahn Ranch**

The park's sandstone bedrock gives a wide-open "badlands" look, used as the background for many western films and television programs. The 500-acre Spahn Ranch, located within the park's northern boundary, was one of several "movie ranches" in the area. Between the late 1940s and the late 1960s, dozens of films and television shows, including *The Lone Ranger*, *Roy Rogers* and *Bonanza* episodes, were filmed here. In 1970, a wildfire destroyed all of the buildings associated with the former Spahn movie ranch.

#### **NATURAL HISTORY**

Panoramic views of the wild landscape provide striking contrast to the developed communities nearby. The western part of the





Transverse Ranges is dominated by high, narrow ridges and deep canyons covered with a variety of plant life.

In winter, heavy rainfall sometimes causes two of the park's intermittent streams to overflow.

### Geology

The soil ranges from nearly five million-year-old sandstone bedrock to forms of clay, shale and crushed sandstone.

### Plant Life

Sandstone rock outcrops shelter the rare Santa Susana tarplant, while the moister slopes support denser vegetation.

Typical shrubs in the canyons include coastal sagebrush, buckwheat, laurel sumac and chamise. Riparian species such as willow and Mexican elderberry grow well. In larger riparian channels, coast live oak, California walnut and sycamore create a dense canopy. Spring rains produce tiger lilies, maroon monkey flowers and wild lilacs.

### Wildlife

Birds, reptiles and mammals take advantage of the park's diverse plant communities, available

groundwater and unusual geologic features. The terrain is part of an important wildlife corridor connecting the San Gabriel, Santa Susana and Santa Monica mountain ranges. Mule deer, bobcats, coyotes, gray foxes and ringtails are often seen here.

### Climate

May through November is usually dry. Cold, wet winters can send torrents of water over the bedrock. Rarely, heavy rains can cause flash floods in arid canyons.

### RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

**Trails**—Hike, mountain bike or ride horses on the marked multi-use trails. Bicycles must yield to horses and hikers. Horses are not allowed on bike/hike trails. The interpretive trails in the historic area are restricted to hiking and foot traffic only. Dogs are not allowed on any trails.

### PLEASE REMEMBER

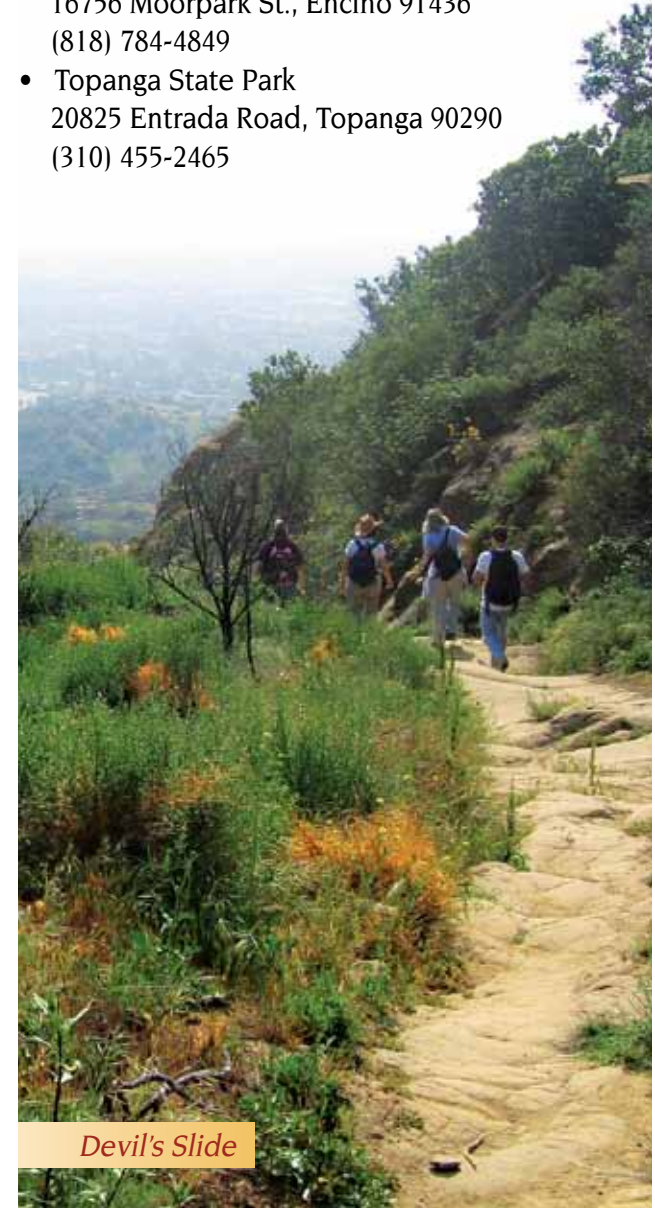
- Enter from Chatsworth Park South at 22360 Devonshire St. or from 10200 Larwin Ave., 9860 Andora Ave., or 7700 Lilac Lane.
- Park legally in residential areas. Do not park on Santa Susana Pass Road.
- No motor vehicles are allowed in the park.
- Do not disturb natural or cultural features.
- Alcohol consumption and weapons are not permitted in the park.
- Fires are prohibited due to wildfire danger.
- Carry and drink plenty of water. Summer temperatures usually reach 100 degrees.
- Do not hike alone. Tell someone where you are going and when you will return.
- Carry a cell phone to call 911 for emergencies.
- Stay away from all railroad tracks and tunnels.
- Contact park staff for a schedule of interpretive activities and volunteer opportunities.

