

San Rafael Mountain 06H

Lat/lon 34.7108196,-119.8151377
UTM 11S 242177E 3844583N

Elevation: 6593'

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San Rafael Mountain on [Peakbagger.com](#)

Current Weather on [NOAA](#)

Location: Santa Barbara County, about 21 miles north of Goleta, 135 miles from Los Angeles

Nearby peaks: McKinley Mountain, Santa Cruz Peak

Land Manager: Los Padres National Forest, Santa Lucia Ranger District (805) 925-9538

USE AT YOUR OWN RISK. CONDITIONS MAY CHANGE, AND UNEXPECTED HAZARDS MAY BE PRESENT.

About the peak

San Rafael, with its neighbors McKinley Mountain and Santa Cruz Peak, constitute the so-called "Big Three". It is the namesake peak of the San Rafael Mountains, deep in the heart of wild and beautiful Los Padres National Forest. It is a long hike, backpack or mountain bike trip from the nearest trailhead, unless you are on one of the periodic HPS-sponsored trail maintenance trips to clear the trail of the pretty but prickly ceanothus that can overtake it at times.

Like the other Big Three peaks it is approached via a long and scenic, but still tedious, road hike to McKinley Saddle. One can stop along the way at McKinley Spring and campground for water that is generally available year around and some shade. From the saddle a pretty trail winds gently up to the summit. The peaks in the area can be quite hot in summer. Further trip planning information is in the notes below.

McKinley Mountain, Santa Cruz Peak, and San Rafael Mountain are together known as "The Big Three". They are normally done as a two-day backpack, camping overnight at McKinley Spring.

CAMPING

Year-round water is usually available from the large pipe-fed container at the camp (avoid using water from the horse trough) but should be treated because the water is obtained from storage. Bears frequent the area, so bear-proofing food and other perishables is also advisable.

MOUNTAIN BIKING

8N08 is well graded and maintained as far as McKinley Saddle. These 8 road miles are suitable for mountain biking.

TRIP PLANNING

Round trip excursions from McKinley Saddle:

Santa Cruz Peak is 11 miles, 1800' gain, plus 2000' gain on the return (7-9 hours).

McKinley Mountain is 1 mile, 400' gain (1 hour).

San Rafael Mountain is 5 miles, 1100' gain (2 hours).

Add 1 mile, 200' gain if the trip begins from camp. Round trip for the Big Three as a day hike is 33 miles, 8600' gain. Camping is recommended.

NATURAL HISTORY NOTE

This area experienced a major fire in 1994. The routes to McKinley and San Rafael were not affected, but the fire dramatically changed the vegetation on Santa Cruz Peak. The last portion of the climbing route to this peak has been permanently changed, with very dense stands of brush replacing the the relatively open slopes that used to be found there.

San Rafael Mountain has 1 official HPS route:

San Rafael Mountain Route 1

Distance: 20 miles round trip on road and trail

Difficulty rating: Class 1, very strenuous

Trailhead location on [Google Maps](#)

Adventure Pass may be required

Gain: 3400

Time: 11 hours round trip

Navigation difficulty:

Road type: Dirt

Driving directions:

- Take US 101 to just west of Santa Barbara. Turn north on SR 154.
- Continue north and then west about 22 miles past Lake Cachuma, to Armour Ranch Road on the right. Turn right, note your odometer and go as follows:
- At 1.3 miles, fork with Happy Canyon Road on the right. Turn right.
- At 12.9 miles, Cachuma Campground.
- At 15.3 miles, Cachuma Saddle and a ranger station on the left. Park in the large parking lot south of the ranger station..
- Sometimes Happy Canyon Road is closed by a slide. In this case, continue farther west on SR 154 to the town of Los Olivos and then go north on Figueroa Mountain Road, which joins Happy Canyon Road at Cachuma Saddle.

Hiking directions:

- From the parking area (3100'), cross the highway and hike in on 28W01, a dirt road to the east, 7 1/2 miles to McKinley Spring at 5600'. The spring is below the road on the left. This is a good camping spot.
- Hike 1/2 mile farther east on 28W01 to the saddle between McKinley and San Rafael. This is also the turnoff for McKinley Mountain and Santa Cruz Peak.
- A trail starts on the east end of this saddle. Follow this trail up along the ridge.
- After about 1/2 mile the trail leaves the ridge and goes along the left (northwest) side of it for about a mile, then comes back onto the ridge. Continue about 1/4 mile farther, past a shallow saddle and along the north side of the ridge.
- Where the trail gains the ridge again, turn sharp right at a trail junction and follow it about 50 yards up to the summit.

Additional Route 1 notes:

