

Dayhikes in Mexico

Presented by The Serious Mexico Tourist



<http://www.geocities.com/sermextr>

Cataviña

Santa María Mission

Trail Data

Length = 22.9 km. Exertion index = 284 going, 456 returning. Maximum elevation = 598 m.

The trail to the Santa María Mission crosses rugged terrain to an unlikely oasis in the midst of stony desert. All that's left of the mission are some badly eroded walls of the mission church. But the stand of palm trees in a little swamp is still there, flourishing. Follow the stream as far as you like.

Temperatures can reach over 100°F, so summer isn't a good time of year.

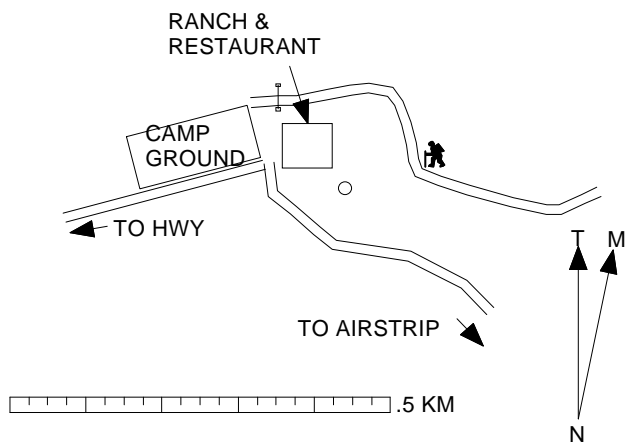
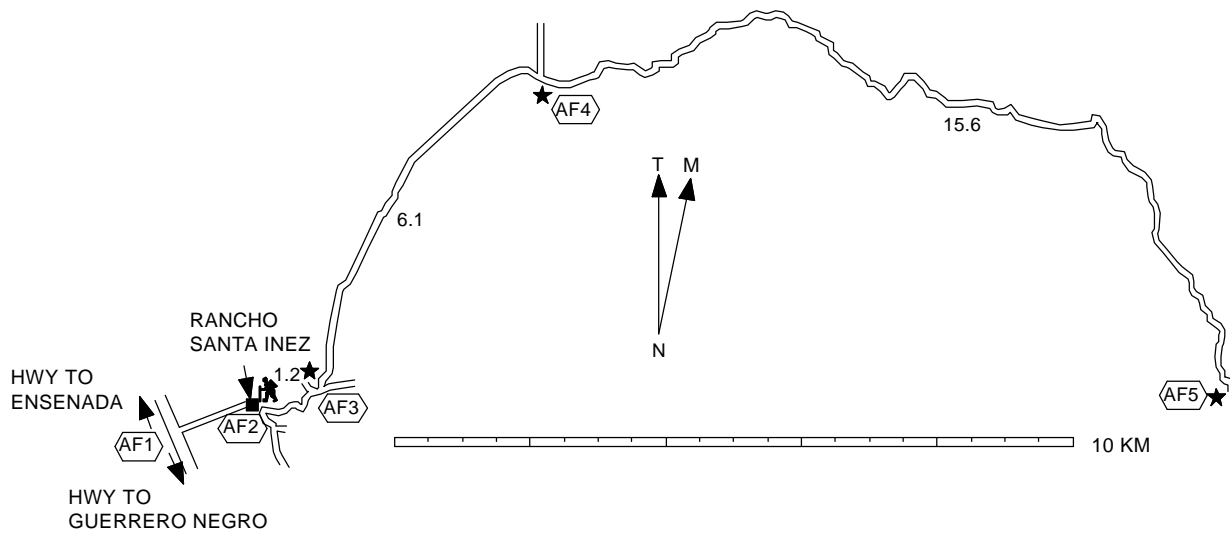
The trailhead is at the Santa Inez Ranch. You can park there for a small fee. You also can camp; the facilities are modest but it's cheap. And there's a restaurant; if it's not open you'll have to go into the nearby town.

When you start out, be sure to tell someone at the ranch about your plans. If you're overdue they may be able to send out a rescue party. Alternatively, if you're going to be out overnight they need to know not to send one.

To start, go around the ranch buildings from the NE corner of the camping area. If the gate is locked then you have to go around to the other side of the ranch buildings and go through the gate into the livestock yard.

Early in the hike there are two side-trails leading to private residences. Once you're past those, the trail is distinct and easy to follow, thanks to ATVers who motor their way up. It's not actually a good ATV trail, because there are patches of loose stones and some very steep parts. But it's an excellent hike, with great, even dramatic, scenery.

Locals claim that water is always available near the mission. If you intend to replenish your water there, be sure to treat it, even if it's running and clear.



Madera

Cuarenta Casas

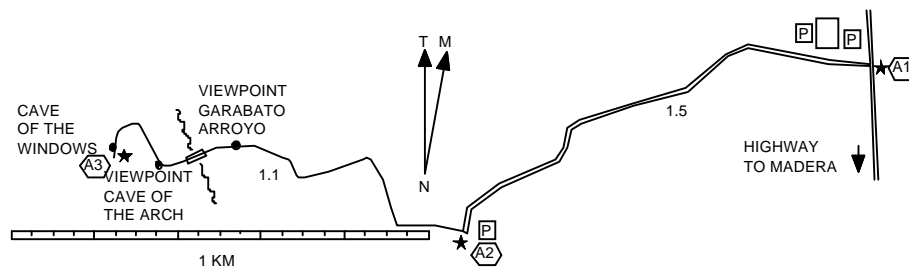


Trail Data Length each way = 1.1 km. Exertion index: 75 going, 250 returning.
Maximum elevation = 2223 m.

Cuarenta Casas has cliff dwellings like those in the Four Corners area of the US. To see the dwellings involves hiking down and up the sides of Arroyo Garabato, a small, pretty canyon, on stair-stepped switchbacks.

To get there, go through Madera on the main street, Calle 3a. Continue north on the highway to Km 43 and turn left. Follow the poor dirt road .8 mi (1.3 km) to the parking lot.

The closest accommodations are back in the direction of Madera, at Hostales Paraíso Madera Peñitas. They have rustic but clean cabins and a campground with restrooms and hot showers for tents or RVs. At Km 7.4 turn east at a sign for Presa Peñitas. Cross a cattle guard, go .9 mi (1.4 km) to another cattle guard and another .3 mi (.5 km)



on a compacted road to the entrance.

Creel

Creel is the main center for hiking in the Copper Canyon area. There are two excellent hikes you can make from the town, and a number that are only a short drive away. The proximity of these hikes to Creel makes bicycle rentals a good choice. Several places rent mountain bikes; Tres Amigos Excursions is especially recommended because of their knowledge of the area plus a positive attitude toward independent travelers. They also rent pickup trucks suited to the roads. As always, though, it pays to compare costs.

San Ignacio



Trail Data Length of loop = 9 km. Exertion index = 215. Maximum elevation = 2402 m.

This loop hike starts at the south end of Creel and takes you around to the small, austere mission church at San Ignacio, through some odd-shaped boulders, into a humble farming area, and finally over a rocky hill back to Creel.

To start, go south down the main street, Ave. López Mateos, past the Villa Mexicana hotel/campground. Where the paved road bends toward the highway follow the dirt road straight to go past the cemetery. At the top of the hill past the cemetery there may or may not be a small toll, about 20 pesos.

Cusarare



Trail Data

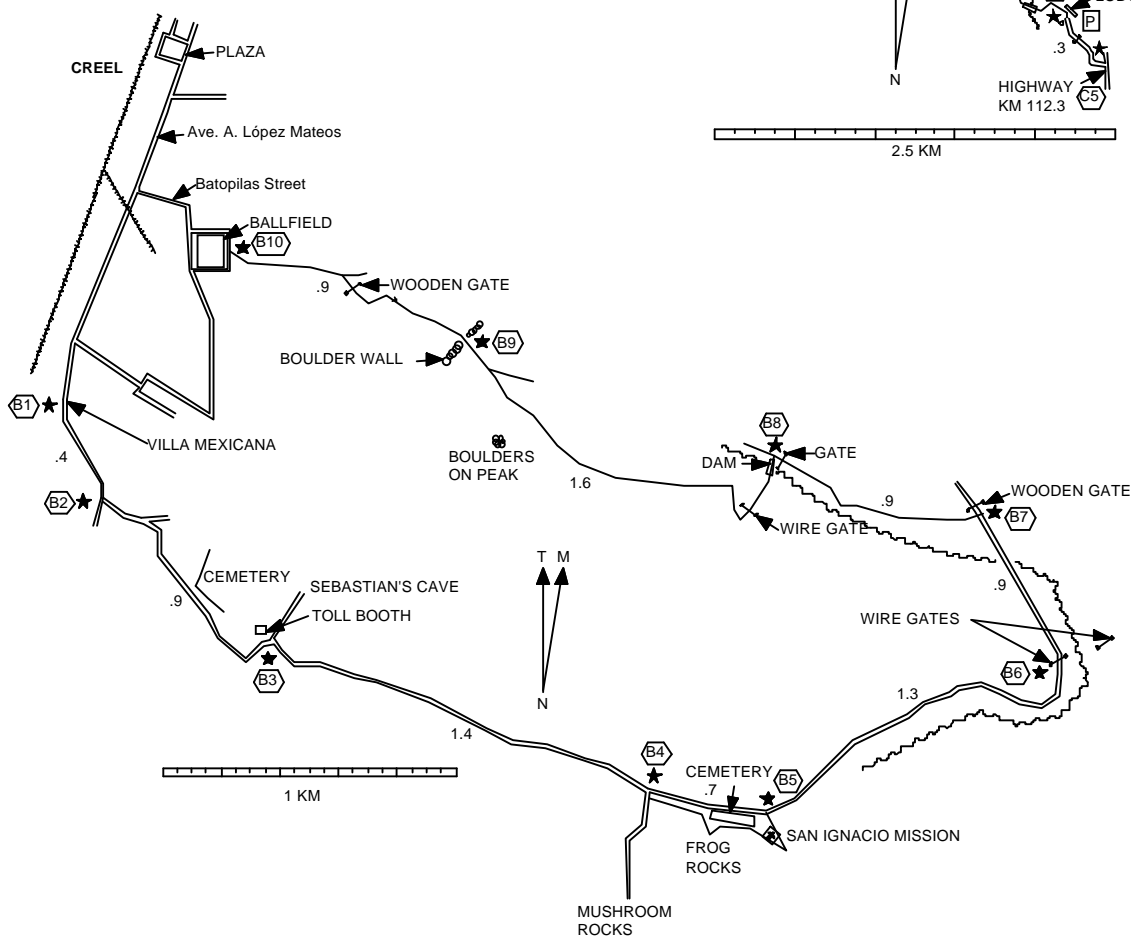
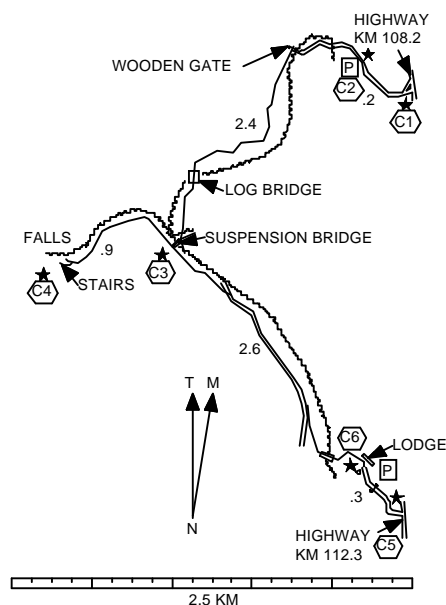
Km. 108.2 to suspension bridge: Distance = 2.6 km. Exertion index = 45 going, 100 returning. Maximum elevation = 2245 m.

Km. 112.3 to suspension bridge: Distance = 2.9 km. Exertion index = 20 going, 40 returning.

Suspension bridge to falls: Distance = .9 km. Exertion index = 50 going, 95 returning.

There are two trails to the cascades. Both are equally beautiful, following streams through wooded canyons to a waterfall. The Raramuchi access (Km 108.2) is recommended because the access is much easier and safer. But there's nothing to keep you from hiking up the other way for extra distance before returning to your car. The toll for either is about 20 pesos per person.

Km 112.3 Access. On the right from Creel. There's a sharp dropoff at the entrance and it's tough getting back on the highway because you can't see traffic. You have to park near the highway unsupervised or drive down a



treacherous road to the gate. There is a rustic lodge where you can stay for a change from the hustle and bustle of Creel.

Km 108.2 Access (Raramuchi). Better/safer exit than at Km 112.3. Follow the rough road .4 mi (.6 km) to a store/cafeteria to park. If the road is dry go on another .1 mi (.2 km) to the gate.

Rekowata

Trail Data

Creel-Rukiraso waterfall: Length = 9.3 km. Exertion index = 205 going, 215 returning.

Rukiraso waterfall to trail junction: Length = 3.9 km. Exertion index = 160 going, 80 returning.

Trail junction to hot springs: Length = 2.2 km. Exertion index = 5 going, 260 returning.

Trail junction to San Ignacio Canyon viewpoint: Length = 3.1 km. Exertion index = 85 going, 60 returning. Maximum elevation = 2462 m.

The Rewokata area can be reached by walking from Creel or by driving in from the Creel-Divisadero highway. It includes the beautiful Rukiraso waterfall, Rewokata hot springs, and a viewpoint over San Ignacio Canyon.

The waterfall and viewpoint hikes are pleasant rambles through sustainable-yield pine forest that culminate in great views.

The hot springs hike is quite different. All the hiking is on a steep, narrow, rough-cobbled roadway laid by hand. The labor that went into making the road is a marvel. But the point of it is to view the canyon all the way down to the stream at the bottom and soak in bath-temperature water in small concrete pools.

Camping is allowed at the parking lot and at the stream near the hot spring.

From Creel

You can drive or walk to the trailhead from Creel. Follow the highway past the Divisadero turnoff, then past Km 94, to the near end of a bridge. Go right onto a dirt road and reach the tollhouse. The toll is about 20 pesos.

This is a hike with some variety. The first half takes you through a farming valley with lavish stone outcroppings and thick pine forests on the sides. Then there's a little rise to a stony ridge. Follow the stony ridge to where you can hear the falls to your left and a little behind you. There's no official viewpoint so you have to pick your way through the trees and shrubs to find a place where you can see the waterfall and catch a captivating view of the canyon.

From the Creel-Divisadero Highway

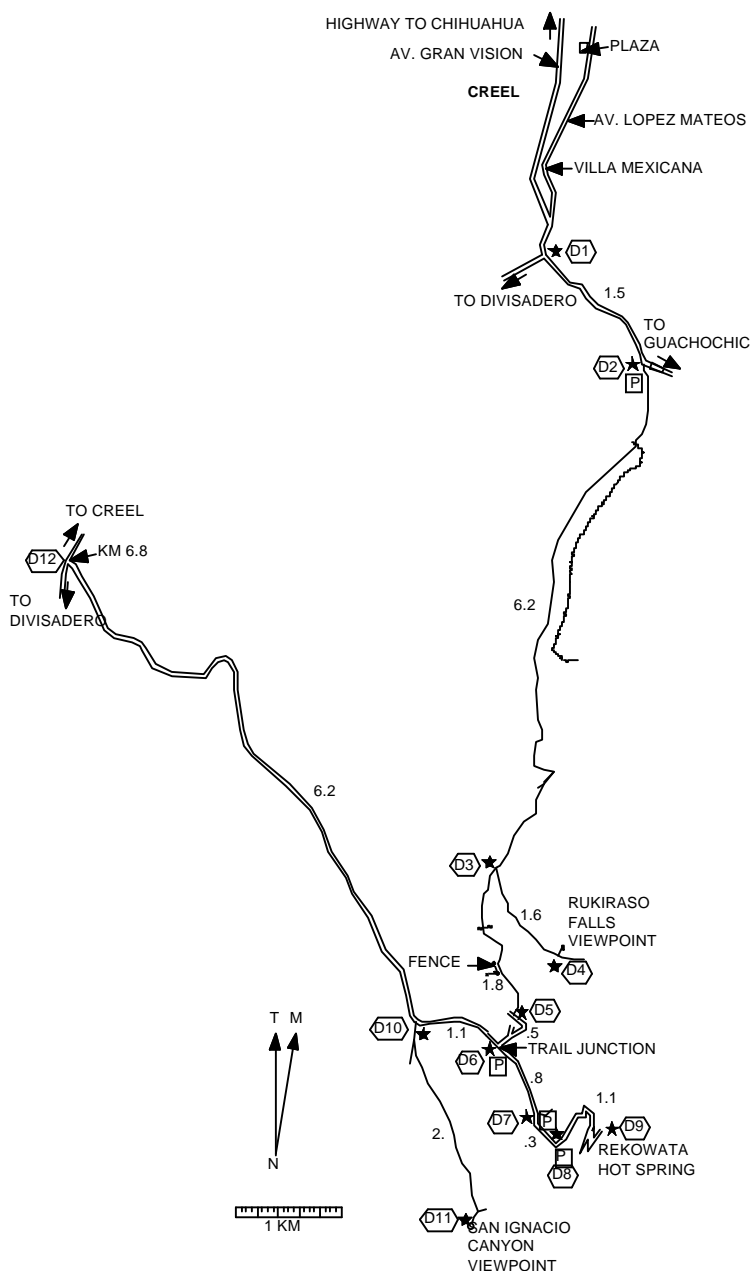
The turnoff to Rewokata is on the road to Divisadero at Km 6.8, on the left if coming from Creel. In 2.2 mi (3.5 km), pay a toll of about 20 pesos per person. In 1.6 mi (2.5 km), just short of Km 6, reach the trailhead for the Mirador, the viewpoint for San Ignacio Canyon. Going on, in 1.1 mi (1.8 km), reach a good place to park. Or, go on another .4 mi (.6 km) to the official parking lot at Km 8.3, on the cobbled road.

The trailhead for Rukiraso waterfall is on the road toward the Rewokata hot springs, at Km 7. Look for a break in the line of rocks on the left side of the road. There may be the lower

part of a tree trunk with its roots attached standing next to the trailhead. A few meters further on the road is a wide spot where three or so cars could park.

The walk to the waterfall is entirely in a pine forest. It requires crossing a stream and you may have to range upstream or downstream to find some rocks you can step across on. If the stream has pushed the rocks out of position it's possible you'll have to wade across. On the plus side, you can't get lost because you'll always have the canyon as a landmark; you just have to navigate around the side-gullies.

4x4 vehicles make the trip all the way down to the hot springs, even though that requires pushing fallen boulders off the roadway. If they meet traffic going the other way, someone has to back up quite a long distance. Of course, the problem is getting back up to the top. The surveyor got back from the official parking lot with his low-powered minivan, so any car should be able to do that part. If you care for your car, though, consider parking at the beginning of the descent and doing the whole thing on foot. There is a clear space on the left just as the road starts downhill.



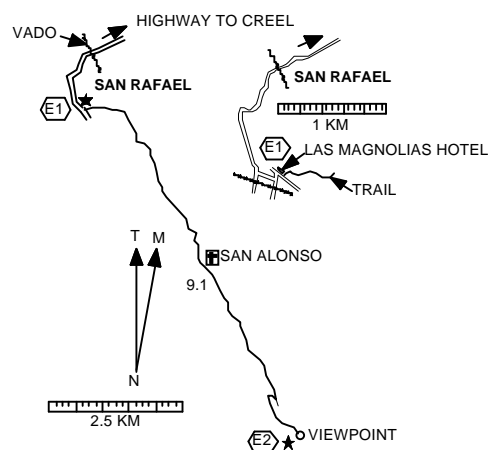
Oteviachi



Trail Data Length each way = 9.1 km. Exertion index = 235 going, 365 returning.
Maximum elevation = 2271 m.

This hike takes you over some volcanic rock formations and into a farming valley where you'll pass the little church of San Alonso and the littler school next to it. Then you'll go along a knife-edge ridge between two valleys to a viewpoint of canyons with toe-curling verticality.

To get there from Creel, go south to the Divisadero intersection and go right. Follow the highway all the way to San Rafael. At Km 55.3 you reach the end of the pavement. Soon after that you go over a vado and then get back on pavement. Just before the road goes over some RR tracks, go left at a tee and then make a quick right. In a short block you'll see comfortable-looking Hotel Las Magnolias on the left. Park next to it so it'll look like you're inside on business. Just to the right of the hotel is the jeep trail to Hostal Oteviachi. Just follow the jeep trail, no tricks, no turns.



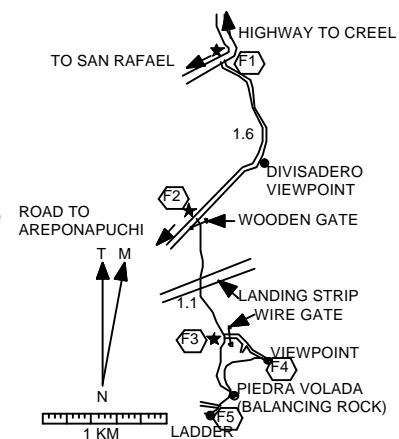
Divisadero



Trail Data Length each way= 1.7 km. Exertion index = 70 going, 75 returning. Maximum elevation = 2403 m.

This short, easy hike with canyon views is a good add-on to the Oteviachi hike, since there's not much extra driving involved.

From San Rafael go back 11 km to the Divisadero turnoff. Go past the Posada Barranca Hotel .7 km to where you can see a wooden entrance gate 20 meters to the left of the road. That's the trail head. Follow the jeep trail, except that sometimes there is a foot trail nearer the rim. You'll come to the viewing point for the balancing rock, which is slightly to your left. You can climb onto the rock if you wish and feel it wobble and probably slide a little toward the precipice. Really, it's for indecisive suicides. Some 300 meters further along the rim is a ladder made by locals to access the trails below. If you feel confident enough in the ladder you can go down and ramble about the sparsely-populated hillsides.



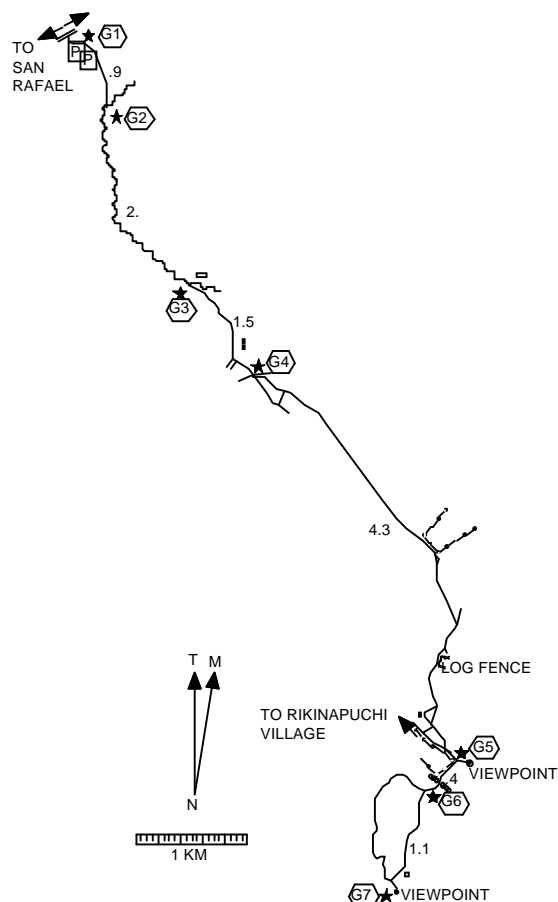


Rikinapuchi

Trail Data Length each way = 8.4 km. Exertion index = 300 going, 355 returning. Maximum elevation = 2451 m.

8 km each way is a long walk for a canyon view, but it's pleasant enough, with pine forest and tidy farms along the way and no painfully steep hills. The sign on the highway promises a hot spring, but none of the locals admit to knowing where it is.

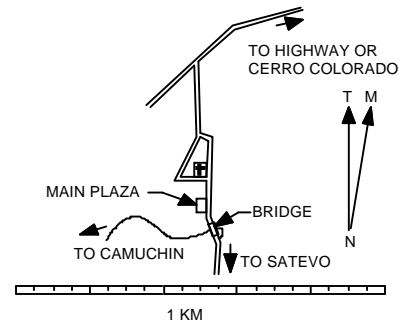
Driving from Creel toward Divisadero, the trailhead is just a few meters short of the 10 Km mark, on the left. 90 meters down the jeep trail is a space wide enough for two cars to park. Another place where you can park is 180 meters further down, but the road is rough enough to require a pickup's road clearance.



Batopilas

Batopilas is a small town of mining origins in the bottom of the Batopilas Canyon. The only transport to it is a daily bus from Creel. Private vehicles with good road clearance can make the journey, but consider these things before going:

- * The road is pretty rough and the shaking likely will loosen joints in the vehicle's body as well as put strain on the suspension.
- * The road is only one lane wide and for long stretches the one lane is quite narrow. If you meet a truck or bus coming the other way you'll face an awkward moment.
- * If you drive you'll miss the scenery that makes the trip worthwhile.



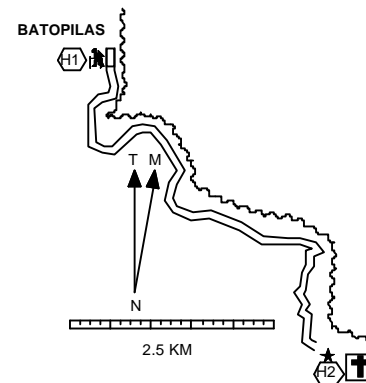
A number of hotels offer comfortable rooms at reasonable rates. Hotel Juanita and Hotel Mary get especially good marks from people who've stayed there.

Satevó

Trail Data Length each way = 6.7 km. Exertion index = 170 going, 175 returning. Maximum elevation = 589 m.



Satevó is a small village a few kilometers south of Batopilas. A pleasant ramble on a dirt road takes you directly from Nigromonte Street near the central plaza (Plaza Felipe Vega) to the oldest church in the Chihuahua area (c. 1640). You should have plenty of time to walk down after you've arrived in Batopilas and got settled in your hotel room.

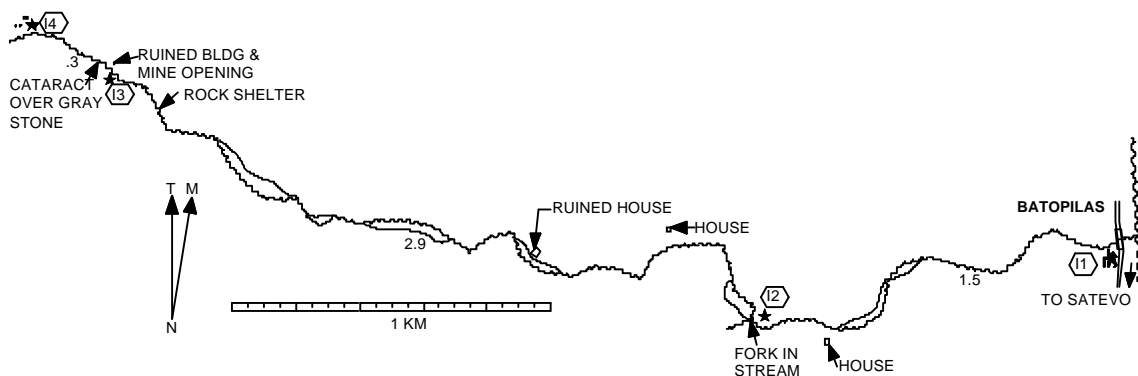


Camuchin

Trail Data Length each way = 4.7 km. Exertion index = 350 going, 56 returning.
Maximum elevation = 872 m.


The hike to Camuchín, an abandoned mine, starts out badly. Just after you leave the central plaza in the direction of Satevó you cross a little bridge. For Camuchín, duck under the bridge and follow the stream bed. The stream meanders about on the flat gravel bed, splitting and rejoining, so you have to keep jumping streamlets to keep your feet dry. Fortunately, this is the worst part of the hike, so you'll know right away whether there's too much water for you to make it. Once you reach the stream's fork things get better. You take a foot trail that goes between the branches and then follow the stream on the right up a pretty, leafy canyon with many cascades and cataracts. At the end there's some scrambling over boulders to be done, and then you reach the old mine. Before going inside check the floor of the mine to see if it's flooded. There are the remains of some ore-processing equipment a little further on.

On the way back, there's nothing to stop you from going up some of the other canyons. You can't get lost because you just have to follow the water downstream back to Batopilas.



Cerro Colorado

Trail Data

Batopilas to village: Length = 11.2 km. 
 Exertion index = 475 going,
 305 returning.
 Village to mine: Length = 2.7 km. Exertion
 index = 340 going, 25 returning.
 Maximum elevation = 1017 m.

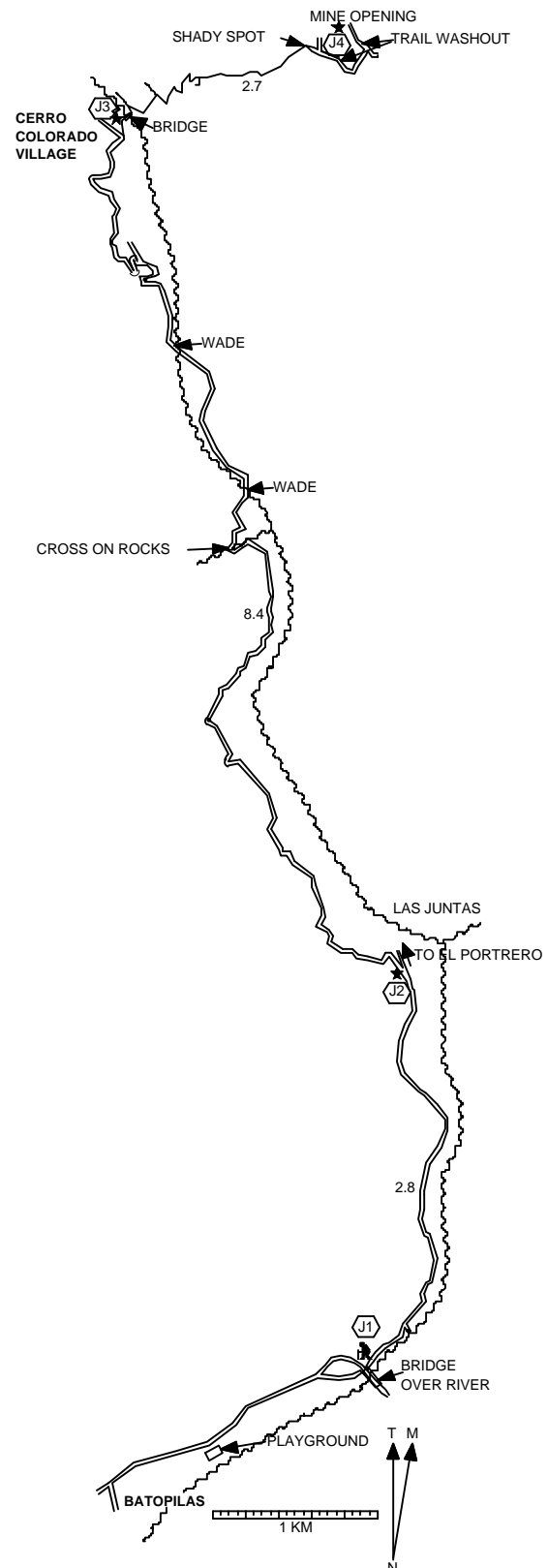
Good for mountain bikes as far as the village.

The trail to Cerro Colorado crosses desert hillsides along the Munerachi River until you reach Cerro Colorado village. There are three stream crossings, two of which require wading. At the village you'll see the gray scar of the mine opening above on the Cerro Colorado mountain. To see the mine up close, cross the suspension bridge behind the village and follow the donkey trail up the hill (tough donkeys!).

If you go inside, be sure to have your flashlight because there are pits awaiting you in the gloom.

On the way back, if you underestimated your water consumption you should be able to find water or soft drinks at the tiny store at the far end of the village on the left side of the lane.

This trail is the first part of the trail to Urique, a multi-day trek.



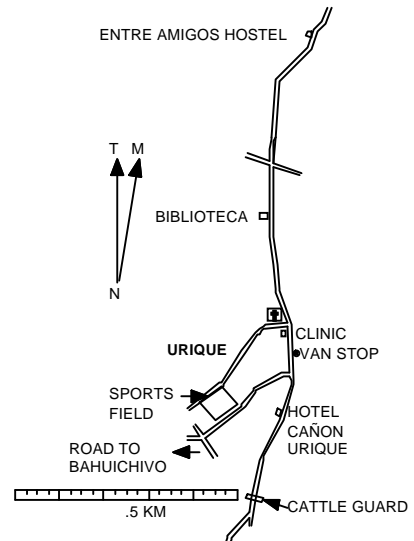
Urique

This little mining town is reached from Creel by riding the train as far as Bahuichivo and the once-a-day bus to Urique. It doesn't get a lot of foreign visitors, probably for three reasons: the journey is slow and tedious; accommodations choices are limited; and the hikes available have lower payback ratios than those around Creel and Batopilas.

But travelers to Mexico often ask for destinations that are less touristy and Urique has that feature even though it can meet travelers' basic needs.

In 2004 the Hotel Cañon Urique seemed to be the only one operating, with small, basic rooms that were clean and comfortable, with private bathrooms and hot water. There also is a hostel, called Entre Amigos, operated by an American with a quixotic approach to hostel design and management. The Restaurant Gran Cañon del Urique shares ownership with the hotel; the two face each other on the main street. The other choice, at least in 2004, was Restaurant Plaza, which is favored by the hostel's clients.

Urique offers three hiking routes. The Naranjo hike and the Guadalupe Coronado hike are similar, following streams up canyons. In fact they share their first segments. Both cover arid terrain but there are cool, shaded arroyos on the way.



Naranjo

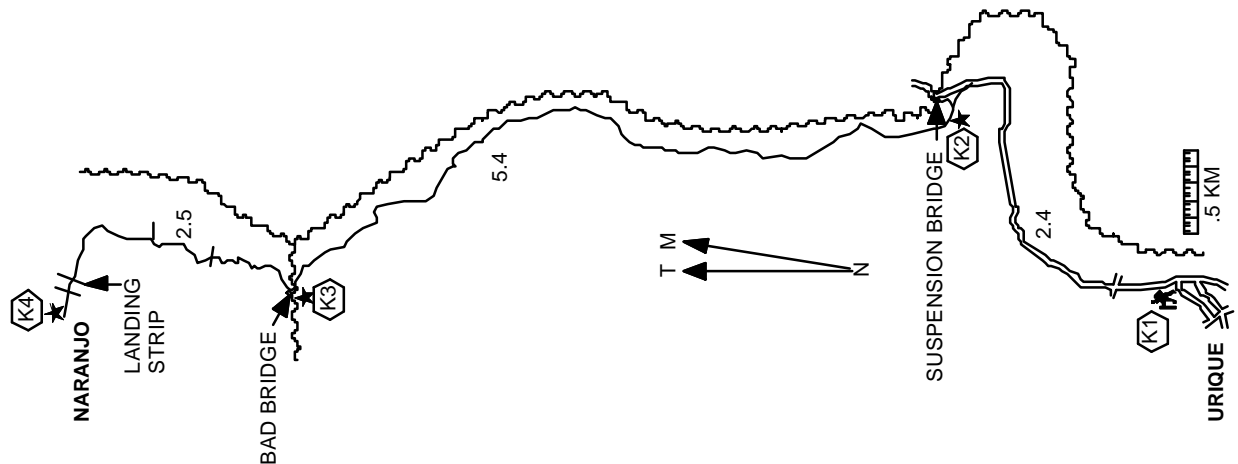
Trail Data

Urique to bad suspension bridge: Length = 7.8 km. Exertion index = 465 going, 145 returning.

Bad suspension bridge to Naranjo: Length = 2.5 km. Exertion index = 335 going, 10 returning. Maximum elevation = 1183 m.


Follow the jeep track upstream and go past the suspension bridge. Stay on the left side of the stream as far as the bad suspension bridge. If in doubt, always go uphill and parallel to the stream.

When you reach the bad bridge, if the stream is running full, you may be content to rest amid the cascades and pools just downstream. That makes a worthy destination by itself. To go on, cross the stream on the boulders and follow the donkey trail up the hill. At the top, Naranjo will turn out to be a scattering of houses on a plateau.

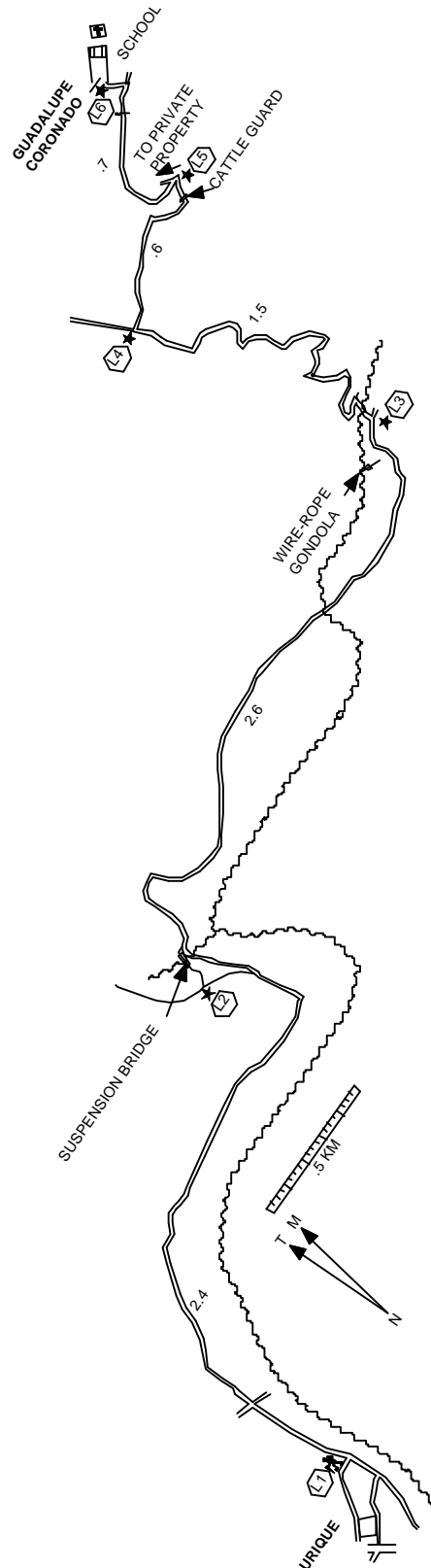


Guadalupe Coronado

Trail Data

Length = 7.8 km. Exertion index = 310 going, 190 returning. Maximum elevation = 675 m. 

Guadalupe Coronado is a church and a school plus a few houses. To reach it, go across on the first suspension bridge and follow the jeep trail.

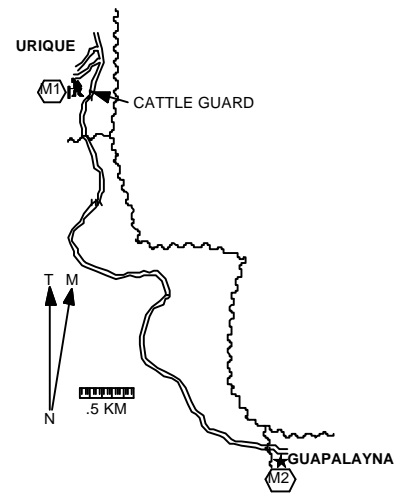


Guapalayna

Trail Data Length = 5.6 km. Exertion index = 175 going, 125 returning.
Maximum elevation = 585 m.



Guapalyana is a little village with a dirt street and nothing that distinguishes it from other little villages. The road there is dusty and gets enough traffic to annoy walkers, but it's short, not steep, and has good views of the Urique River and the overhanging cliffs.



Guanajuato

Guanajuato is a famous historical city, with well-preserved architecture, even though it thrives as a commercial center and university town. It turns out that there are a couple of good hikes nearby.

Lagunillas Trail Data Length each way = 10.4 km. Exertion index = 390 going, 320 returning. Maximum elevation = 2724 m.

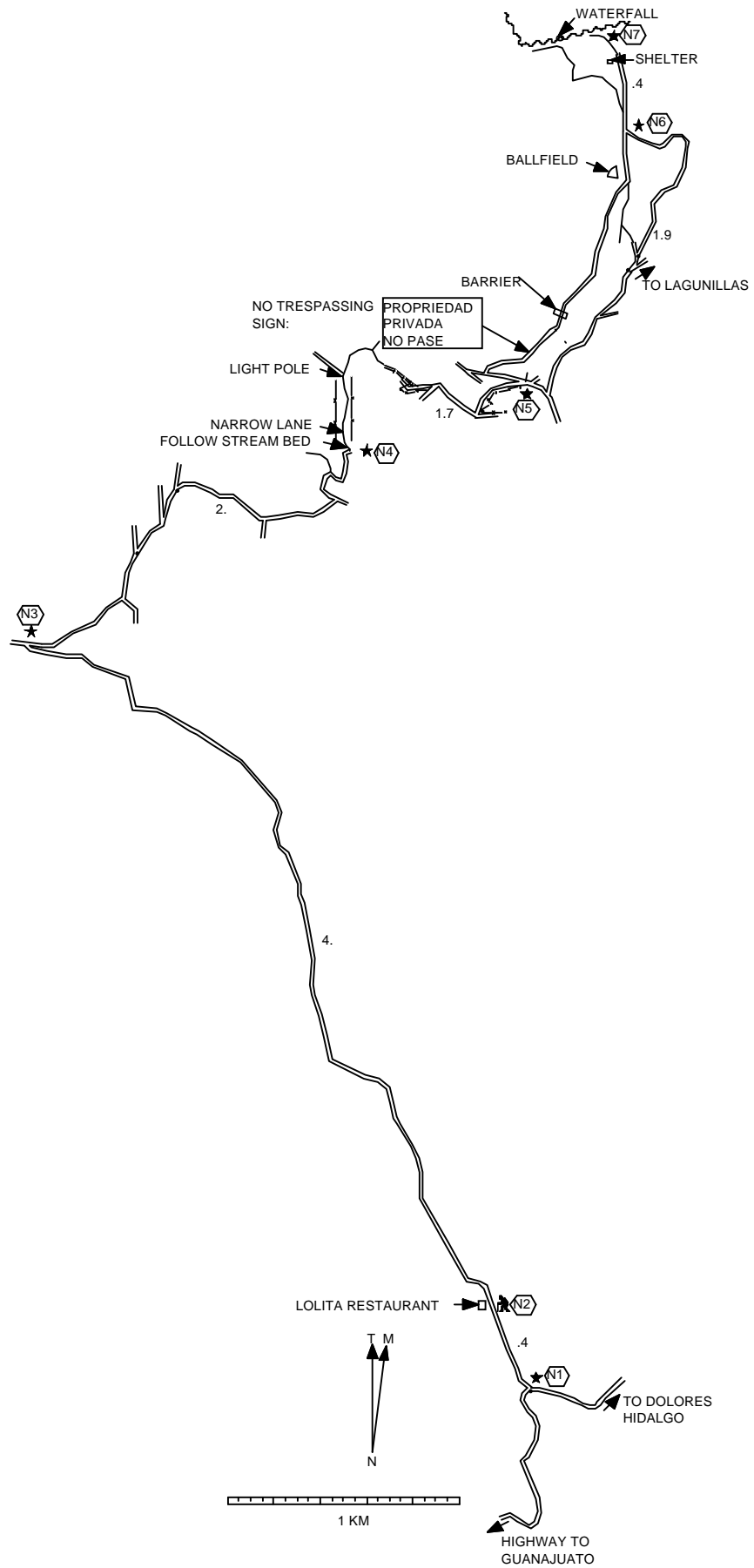


Most of the way is on jeep tracks, but the first part is on an all-purpose dirt road and some is on foot or donkey trails. Going through Llanos de la Fragua, the trail is a narrow lane between farms. The vegetation is oak forest with other dryland plants. There are some glimpses of the surrounding hills. At the end you'll reach a pretty, shady ravine with a little brook just babbling its heart out. It even tumbles over a rock face to make a dainty waterfall. You can make your way above the waterfall and follow the ravine as far as you like.


For the first 4.4 km there could be enough road traffic to be annoying, although between trucks it's good walking. The rest of the way you should encounter only people and livestock.

The road branches off the Guanajuato-Dolores Hidalgo highway between Los Mexicanos and Santa Rosa. At Km 91.8, on the outside of a curve, go north on a dirt road. To the right is Rancho Milagro. In .3 mi (.5 km), reach the Restaurant Lolita. The owner is gracious about letting hikers use his parking lot ("Hago una caminata. ¿Me permite estacionar?"). Eating a meal is not a requirement for parking, but it is the gracious way to say thanks. Anyway, the food's good. If this doesn't work for some reason, there are a couple of parking spaces across the road.

Guanajuato 2

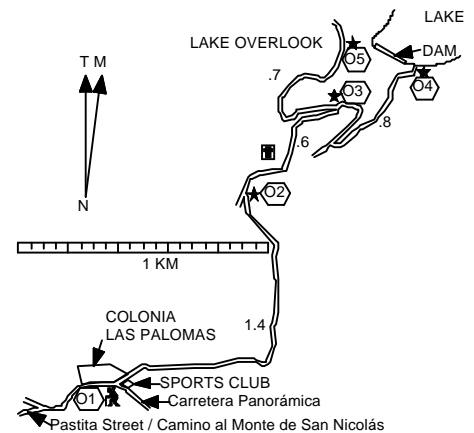


Arroyo las Palomas

Trail Data Length = 2.8 km. Exertion index = 140 going (+ 60 for the overlook), 30 returning. Maximum elevation = 2250 m. 

If you're in Guanajuato and you've had enough of crowded sidewalks and narrow streets, this will help. It follows a ravine up to the city's reservoir, which is a man-made but pretty lake.

You can reach the trailhead from downtown on foot. Actually, that's better because parking opportunities are poor. Use your map from the Tourist Information Office to get you to the baseball stadium (AKA Parque Deportivo) at the east end of town. From the street intersection northwest of the stadium, go northeast on Pastita Street all the way up to the Carretera Panorámica, about 1 km and uphill enough to warm up your leg muscles. There, go right (east) .3 km to a narrow, fairly steep concrete street on the left with a 12-inch steel pipe running along its left side and a concrete guard rail along its right side. To your left is a small fenced-in colonia and to the right is a private recreation club surrounded by a stone wall. The concrete street is the first part of the trail.

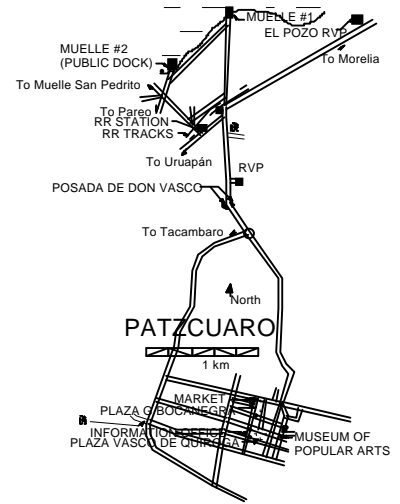


Bikers like to go around to a viewpoint above the lake to get a better workout.

Pátzcuaro

Pátzcuaro is an ancient capital, reconstructed during the colonial period, and still has the ambience of its past.

It offers two hikes that can be made from the city, both of them to hilltops with views of the city, lake and surroundings. Estribo Grande is west from downtown and Estribo Chico is north. Zirahuén is a short daytrip; both Paracutín and Chincua are long ones.

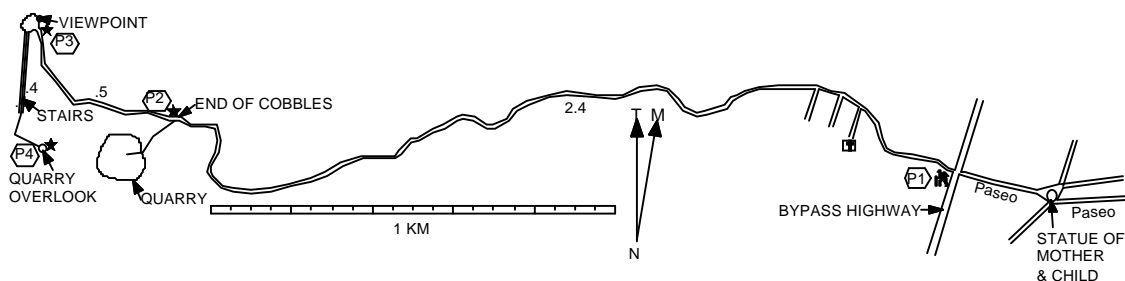


Estribo Grande

Trail Data Length each way = 3.3 km. Exertion index = 313 going, 13 returning. Maximum elevation = 2454 m.

Estribo Grande is the longer and higher of the two local hikes. The trail is a cobbled road lined with cypress trees as far as a mirador or viewpoint. Behind the mirador is a small temple platform and behind that is a long stairway leading to the summit, where you can walk around on the ridge and check out views in different directions. There's a side trip to an old quarry for volcanic sand that's more like a normal hike.

To find the trailhead from downtown, go west from the SW corner of Plaza Vasco de Quiroga on Terán (Terán Ponce de León) Street. The name changes to Paseo and you'll reach a little traffic island with a statue of a woman holding an infant and streets running through at odd angles. Follow Paseo as it bends to the right and continue out to the bypass highway. The trailhead is just across the highway; continue in the same direction. Follow the main cobbled road all the way to the mirador.

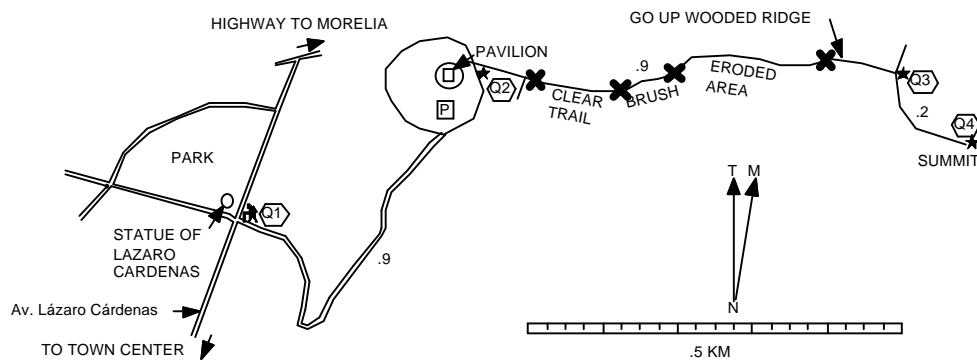


Estribo Chico ("Estribito")

Trail Data Length each way = 2 km. Exertion index = 210 going, 35 returning. Maximum elevation = 2271 m.

The trailhead is on Calle Lázaro Cárdenas, the road that leads north to the highway toward Morelia. Before you get to the highway you pass a little plaza with a statue of Lázaro Cárdenas. Right at the corner where the statue is facing into the plaza, go right onto a cobbled road. Follow that up to a pavilion. Find the rough trail on the east side of the parking lot and follow it up the hill. The map shows the main trail, but any trail that goes up will serve as well. Similarly, any trail that goes in the direction of the boat dock will get you back down.

Pátzcuaro



Zirahuen

Trail Data Length of loop = 18.1 km. Exertion index = 350. Maximum elevation = 2183 m.

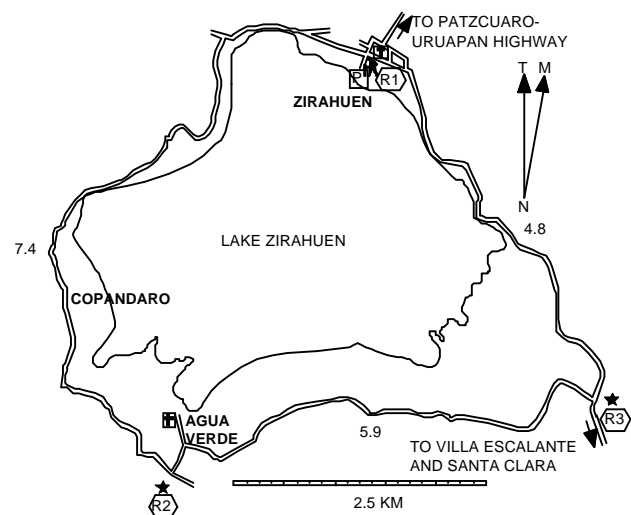
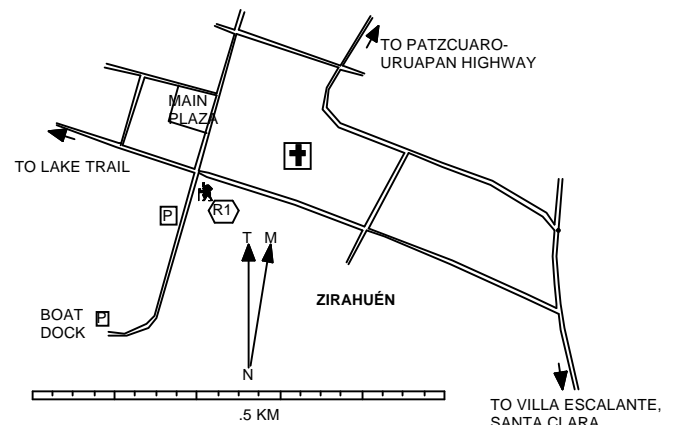


Loops are always good, and that makes up for the occasional dust-raising truck. This loop takes you through villages and past farms and forests. There also are some country homes built by wealthy Mexicans and a couple of resorts.

Every hike should have a destination, so for this one we'll pick the humble church at Agua Verde. No one's sure of its name, but it might be Las Aguas de Zirahuén. It's at least 70 years old and looks considerable older. Chances are the gate isn't locked so you'll be able to go in and look around. There's a small alcove devoted to Our Lady of Guadalupe. Muy auténtico.

Probably the best place to park in Zirahuén is at the boat dock (muelle). There are some businesses there and your car is unlikely to be burglarized. On the street to the dock there also is Hotel/Restaurant Espejo del Lago; if the gate is open you can park there for 15 pesos.

There's an advantage in going counter-clockwise on this loop: you can catch a bus when you get to the paved road and not miss any great scenery. This bus runs between Santa Clara and Pátzcuaro. In Zirahuén it drops you off at the plaza.



Paracutín

Trail Data

Length of loop except volcano = ~20 km. Exertion index = 580.

Volcano: Length = 1 km. Exertion index = 180 going, 0 returning. Maximum elevation = 2816 m.

Paracutín is a volcanic mountain that was active in the last 60 years. There now are two things to see: a church that was partially buried in lava and the mountain with its crater.

The church is easy to get to: a short hike down a dusty trail and a short scramble over lava rocks.

The mountain is more of a challenge. The easiest way is to reach it is to rent a horse from one of the many horse wranglers; the cheapest place to rent seems to be at the food stalls near the church.

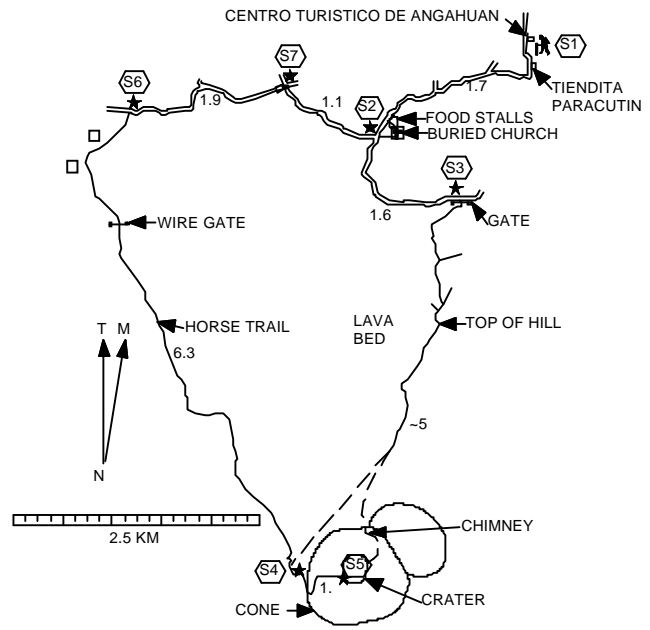
If you're going on foot, the easiest way is to follow the horse trail around the lava bed, although much of the trail is soft volcanic sand. Most of the scenery looks desolate, with shrubs and small trees growing as well as they can in the volcanic sand, but part of the trail goes through farm country with some impressive orchards.

The other way is to pick your way over the lava bed. Local young people do it for fun and it is a little faster, but the bed is very rough and full of crevices so that with scrambling and backtracking it requires quite a bit of effort. The surveyor despaired of mapping a trail through it. If you go this way, look for places where the rocks have been broken up by foot traffic and for white marks that have been painted on the rocks. Those trails, such as they are, lead to a chimney formed by the main volcanic cone and a daughter cone on its northeast side. There are several trails going up the cone, all of them very steep, and that's one of the two main ones.

The other main trail up is on the west side of the main cone, where the horse trail ends. None of the trails up rates a single star, but the footing in the volcanic cinders on this trail is a little less loose than on the others. So, even if you go through the lava bed, the recommendation here is that you work your way over to the west side. It will be amply challenging.

The following instructions for reaching the trailhead are an abridged version of those given in Church and Church, *Traveler's Guide to Mexican Camping* (Rolling Homes Press):

Starting at the turnoff from MEX 37 Highway near Km 59, 8 miles (13 km) north of Uruapan, Michoacán, go west 11.9 mi (19.2 km) and turn left on a paved road near the outskirts of Angahuan. Proceed .8 mi (1.3 km), .1 mi past the town square, and go left again. The house on the forward corner there has a big satellite dish on its roof. In another .6 mi (1 km), you'll reach the Centro Turístico de Angahuan. You can park there or at the restaurant just before it or at the Tiendita Paracutín just beyond it. The trail begins at the entrance to the Centro Turístico and goes to the right of it.



Chincua Monarch Butterfly Reserve

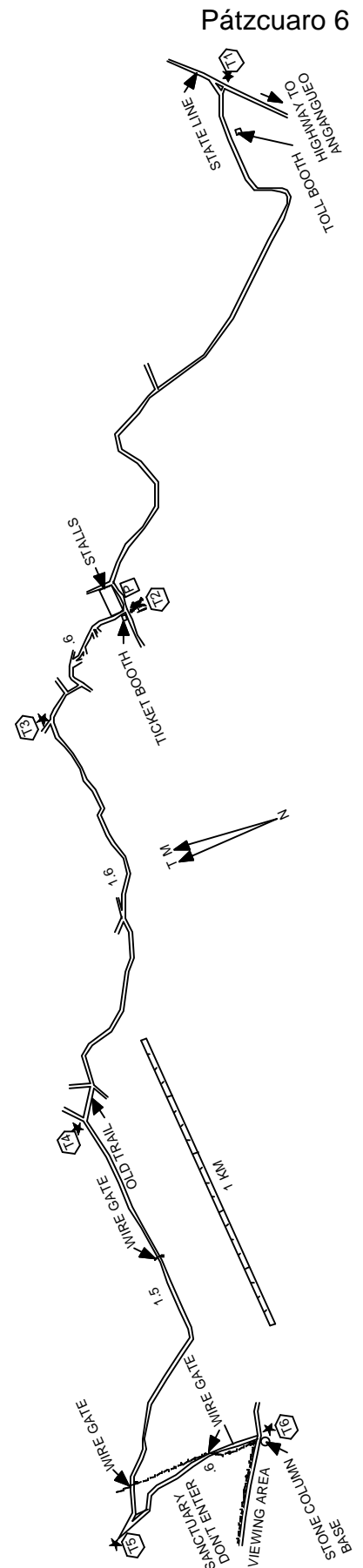
Trail Data Length = 4.3 km. Exertion index = 185 going, 245 returning. Maximum elevation = 3383 m.

The hike described here leads to a butterfly-viewing location. The monarchs are a seasonal phenomenon, mainly during the months of January through March. Moreover, they're not reliable. That means that even if you go during the peak season you may not see butterflies at this spot.

Because of that, the hiring of guides is highly recommended. This whole area is beautiful, with gorgeous tall pines, and there are many trails and a variety of other creatures to see. There also are horses available to rent.

The hike given here is the main horse trail to the viewing location. Don't go off on foot trails unless they are obvious shortcuts.

The access road is just north of Angangueo, almost to the state line between Michoacán and México.



Mexico City

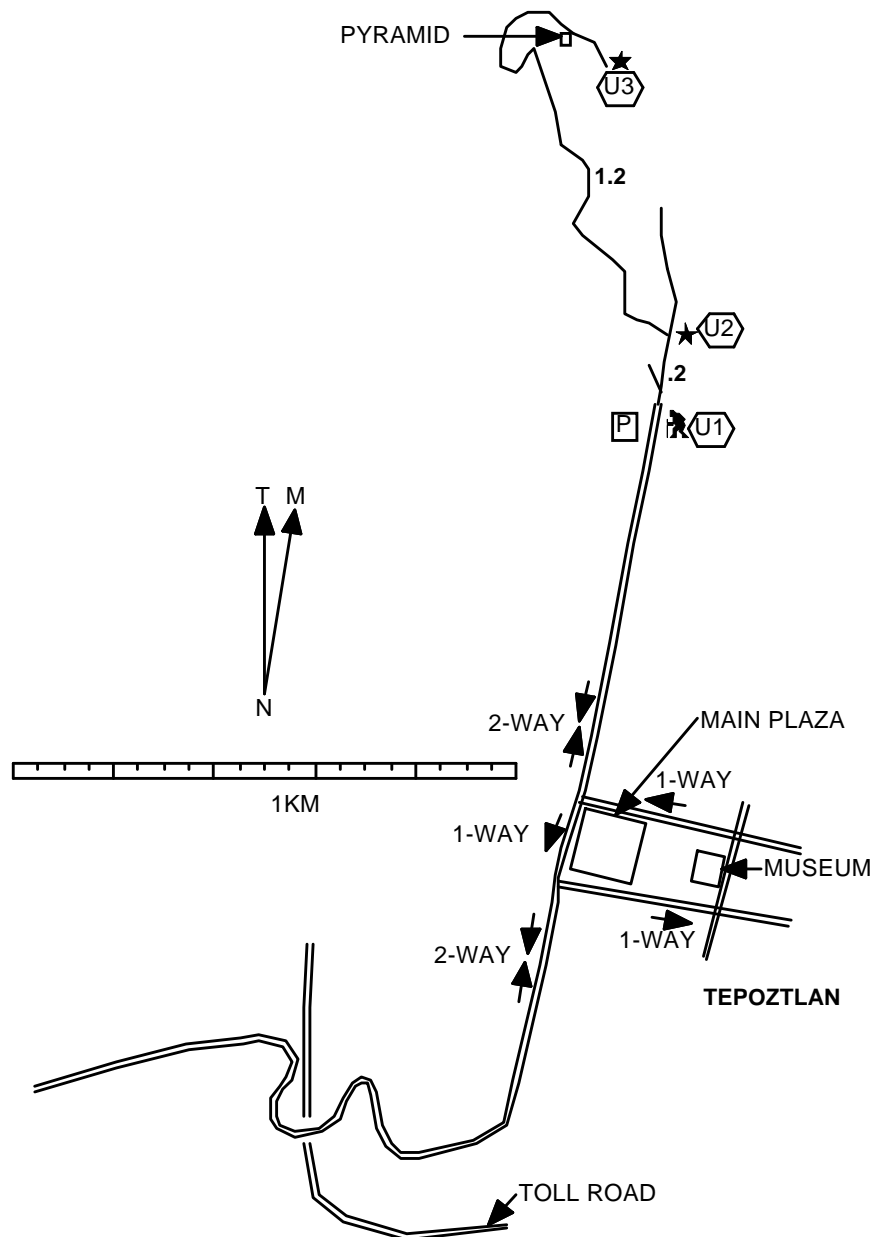
Tepoztlán

Trail Data Length each way = 1.4 km. Exertion index = 360 going, 10 returning. Maximum elevation = 2101 m.

