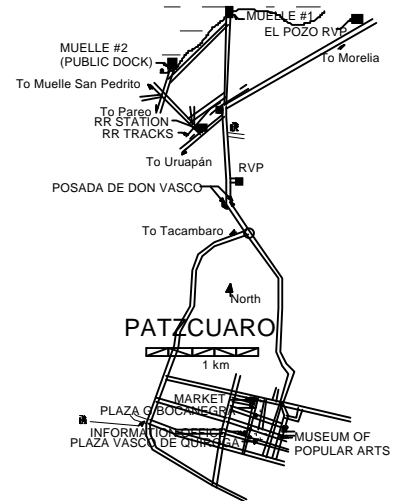


Pátzcuaro

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 Paricutín and Chincua are long ones.

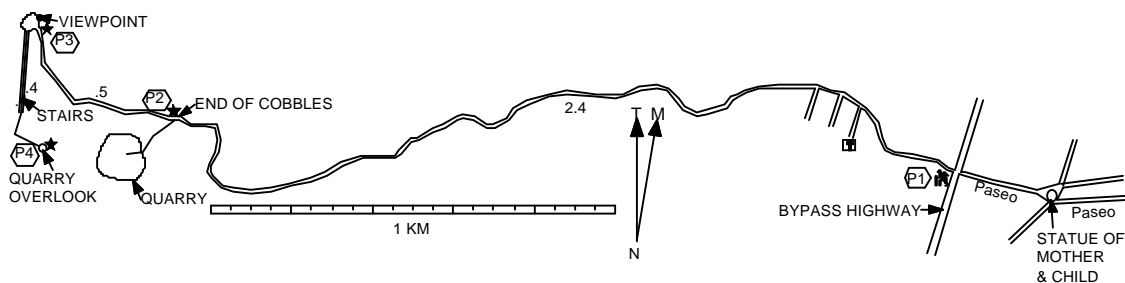


Estribo Grande

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.

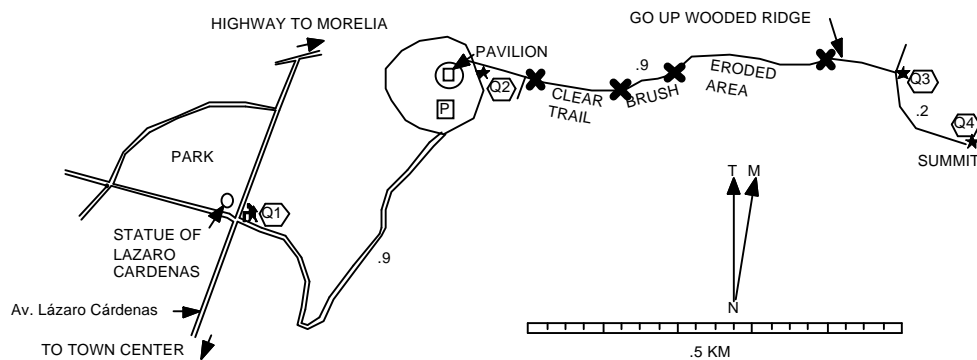


Estribo Chico ("Estribito")

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.

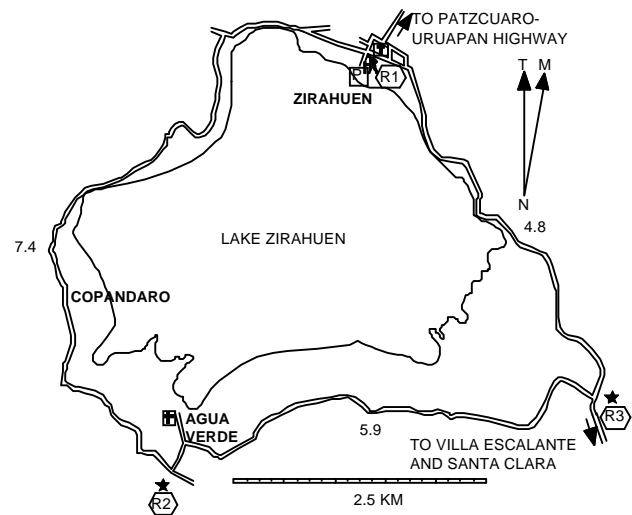
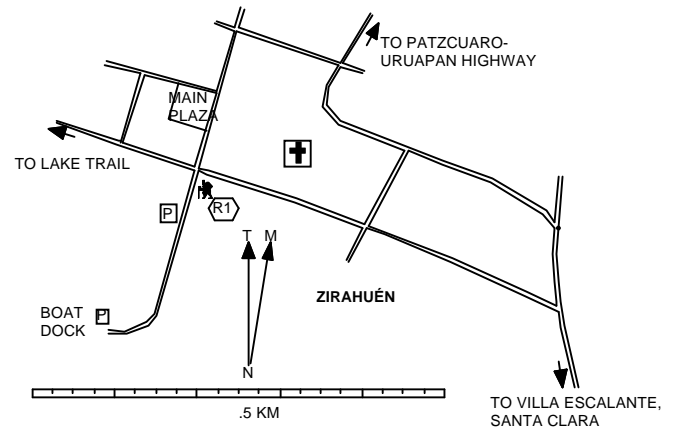


Loops are always good, and that makes up for the occasional dust-raising truck. This loop takes you through villages and past farms and forests. There also are some country homes built by wealthy Mexicans and a couple of resorts.

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.



Paricutín

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.

Paricutín 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 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.

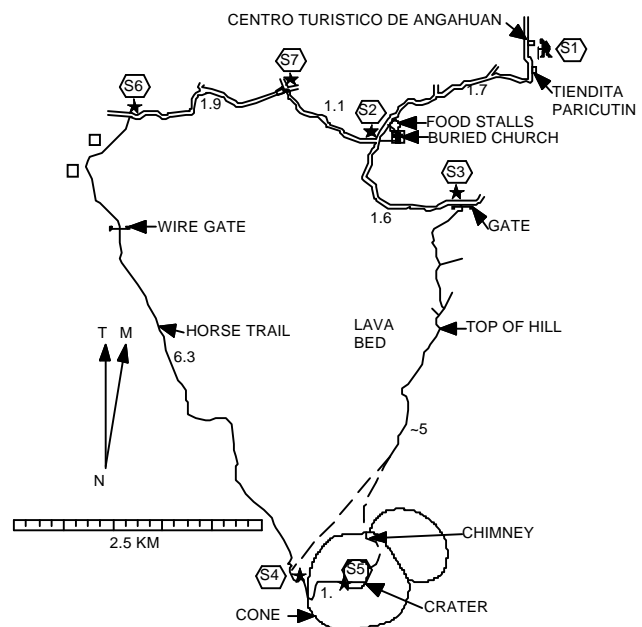
If you're going on foot, the easiest way is to follow the horse trail around the lava bed, although much of the trail is soft volcanic sand. Most of the scenery looks desolate, with shrubs and small trees growing as well as they can in the volcanic sand, but part of the trail goes through farm country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

