

Crystal Cove State Park

— Laguna Beach, CA

Hello again!

This month, we travel south just past Newport Beach to the beautiful Crystal Cove State Park. The backcountry and wilderness areas of Crystal Cove State Park offer 17 miles of hiking trails that wind through 2,400 acres of native wilderness – mostly the endangered coastal sage scrub plant community.

For energetic backpackers, there are three environmental campgrounds: one in a canyon and two at the higher elevations. The higher trails offer beautiful vistas of the mountainous backcountry, geological formations and the blue Pacific Ocean. Exploring the lower trails offers hiking through riparian woodlands with oak and sycamore trees along the seasonal Moro Creek. Whether you explore the high trails, the low trails or both, you will find ample evidence of native plants and animals, and a sense of escaping from civilization into the beautiful solitude of natural history.

Let's begin!

We took the "red" route:

- Distance: 5.5 miles
- Elevation: 50 – 872 feet
- Approximate time: 2.25 hours
- Difficulty: Moderate.

We started at the Ranger Station; go left down the hill and take the first left turn. Continue on this path until you come to the first trail crossing on the right. Hikers have named this the BFI – Big Fat Incline, which I agree is an appropriate name for this trail. The distance from this point to the Ranger Station is seventh-tenths of a mile. Next, take the BFI until you reach the top of Morro Ridge. Don't forget to enjoy the splendid views of the ocean as you climb. You will have hiked 2.7 miles and an altitude of 842 feet by the time come to the East Cut Across, which will take you down off Moro Ridge. The East Cut Across is a pleasant down-slope with excellent views into the interior of the park.

Fact: In 1998, this path was washed out by the El Niño floods. When you reach the end of the East Cut Across, turn toward the ocean – left – and continue along the Lower Moro Trail back to the Ranger Station.

The Trail: The State Park features three miles of Pacific coastline, wooded canyons, open bluffs and offshore waters designated as an underwater park. Crystal Cove is used not just by people who enjoy water-related activities, including swimming, surfing, sunbathing, scuba and skin diving, but also people who like to fish, mountain bike and hike.

The great expanse upland, north and east of the Pacific Coast Highway is for hikers who can follow hillside and canyon trails to campsites that allow visitors to feel they are "away from it all," despite being near one of the greatest population centers in the United States.

My family and I loved the hike so much that we plan to go back and try to improve our own hike time, which averaged to be about two-and-a-half hours (remember we have 9- and 7-year-olds with us). We took the red route, which is said to be moderate. It felt a little more like a difficult level to me. This trail stays in the backcountry section of the park so we could see the beach only from the uphill section at the beginning of our hike.

This is very important: You will need a hat, cap or umbrella because there is almost no shade along the path. Sunscreen is a must; bring plenty of water, too.

The hike was enjoyable and challenging for all of us. I love the outdoors and really enjoy the tranquility of a nice, quiet hike.

My youngest son, Aden, loves to run and be outdoors, but this hike was a bit more challenging for him.

Starting at Morro Ridge, you will have a steady incline going upward. If you travel this direction first, you

will have the entire coastline and breeze to keep you company, but once you reach the "I think I can" section, you will make a left and start going inland.

The hike began to get hot very quickly once the beach wind started to die down. Since this was our first time on the trail, we had to continue. Next time, however, I think it would be wiser to begin our hike at El Morro Canyon instead so we get the coastline as a final treat.

Before you leave, stop by the Ranger Station to see all the cool information there on plant and animal life in the immediate area.

If you happen to take on this trail, I ask you to please swing by the very inviting looking beach area of the State Park. My family was out of breath by the time we completed the hike, so going any further was out of the question. Don't forget to take pictures of the hike/beach area and send them to me at agomez@cityemployeesclub.com.

**As always,
be safe and *Be Alive!*,
Angel**



Aden and I at the Crystal Cove State Park Sign.

Angel's

Be Alive!

Angel Gomez, Director of Member Services

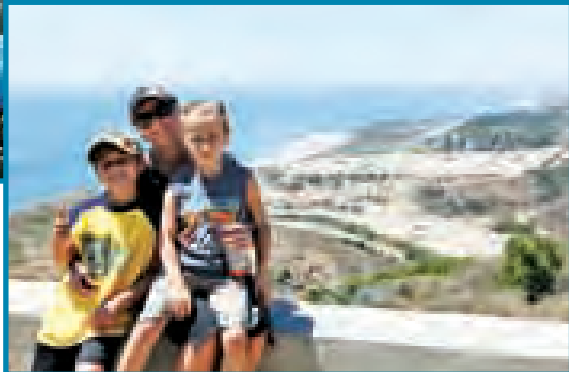


Keep on smiling!

BELOW: The Ranger Station entrance.



Ranger's Information Center.



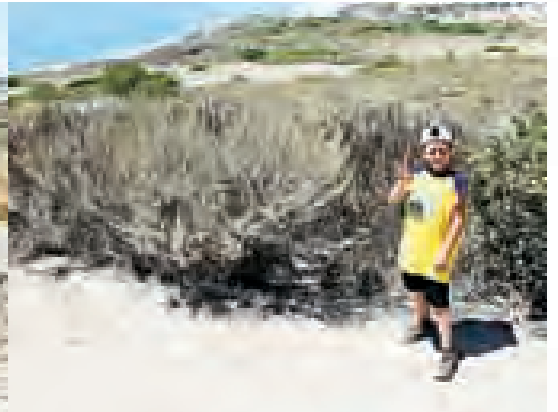
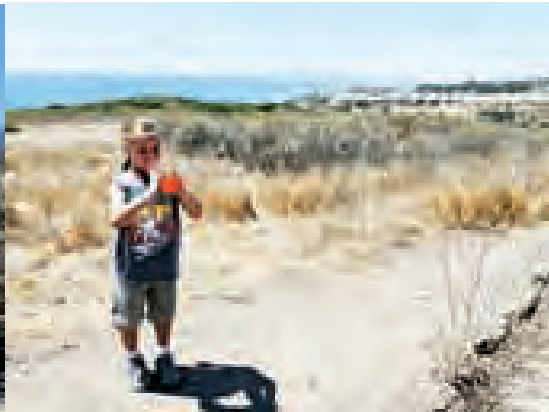
Angel, Kathy and Aden taking a short break.



Angel and Aden hike up the steep trail.

Aden drinks his Gatorade with a view of the coastline behind him.

Angel Jr. gives a peace sign on the coastline.



Crystal Cove State Park

8471 Pacific Coast Highway
Laguna Beach, CA 92651
(949) 494-3539



Red Route hiking trail marked in red.

Hiking Trail:

Red Route
DISTANCE: 5.5 MILES
ELEVATION: 50'-872'
APPROXIMATE TIME: 2.25 hrs.
(Depending on your pace)
DIFFICULTY: Moderate

Parking Fees:

An all-day parking pass costs \$15 (or you can park at the Morro Elementary School and just walk up the hill to beginning of the trail). You save \$15!

Directions: *Directions from downtown.*

OPTION 1: Take the 5 Freeway south to the CA-55 south (Newport Beach), then take exit 5A toward State Route 73 South toward San Diego. Then take exit 11 to merge onto Newport Coast Drive. Take a slight left to stay on Newport Coast Drive. Turn left at CA-1/El Camino Real (look for the elementary school; save \$15).

OPTION 2: Take the I-405 south toward Long Beach, then take exit 5A toward State Route 73 south toward San Diego. Then take exit 11 to merge onto Newport Coast Drive. Take a slight left to stay on Newport Coast Drive. Turn left at CA-1/El Camino Real (Look for the elementary school; save \$15).