It's a little bit of a stretch to call this a hike. The trail is almost entirely on stones that have been laid step-like up a very steep hill. But the vegetation is natural and the stones were laid hundreds of years ago by the Tlahuica people who settled here. About 50 meters from the top there's a steel ladder which probably was installed later. The pyramid is a small temple platform with remnants of Mexica (Aztec) decorations.

The trail up to the pyramid begins at the north end of Cinco de Mayo Street, which is the main street through town. At the main square, if you're driving, you have to go right and go around the block because of one-way streets. On the way you'll pass the museum, which is worth a stop.

At the north end of town, Cinco de Mayo Street ends directly at the trail. There is a paid-parking lot there. Also, there is a fee to see the ruins, which is paid at the top of the trail. A sign at the bottom indicates how much the fee is. You can hike up for free.



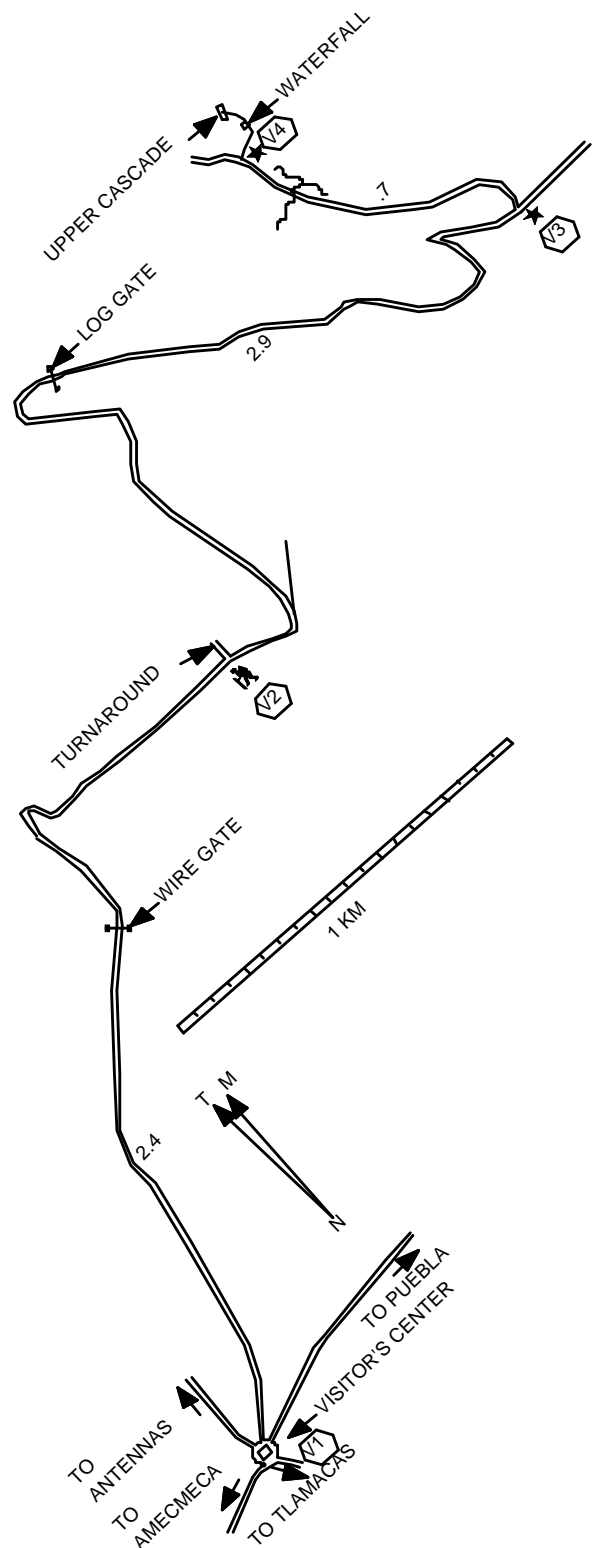
Paso de Cortés

Trail Data Length each way= 6 km. Exertion index = 165 going, 360 returning.
Maximum elevation = 3702 m.



To be this close to the capital and breathe clean, fresh air amidst beautiful long-needle pines and catch glimpses of stalwart peaks looming above you is an unexpected treat. This hike takes you through all that and, as a bonus, shows you a cascade and a waterfall.

The road to Paso de Cortés starts from the highway at the south end of Amecameca, 100 m south of Pemex #0222. There might be a sign for Tlamacás. Follow the road up to the high point of a saddle between Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl Mountains. There you'll find a circle with a square block column, which marks where Cortés crossed on his way to Tenochtitlan-México. Next to it is a ranger station where you can stay if you bring a sleeping bag and a back-pad and you're prepared to cook meals; you'd need a stove and there aren't any showers. There are four other roads leaving this circle: one toward Tlamacás, one toward Puebla, one toward the microwave antennas uphill, and another between the last two that leads to the trailhead. You have to open (and close) a gate near the circle to proceed, and there's a wire gate at 1.5 km. The trailhead is at 2.4 km, where the road widens enough that you can park and there's a turnaround for anything as big as a van. After that the road gets worse.



La Malintzi

Trail Data Length of loop = 6.7 km. Exertion index = 1558 going, 213 returning. Maximum elevation = 4452 m.

This hike is well into the strenuous range, not just because of the exertion index but also because of the high altitude. Some of it involves volcanic sand, but the footing is better than at Paricutín. The lower part is a well-worn trail in pine forest.

It gets a lot of traffic from capital residents, who are more used to high altitudes than most foreign visitors. But most of them go only as far as the tree line.

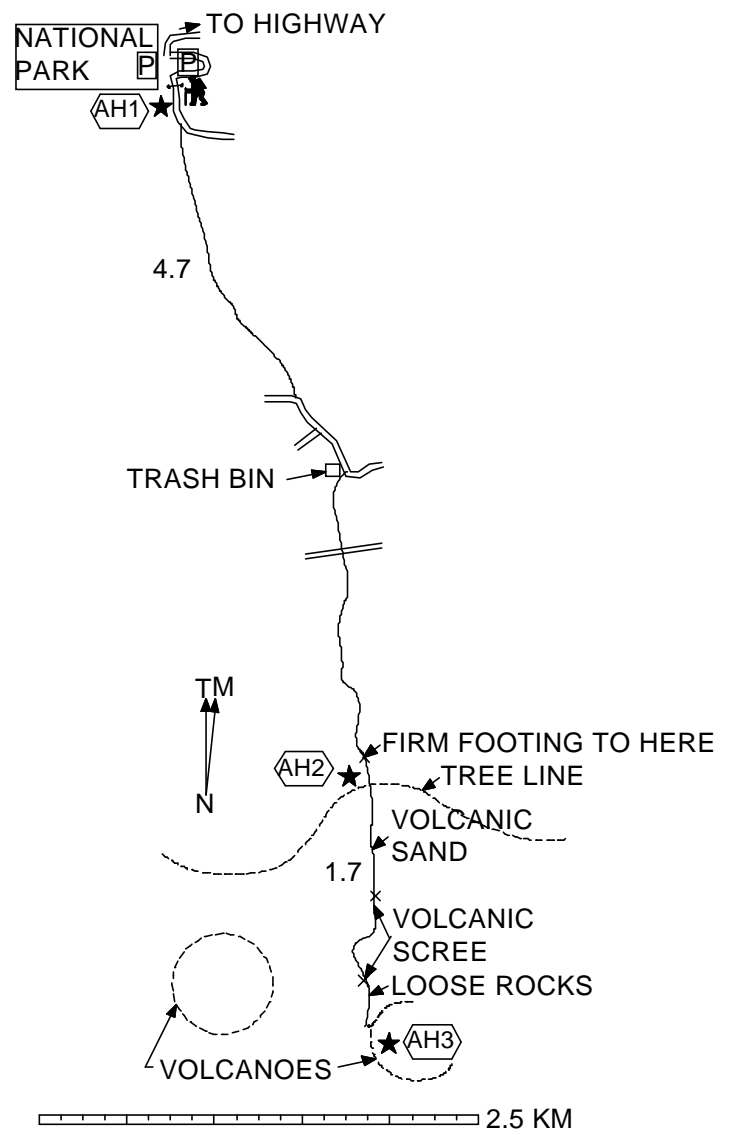
A paved road zigzags across the trail at the lower part. Consider following it as far as the trash bin to reduce the amount of dust you'll breathe and to save your feet and ankles for the volcano.

La Malintzi National Park is shown on some maps as La Malinche NP. There are cabañas to rent and a tent camping area. RV's can park overnight.

These driving directions are taken from *Traveler's Guide to Mexican Camping* by Church and Church, 3rd Edition (Rolling Homes Press, 2005).

"There is plenty of room for big rigs once you reach the campground but the climb through the park probably limits really big rigs from visiting, we wouldn't bring anything over about 30 feet up here.

"To reach La Malintzi head south on the road up to the volcano which cuts off Mex 136 at about the 130 Km marker [surveyor: slightly east of the 130 Km marker] between Apizaco and Huamantla, it is signed for Teacalco. After 2.6 miles (4.2 km) you will reach the small village of Totolquexco. Turn left at the intersection and drive another 3.4 miles (5.5 km) to the gated park entrance. A ranger will let you in and then it is another 1.8 miles (2.9 km) to the gated campground entrance on the right."



Puerto Vallarta

Mismaloya

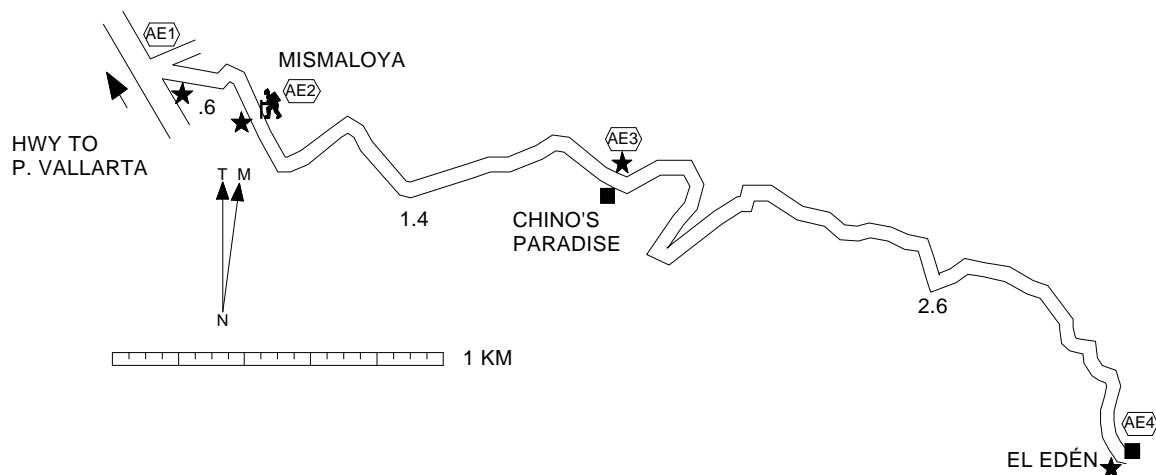


Trail Data

Length = 2.4 km. Exertion index = 55 going, 2 returning. Maximum elevation = 133 m.

You can take a bus from PV to the town of Mismaloya. Starting with the trailhead in the middle of the village, follow the cobbled street, which turns to dirt at the end of town. Then you keep following the dirt road. The endpoint is a restaurant called El Edén, which features water cascading over a large rock into a natural pool. You can swim, you can swing out on a rope and splash into the pool, you even can slide down the rock into it. Admission is free. If you're up to it, you can take the jungle canopy ride, which consists of attaching yourself to a pulley and zipping down cables strung out high above the canyon. In November 2005 it cost US\$66. They run visitors through in packs so most of the time is spent waiting in line.

There is a fair amount of traffic on the road, so the dust can be annoying. Tying a bandana over your mouth and nose ought to help. Aside from tourist attractions, the scenery is mostly natural jungle.



Jalpán

Cañón de la Angostura

Trail Data

Length = 2 km. Exertion index = about 100 going, about 20 returning. Maximum elevation = 1350 m.

Cañón de la Angostura is included without enthusiasm. On the plus side, the canyon is very beautiful: steep walls with a wild profusion of greenery hanging over a lively stream.

The first issue is accessibility. For most drivers it calls for high clearance and, in wet weather, 4WD. The surveyor did see a taxi making its way down so presumably the road is passable for cars, but he didn't see the taxi going back up.

