

DANA POINT HEADLANDS HIKE

Approximately a 4-mile loop

(No dogs or bikes are allowed on the trails)

A map of this trail is available in PDF format at

<http://www.danapoint.org/index.aspx?page=577>

This is a loop trail across the Dana Point Headlands and through coastal sage scrub, along Dana Strands Beach, city parks and with striking ocean and coastal views. The trail and turnouts on the headlands are grand locations for whale watching in the winter months. This hike also gives you the opportunity to ride a funicular railway. The trail's creation was the result of many years of grassroots, local efforts to preserve the last of the open space headlands on the California coast for public access and enjoyment.

You will probably want to drive the 1.5-mile route to the trailhead at the Dana Point Nature Interpretive Center (NIC). From the entrance of Doheny State Beach, turn left (west) onto Dana Point Harbor Drive going about 1 mile to Cove Road; a right turn takes you up the steep and not pedestrian friendly hill to Scenic Drive. Turn left on Scenic Drive, which dead ends at the NIC parking lot. You can park in the lot or on the street (parking lot gates are locked just after sunset).



The Nature Interpretive Center

The trailhead is behind the NIC and leads out into the coastal scrub of the headlands. On the southeast side (your left), you'll see San Juan Rock and the coastline from Dana Point down into San Diego County. Ahead on a clear day is San Clemente Island, and north of it and much closer, Santa Catalina, the southern most islands in the Channel Island chain. Just offshore of the headlands is "Annabelle", a large red channel buoy giving off the occasional toot to warn sailors there are rock reefs on the inside they should avoid. You'll probably hear the barking of sea lions that use Annabelle as a haul-out to rest on during the day. To the northwest on a clear day, you can visually follow the coastline up to the Palos Verdes Peninsula.

Before hitting the trail, take time to visit the NIC, open Tuesday through Sunday, 10 AM – 4 PM. Inside you will find wonderful historic, geologic, geographic, animal (land and sea), and vegetation exhibits giving you a good background on the area you are about to traipse through. There are knowledgeable docents and a colorful mural of the 1840's headlands during the hide trade era along the California coast.



Looking Northwest to Dana Strands Beach

The headlands trail winds along to exit onto Dana Strands Road. Walk passed the apartments (wouldn't you like to have one of those, eh?) and a short distance further down the road until you reach the entrance to the switchback stairs leading down to Dana Strands Beach. At the bottom of the switchback is a wooden raised walkway heading northwest along the beach. On your left is beautiful Dana Strands; on your right are some spectacular homes (forget the apartments, I'll take one of these). The waves along this stretch of beach are hard breakers. If perchance you decide to take a swim, be forewarned that it doesn't take much to get hammered into the sand.

The walkway ends at a lifeguard tower and a wide paved path heads up the hill. Just a short distance away is some real fun, a chance to ride a funicular railcar to the top of the hill. The funicular runs during the summer and on weekends during other seasons. It's a free ride. Your other choice is to walk up the stairs, a walkway known locally as "1000 Steps". On-line readers can take a trip down the funicular on YouTube at



The Funicular

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6idbHEWZ8lw>

Exiting the funicular or arriving at the top of the stairs, turn right and walk along the sidewalk of the parking lot through Strands Vista Park. At the War Memorial, head out to Selva Road and look to your right across the street for the pedestrian / bike path heading up the hill. Reaching the top of this path, you are at the private entrance of the housing tract on Shoreline Drive by Pacific Coast Highway. Cross Shoreline Drive to the entrance into Hilltop Park and its walking path. When you reach the point on the path where there are apartments on your left, you'll also reach an intersecting path on your right leading up the hill. This is a side trip well worth the climb as it takes you to the highest point on the coastline with a spectacular 360-degree view of the coast from San Diego to Palos Verdes and the Santa Ana Mountains behind you. In the winter when there's snow capping Saddleback at sunset and the sun settles into the Pacific, it's a breath-taking sight. Now back down this side trail and continue along the Hilltop Park path to a stairway leading down to Green Lantern Street. At the bottom of the stairs, turn right to head back towards the NIC. Along the way and on your left just passed Cove Road is another short side trip trail (1/4 mile) through Harbor Point Park leading to the cliffs above the Ocean Institute and the jetty.



