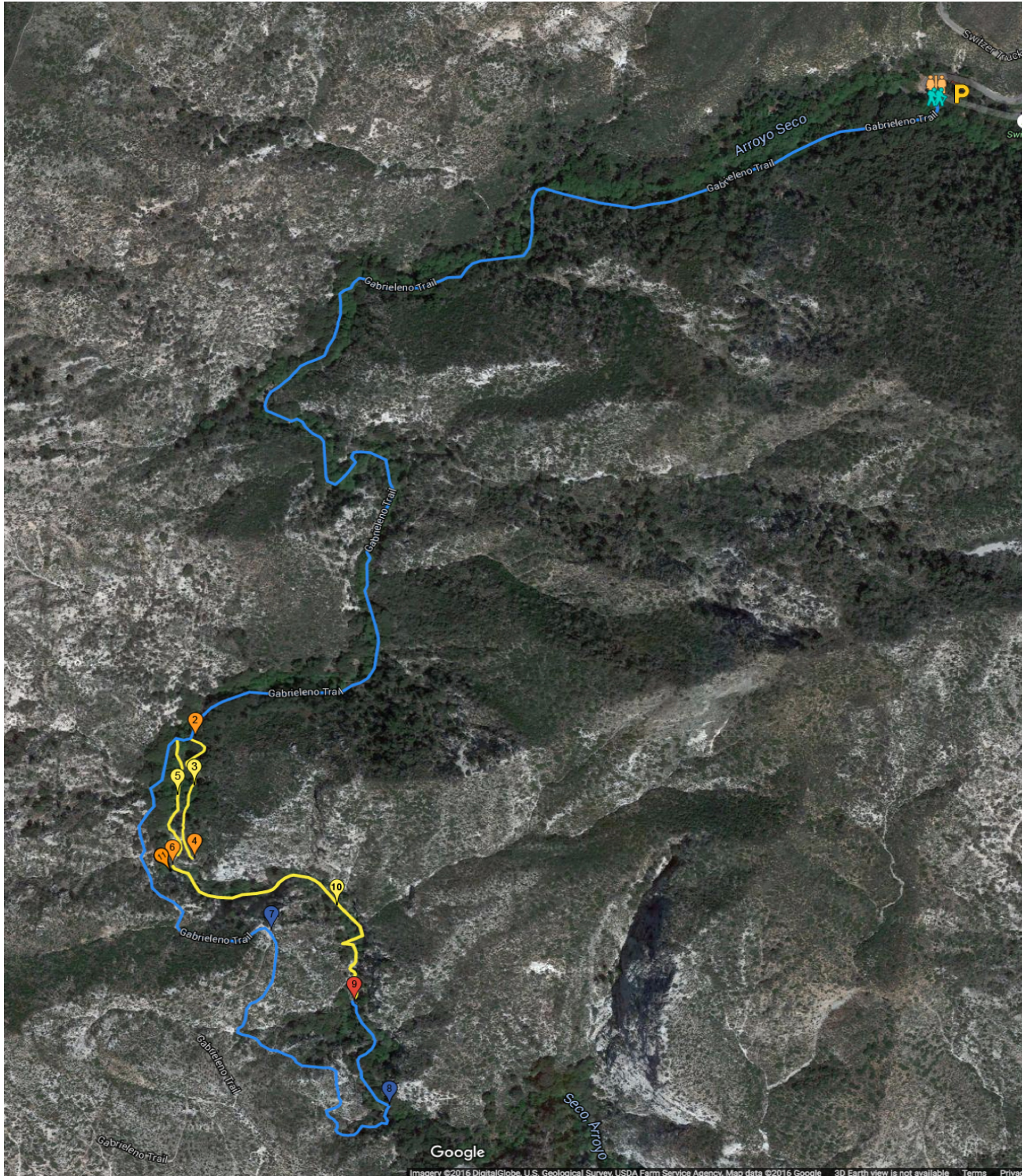


Switzer Falls Hike

by Hike-LosAngeles.com



Switzer Falls Trail Guide

DISTANCE: 3.4 Miles Roundtrip (plus extra mileage on spur trails)

ELEVATION GAIN: -650'

TYPE: Out and Back

HIKING TIME: 1.5 - 2 Hours (Add time for spur trails)

RATING: Easy first half with a short but moderate uphill push near the middle

FEATURES: Views of the San Gabriel Mountains, ruins of the Switzer-land resort, two waterfalls

Directions to Trailhead

Switzer Truck Trail

Altadena, CA 91001

Coordinates: 34°15'58.4"N 118°08'44.3"W

Take the Angeles Crest Highway (CA-2) east for 10 miles from the 210 in La Cañada Flintridge. Just past the Clear Creek Information Center, turn right into the Switzer Campground and Picnic Area. Follow the road all the way down to the parking area. This site does require an Adventure Pass to park. Passes may be purchased at the Clear Creek Information Center on weekends and at the Shell station back in La Cañada Flintridge on weekdays. Do not park without a pass. You may be ticketed and/or towed.