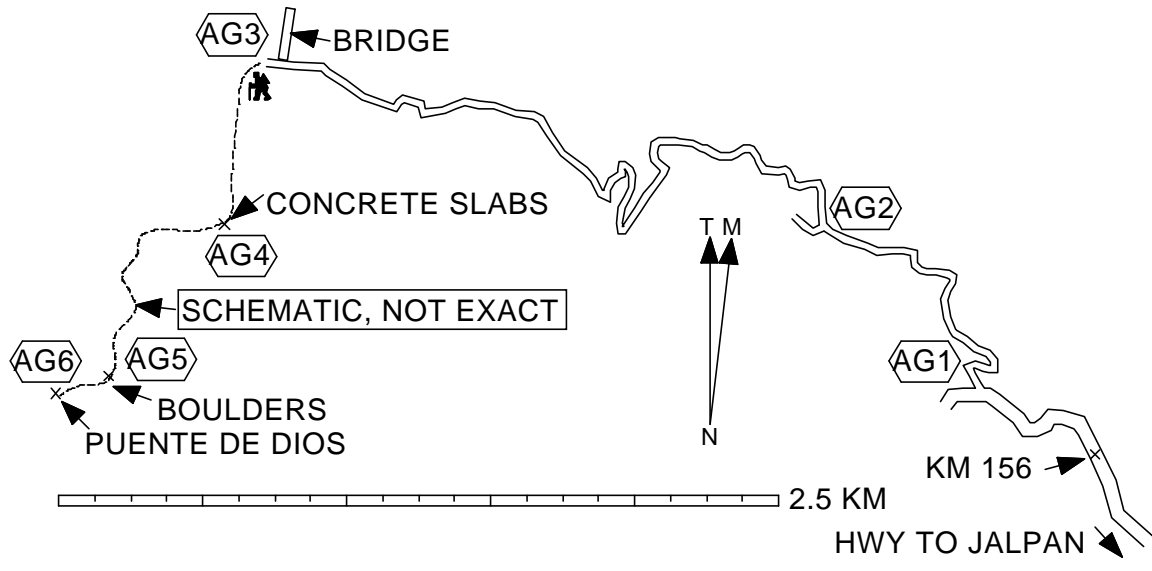
Walking down from the highway is a possibility, but the return requires an elevation gain of 315 m in 4.4 km. People live along the road but there's no way of knowing how long you'd have to wait to hitch a ride.

The other issue is the trail. Mainly you have to follow the stream bed with numerous crossings. You should expect to wade, so short pants and sneakers would be good choices.

Where the canyon is at its narrowest and the stream at its deepest, concrete slabs have been attached to one of the canyon walls to form a walkway. They look as though they could break away under a person's weight and, in fact, one of them has broken away. Experiments have shown that people submerged suddenly in cold water have an irresistible reflex to inhale, which causes instant drowning.

If you decide to do this hike, find the foot trail on the left side of the stream as you face upstream. Follow it until you can proceed only by crossing. After that, keep going upstream as well as you can. When you see three large boulders that have rolled into the bottom of the canyon and stacked against each other you're near the end. The end is at a dirt clump in the canyon bottom through which the stream has eroded a channel so it can pass through, called Puente de Dios. It may seem irreverent to identify such a modest geological artifact with the Almighty, but that's its name.

The map shown here is schematic because the surveyor's GPS receiver couldn't work in the narrow canyon.



Catemaco

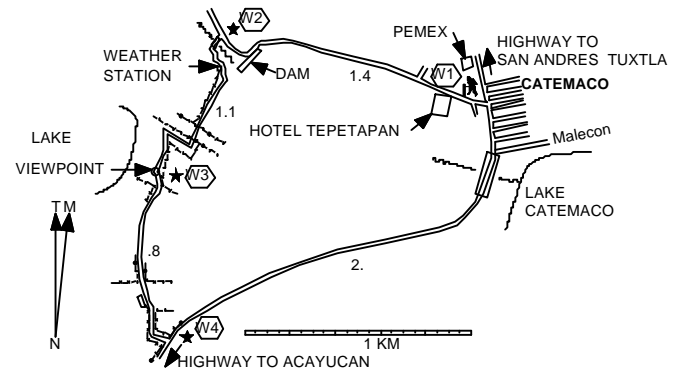
Volcanic Lake

Trail Data Length of loop = 5.3 km. Exertion index = 120. Maximum elevation = 390 m.



There's a small lake in a volcanic crater near Catemaco. The hike that goes there takes you through some pretty farm country on little-used roads.

The trailhead is at the end of the street the Hotel Tepetapan is on. That street connects with the Highway 180 bypass around Catemaco 200 meters south (toward Acayucan) from the Pemex at Km 146. It almost lines up with Moctezuma Street coming from the center of town.



When you reach a dam at the other end, go around to the other side of the dam. At this point you may elect to follow the canal downstream for whatever distance suits you to see birds in natural jungle foliage who feed on fish in the canal.

From the dam, go past the small unmanned weather station and follow the foot trail past the little lake to the highway and back into town.

Thanks to Dave Kloosterman for this delightful excursion.

SALTO DE EYIPANTLA

The waterfall at Eyipantla is a commercialized tourist attraction. It is included here only because many guidebooks mention it and you could get the impression that a hike is involved.

If you drive you'll find the parking insecure. Youths will offer to "cuidar" your car but in fact they're as likely as anyone to break into it. There is the further risk that some little man with a dirty rag and a bucket of dirty water will scrape the paint off your car and demand a tip. Telling them not to serves no purpose. They'll ruin your car's paint finish and grin at you when you get back.

Taking the bus avoids that problem, but in reality the waterfall is only worth the bus trip if you're a fanatic for waterfalls. It's a nice enough waterfall but the commercialism and artificiality of the setting makes it altogether forgettable.

Poza Reina

Trail Data Length = 7.7 km. Exertion index = 160 going, 35 returning. Maximum elevation = 481 m.



A picture-perfect waterfall and crashing cascades in a gorgeous setting makes as good a destination as you'll find in Mexico. The hiking part is a bit monotonous, being almost all ranchland, but the surrounding hills are pretty and there's not much traffic.

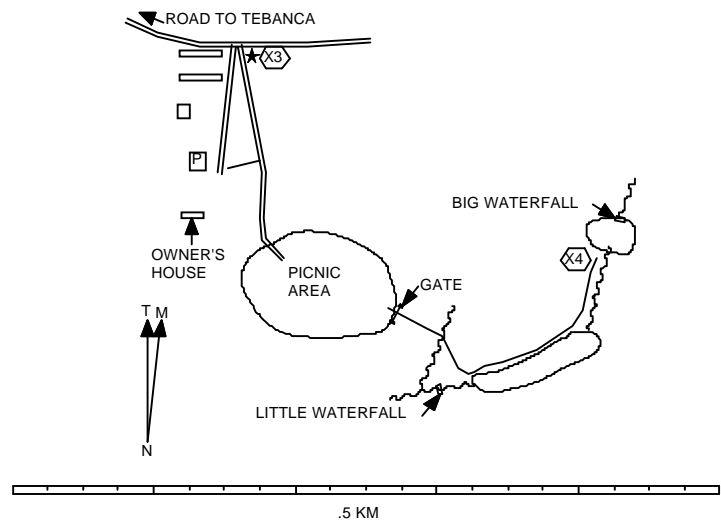
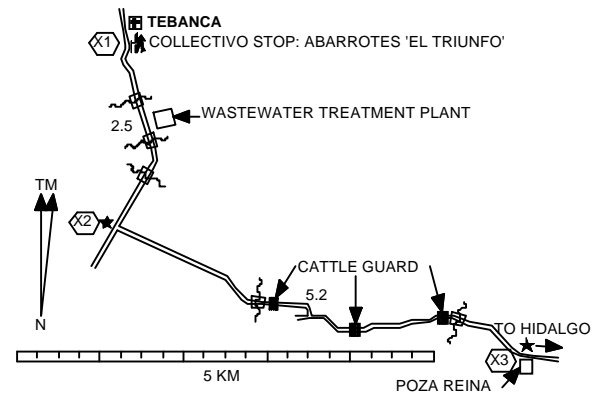
It's a fairly long walk and there's no place to buy water so go prepared. This area gets a lot of rain, so go prepared for that as well. The setting for the falls and cascades is wonderfully natural. So natural, in fact, that no trails have been built and so some agility is required to scramble over some of the boulders.

The trailhead is the colectivo stop in Tebanca, at Aborrotos 'El Triunfo', at the far end of town. If you're driving, the fact is that if you can drive as far as Tebanca you can drive all the way to Poza Reina. So it's a long walk for those who don't have cars and for those who do but choose to walk. For everyone else it's a short drive.

You can catch a colectivo for Tebanca in Catemaco at the corner of Independencia and Revolución Streets. Starting at the Basilica, go five blocks north (six if you're counting short blocks) and five blocks east and you'll see the colectivos lined up. Ride the colectivo to the far end of Tebanca and walk in the same direction.


To drive to Tebanca, follow the signs through Catemaco toward Sontecomapan and Montepío. That takes you past a five-corner intersection a block north of the colectivo station. From the five-corner intersection head out east on the highway. In 2.6 mi (4.2 km), at a fork, bear right toward Nanciyaga. You'll go through Coyame, where the pavement ends, and Tebanca is the next town after that, in 3 mi (5 km).

There seem to be no signs for Poza Reina. The only turn is in 2.5 km from the trailhead (Aborrotos 'El Triunfo'), onto a road like the one you're on, signposted for Hidalgo and Lago Apompal. The entrance is on the right in 5.2 km, at the first substantial collection of ranch buildings. The ranch owner will collect a toll of about US\$3 per person, in pesos.



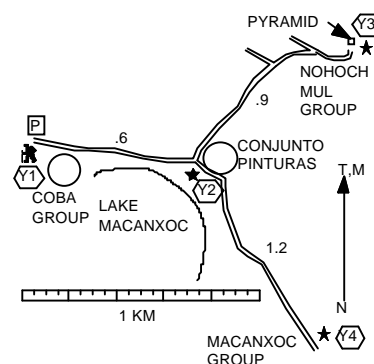
Cobá

Cobá Archaeological Zone

Trail Data Length of round-trip = 3.4 km. Exertion index = 0. Maximum elevation =  103 m.

Bikes are okay. It's hardly worth taking them off the rack, though, and there are mandatory bike parking places that aren't secure. You can rent a single-speed clunker for under US\$3 (pay in pesos).

The archaeological zone at Cobá doesn't have stunning temples. Instead, the remains are of poor construction and are poorly preserved. On the other hand, it's the best hike on the Yucatan Peninsula. Admittedly it isn't very long but it offers natural jungle vegetation, freedom from motor traffic, and some things to see. A bike would defeat the purpose of the trip. For our purposes the trail head is the entrance to the zone and the destinations are the Nohuch Mul pyramid and the stelae at Macanxoc. The stelae are good examples of that classic-Maya art form.



The trails are essentially flat. Note that the trails mostly follow ancient Maya elevated roads so the hiker is spared what little unevenness the terrain has. You'll see that most clearly on the way to Macanxoc.

Consequently, the exertion index is approximately zero. You can raise that by climbing some of the pyramids. Nohuch Mul is the tallest at 42 meters.

If you're in a group to share the cost, hiring a guide will make the visit more interesting. All the guides have to pass a test, so they know pretty well what there is to know. Be aware that next to nothing remains of prehispanic Maya writing and the site was abandoned centuries before the Spaniards arrived. If you ask a question about history or lifestyle the guide probably will make something up.

Palenque

Bonampak Archaeological Zone

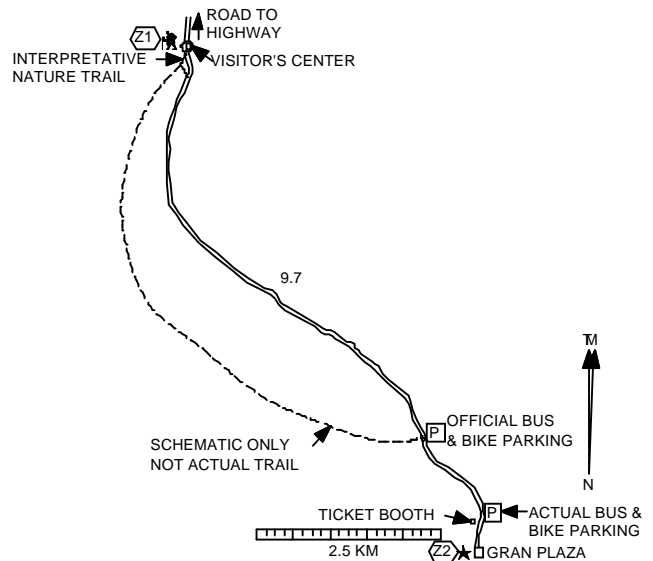
Trail Data Length each way = 9.7 km. Exertion index = 160 going, 160 returning. Maximum elevation = 467 m.



Mountain bikes are okay on the road, but not on the jungle trail because of the thick brush in some places.

Bonampak is a little jewel of an archaeological site, and it's famous for murals painted on the inside walls of one of the buildings. The jungle trail goes through a Green Mansions kind of wonderland.