Stairway to St. of the Green Lantern

SAN JUAN HILLS TRAILS

The distance you hike is up to you: good for an hour, good for all day.

These trails are popular with hikers, dog walkers, runners and off-road bicyclers. They have many connecting trails for you to choose from, none better than another: all a delight. In warm weather, trail users should be aware that this is wild land, thus home to snakes. Don't pick up a stick unless you know it really is a stick. Keep an eye on whatever Rover may be investigating.

The San Juan Hills Trails stretch along the ridgelines and canyons of the backcountry in San Juan Capistrano. These trails are actually part of a larger network reaching from San Clemente and San Onofre in the south and inland to the Ortega and the Donna O'Neill Land Conservancy. Hiking is on well-defined trails: some wide, some narrow, some flat, some steep, but all hard pack except after a rain. Then, unless you enjoy pounds of adobe mud caked to your shoes; you should probably avoid the hike until things dry out. The views from trails are spectacular encompassing the coastline and Dana Point Harbor, Talega Valley on the San Clemente side of the hills and the breath of the



Las Ramblas Trail

Capistrano Valley as far back as the entrance to Trabuco Canyon at the base of Saddleback and the Santa Ana Mountains on the other side and to the east. There's vegetation a plenty with a variety of sage, reeds, wildflowers, wild artichoke thistles and grasses. As with most hill hikes in

Southern California, the best time of year stretches from the first rains of the wet season when the hills turn green with fresh vegetation through mid-spring as the hillsides are just turning brown again. Summer hiking is rewarding as well, only not as colorful with vegetation and the need to keep a look out for snakes that maybe lounging on or near the trails.

The Las Ramblas Trailhead is the closest entry to the San Juan Hills Trails from Doheny State



Trailhead at the top of Las Ramblas

Beach, less than a 3-mile drive from the park's entrance. Turn right onto Dana Point Harbor Drive and right again on to Pacific Coast Highway; move into the left lane. The road rises towards the Interstate 5 on-ramps and passes beneath the freeway bridge. At this point, the road becomes Las Ramblas. Stay on Las Ramblas all the way to the top where it dead-ends at the Las Ramblas Trailhead. There's easy parking on both sides of the road. The entrance to the trail is on your right as you walk up the street. Once through the entry gate onto the trail, head to the top of the ridge. The main trail is on your left but there are a few smaller trails going off up the hills on either side of you. I suggest, on your first time through, go with the main trials.

My current favorite San Juan Hills hike with my grand-dog Charlie is up the Las Ramblas Trail until it is intersected by the Harbor View Trail on the left. Up the hillside at the top of Harbor View is the beautiful sight of the coast and the harbor, and across the canyons and ridges. On the way back down the Harbor View Trail, you'll see a smaller trail on the hill to your left. This is the easier path than the steep Delgado main trail, taking you across the ridgeline to connect with the Patriot Trail. Along the Patriot Trail is an American flag that has proudly flown since 9/11. It's a good destination. Making this hike and back to the Las Ramblas Trailhead is about an hour and a half or so, allowing plenty of time for Charlie to sniff around and leave his doggie pee-mail for others to find, and for me, of course, to stop and enjoy the view.

You can access a PDF map of the San Juan Hill Trails at

<http://www.sanjuancapistrano.org/index.aspx?page=457> . The Las Ramblas trailhead is on the bottom right side of the map.

Photo Credits

Except for the following, photos by Ed Neely

The Pirate's Cave Franz Zhilmahn

The Nature Interpretive Center City of Dana Point

Looking Northwest to Dana Strands Beach Steve Bemerhawld

The Funicular Orange County Register

Stairway to St. of the Green Lantern City of Dana Point