### ACCESSIBLE FEATURES

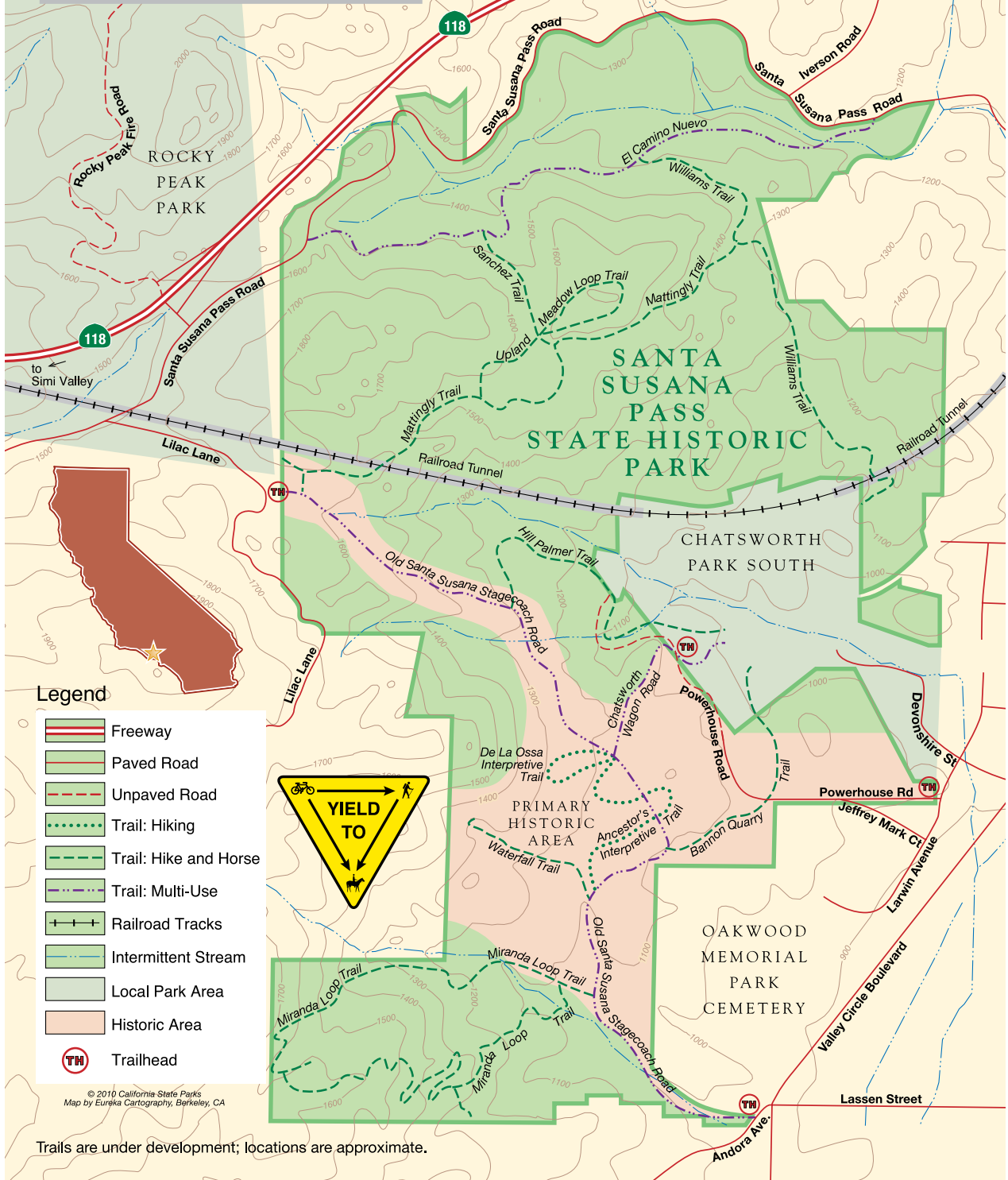
Currently no wheelchair-accessible features or restrooms are available. Accessibility is continually improving. Visit <http://access.parks.ca.gov> for updates.

### NEARBY STATE PARKS

- Los Encinos State Historic Park  
16756 Moorpark St., Encino 91436  
(818) 784-4849
- Topanga State Park  
20825 Entrada Road, Topanga 90290  
(310) 455-2465



# Santa Susana Pass State Historic Park



- Legend**
- Freeway
  - Paved Road
  - Unpaved Road
  - Trail: Hiking
  - Trail: Hike and Horse
  - Trail: Multi-Use
  - Railroad Tracks
  - Intermittent Stream
  - Local Park Area
  - Historic Area
  - Trailhead

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Map by Eureka Cartography, Berkeley, CA

Trails are under development; locations are approximate.