The trailhead is easy enough to find, though it is a bit of a drive. From Palenque, go toward Ocosingo, but in about 5 miles (8 km), at Km 36.7, go left toward Frontera Corozal. Then drive for 122 Km to the San Javier intersection. Bear right there and in 2.5 miles reach the Centro de Interpretación (visitor's center). You can't drive the rest of the way because the land is owned by locals, so that's our trailhead.



Choices abound for reaching the ruins.

Option 1: you can ride an officially-sanctioned bus. You can ride one way and walk the other, too.

Option 2: you can take the jungle trail. The surveyor followed it okay, but it's unmarked and basically unmaintained, so it could be hard to follow. The route shown on the map is schematic; the gps receiver couldn't take readings through the dense jungle cover and the trail has many more curves than the map shows. Even if it's dry you have to cross a few streams and clamber down and up muddy banks. If you reach a dead end it's probably because of an obstacle so back up a few meters until you find the detour. In the worst case you could totally lose the trail. If that happens use your always-present compass to work your way east to the road.

Option 3: if there are several of you, hiring a guide at the visitor's center is probably worthwhile because he'll point out things you'd otherwise miss.

Option 4: you can hike along the road. The vegetation is different because the plants next to the road get more sun than those under the jungle canopy. As a compromise, take the nature loop and continue on the road.

Option 5: you can rent bikes at the visitor's center.

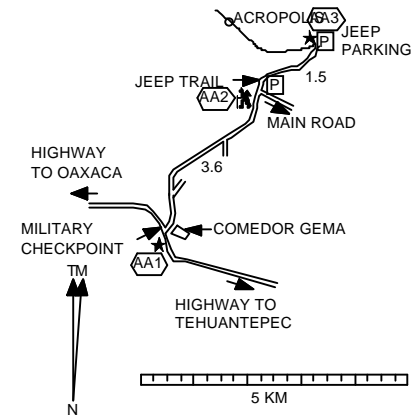
Tehuantepec

Guiengola Archaeological Zone

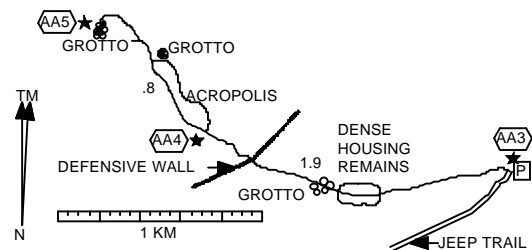
Trail Data Length each way = 4.2 km. Exertion index = 400 going, 62 returning. Maximum elevation = 448 m.

The Zapotecs built Guiengola after they left Monte Albán. During the 15th Century they fortified it against the Aztecs but the Aztecs defeated 60,000 Zapotecs and Mixtecs there anyway.

Sometimes visitors to Mexico will express a desire to see archaeological sites that haven't been stabilized and rebuilt. Usually sites like that are just piles of rubble, but Guiengola is actually in pretty good shape although only minimally stabilized. Much of the plaster used to cover the stone structures is still in place.

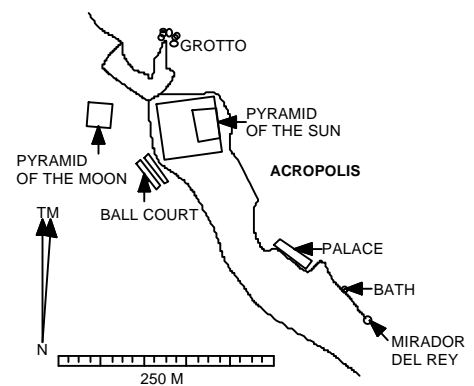


The statistics for the hike assume you go from the dirt road up the jeep trail and follow the foot trail to the ceremonial site and beyond that to the northern of the grottos. Of course, you can spend some more time looking around in the ruins. Obviously, you'll be careful not to disturb the stone structures.



Although the hike isn't long or strenuous, the temperature can be high. Mornings are better, of course, but take some water along whatever time you go. There's a lot of sharp brush to go through, so long pants are a good idea.

Thanks to the Mexican Army, finding the trailhead is easy. The Army has a checkpoint at Km 239.7, about 20 miles or 32 km from Tehuantepec on the highway toward Oaxaca. You just need to go NE on the dirt road that leads away from the checkpoint. In 2.2 mi (3.6 km), where the road bends to the right, you'll reach the jeep trail on the left.



Oaxaca

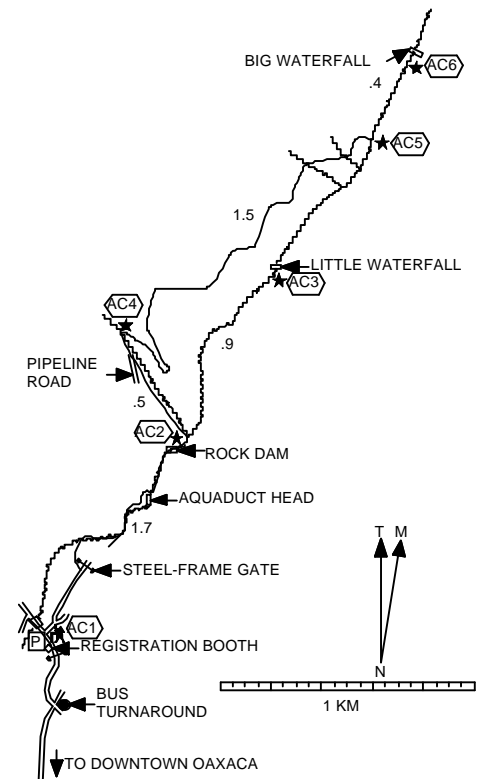
San Felipe

Trail Data Length round-trip circuit = 10 km. Exertion index = 285 going, 25 returning. Maximum elevation = 1943 m.

Above the Oaxaca suburb of San Felipe del Agua is a regional park, Parque Comunal de San Felipe, with cascading streams in their own arroyos. While the bony mountains are hot and dry, the arroyos are shady and green. The turnaround points are two waterfalls.

Finding the trailhead is the only real challenge. Because of one-way streets and dead-end streets, probably the best way to get there is by taxi. You can get pretty close by bus if you can find out where to catch it. Or taxi up and take the bus back from the bus turnaround point described below.

If you have to drive, the way to get there starts at the intersection of Heróico Colegio Militar with Heróica Escuela Naval Militar. Go west on Esc. Naval Militar to Emiliano Zapata (the northern extension of Nezhualcóyotl) and go right. Follow the worn pavement tracks as they zigzag and you'll come to a traffic circle on your left with a statue of an Indian chief on a pedestal surrounded by statues of Indian women; on your right is a white, ornately classical building. Go right on the other side of the white building onto Calzada San Felipe del Agua. In 1.1 miles (1.7 km), at the top of the rise, you'll reach a church on your right. 1000 meters (.6 mi) beyond that you'll reach an intersection with a bus turnaround point on the forward right corner. Go left here on a dirt road and reach the park entrance in 300 m. There's a registration booth where you sign in and out.



It is possible to get from the little waterfall to the bigger one without backtracking if you're okay with scaling cliffs. For sane people it's probably better to backtrack.

Cuajimoloyas

Trail Data Length round-trip circuit = 16.6 km. Exertion index = 700. Maximum elevation = 3214 m.

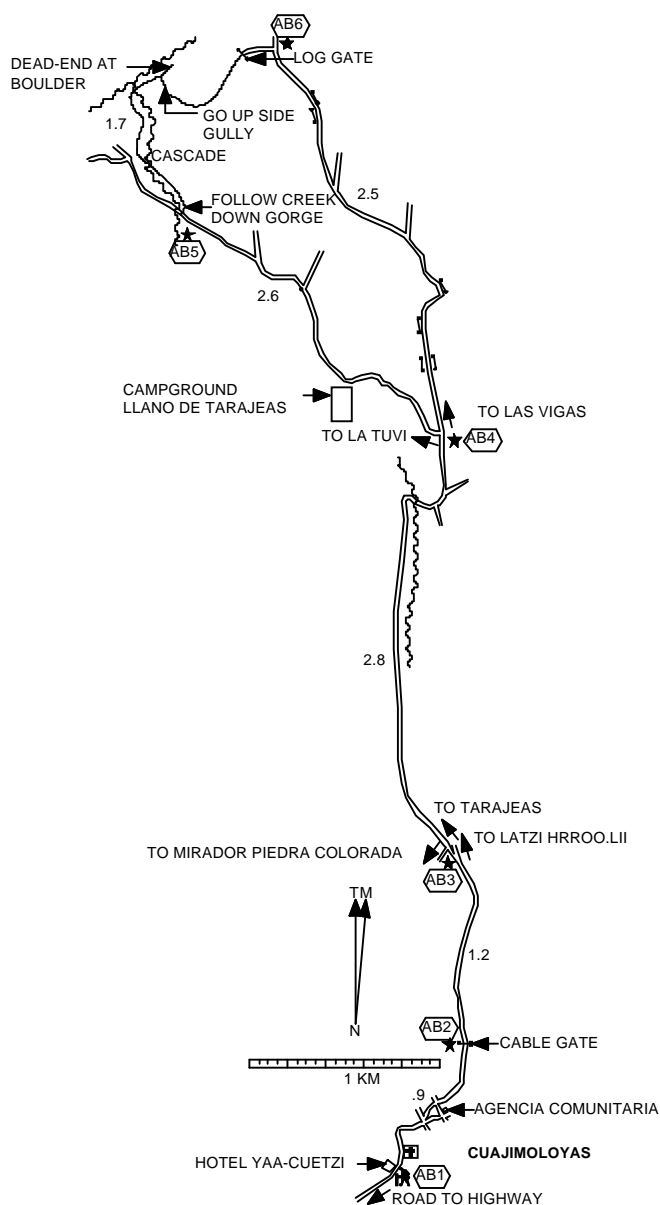
If you're fond of pines whispering in the fresh mountain air and little streams splashing their way down wooded ravines, this is the one for you. The bonus is a marvelous gorge with a cascading stream. At the turnaround point another stream joins with it; follow that stream up another gorge a short way and then climb up to the plateau and continue back to the trailhead.

This hike has only one deficiency: it starts with a long downgrade, which means it ends with long upgrade.

The trails are part of the Pueblos Mancomunados system. If you're interested in taking some of the multi-day hikes, you can get more information at the SEDETUR Office in Oaxaca or, better, at the Tourist Information Office in Cuajimoloyas (see below).

Driving there is easy enough, even if it is slow on the mountain roads. Find the market town of Tlacolula, 32 km east of Oaxaca on Hwy 190. At the main intersection that would take you south into the town center, go north instead, to Díaz Ordaz. In that town, go west toward Yalalag. Keep following that road up into the mountains to Km 21, which puts you in Cuajimoloyas.

The trailhead is at the Hotel Yaa-Cuetzi, which is also where the Tourist Information Office is. You'll have to look around to find a parking place because this is a little mountain town with not much flat ground. The manager of the Tourist Information Office may be able to help you find a place to park. The office has more information as well, about the Pueblos Mancomunados trails. There's a fee charged for using the trails, which helps defray the costs of cleaning, maintaining, and signposting them.



Ciudad Victoria

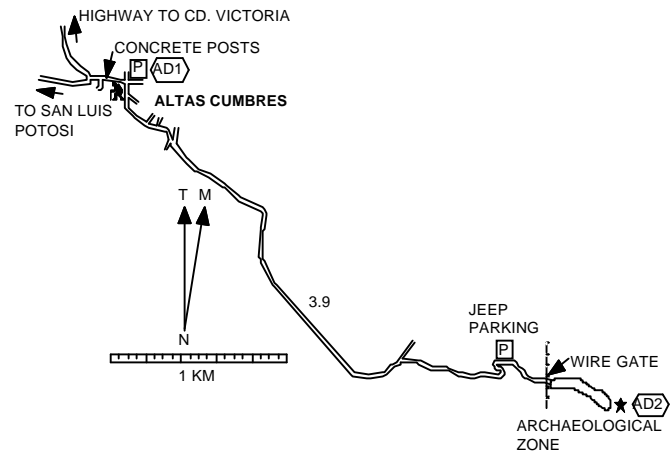
Balcon de Montezuma

Trail Data Length of round-trip circuit = 3.9 km. Exertion index = 80 going, 290 returning. Maximum elevation = 1259 m.



The ridge between Altas Cumbres Village and the simple ruined settlement known grandly as Balcón de Montezuma shows a rich concentration of dryland plants including cactuses, agaves and desert palms, along with drought-tolerant deciduous trees.

The ruins amount to some circular house mounds and some farming terraces that look to have been formed naturally and improved by moving some rocks around. It was occupied from 200 BC to the 16th Century.



The turnoff to Altas Cumbres is at Km 154 on the old highway from Cd. Victoria to San Luis Potosí. The highway leaves Cd. Victoria from the SW end of town, and is called Calzada General Luis Caballero in the city.

If you go from Cd. Victoria, the turnoff is to the left at a blind curve. To avoid the awkwardness of a head-on collision, go on another .3 mi (.5 km) to a wide spot where a small car or truck could turn around or .9 mi (1.4 km) to a better turnaround.