Trailhead

The trailhead is located at the entrance of the picnic area. Cross the footbridge over the Arroyo Seco River and onto the Gabrieleno Trail. Continue 1.1 miles along a shaded stretch of the Arroyo Seco to the ruins of Switzer-land Camp and the first trail junction. This portion of the hike is an easy, gradual descent.



Switzer's Camp (1.1 mile)

Constructed in 1894 by Commodore Perry Switzer, this back country camp became a thriving resort when purchased by Lloyd Austin in 1911. The camp featured cabins, an open air dance floor, a croquet field, tennis court, and a library. Austin and his wife lived here until his retirement in 1936. All that remains today are some wood-burning stoves scattered along the trail.



Spur Trail to Christ's Chapel Ruins

If you want to add to your hike, take the spur trail from the camp ruins to site of Christ's chapel 200' above Switzer Falls. This trail is only about 600' in length but climbs nearly 200'. There are some treacherous vertical climbs and the trail is not easy to follow. In addition, the views are the same as you will see from the main trail on the opposite side of the canyon. Unless you feel the need to get up close and personal with history, I recommend you forgo this particular side trip.



Ruins of Christ's Chapel

Designed by Arthur B. Benton, the chapel featured an iron bell, reed organ, and stained glass windows -- all hauled up the canyon trail by hand. The chapel amphitheater seated 200 and, outside of Sunday morning services, was well-used for weddings and youth retreats. The chapel was demolished for safety reasons by the US Forest Service in 1943. All that remains on the summit are the foundations. The chapel arches are scattered on the mountainside below.



Spur Trail to Top of Upper Falls

Just before the small set of switchbacks on the opposite side of the Arryo Seco is a short 500' spur trail that follows the river downstream to the top of the upper falls. This is a relatively easy side trip that with a little rock scrambling at the end to reach the falls. Hikers attempting this trail are urged to use caution when approaching the top of the falls. During high-volume water flows, this side trip should not be attempted.

If you elect not to take the spur trail, continue up the switchbacks on the Gabrieleno Trail and begin a fairly steep ascent to Trail Junction 1, about .25 mile distant.



Top of Upper Falls

The top of the Upper Falls is reached along a spur trail from the ruins of Switzer's Camp. There is a little rock scrambling at the end for a look over the edge into the box canyon below. Hikers are urged not to venture out to the edge during heavy water flows and use extreme caution during other times.

When you complete your visit, make your way back along the Arryo Seco to Switzer's Camp and take the switchbacks on the Gabrieleno Trail on a fairly steep ascent to Trail Junction 1, about .25 miles distant.



Trail Junction 1 (1.3 miles)

As you come around the bend, the trail splits in two. The Gabrieleno Trail veers uphill to the right and the Switzer Trail descends to the left. Continue downhill on the Switzer Trail. you will reach the canyon floor and return to the Arryo Seco in about .3 mile.



Trail Junction 2 (1.6 miles)

As you reach the canyon floor, the trail splits to the right and left. Turning right will take you downstream and into Bear Canyon. Turn left and continue upstream to reach Lower Switzer Falls in about .1 mile. Though the trail to the falls is not maintained from this point onward, the falls see enough traffic that it is fairly easy to follow. Don't be deterred by the sign.



Lower Switzer Falls (1.7 miles)

Congratulations! You've reached Lower Switzer Falls, a 30' two-tiered waterfall. During the wet seasons, the basin below the falls fills with water to make a nice wading pond. During drier seasons, the basin is a sandy beach. The area just above the larger drop makes for a nice natural jacuzzi during the rainy season.



Spur Trail to Upper Falls

For the adventurous who wish to reach the larger upper falls, look for a side trail to the right of the lower falls. There is a little bit of rock scrambling to reach the top of the lower falls, but from there it is an easy walk along the Arroyo Seco to reach the 50' upper falls in about .25 mile.



Upper Switzer Falls, 50' (1.95 miles)

At about .25 mile from the lower falls, the canyon dead ends on a granite wall with the Upper Switzer Falls cascading over the face. Like the lower falls, the basin here will fill with water for a wading pool during rainier seasons, but remains a sandy beach at other times. Hiking to the upper falls is not advised during heavy water flows. Hikers are to use their own discretion.