



OFF THE BEATEN PATH



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Hiking

WITH THE FAMILY
IN THE SAN
DIEGUITO RIVER
VALLEY

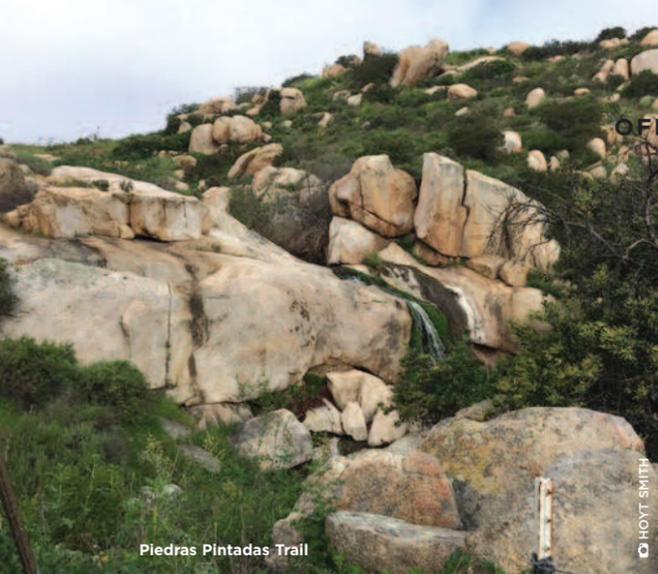
BY DELLE WILLETT AND
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Lake Hodges

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HIKING IS A GREAT WAY TO DISCONNECT FROM OUR fast-paced lives and, instead, connect with family, and bring a sense of balance back into life. It's a time to see the beauty all around us.

Hiking helps teach our children life isn't about games, television shows, and social media. It's about interacting with nature, which teaches us that all living things, whether they are plants, animals or people, need to be treated with respect. 🐾



Piedras Pintadas Trail



Lake Hodges Dam



Clevenger Canyon South



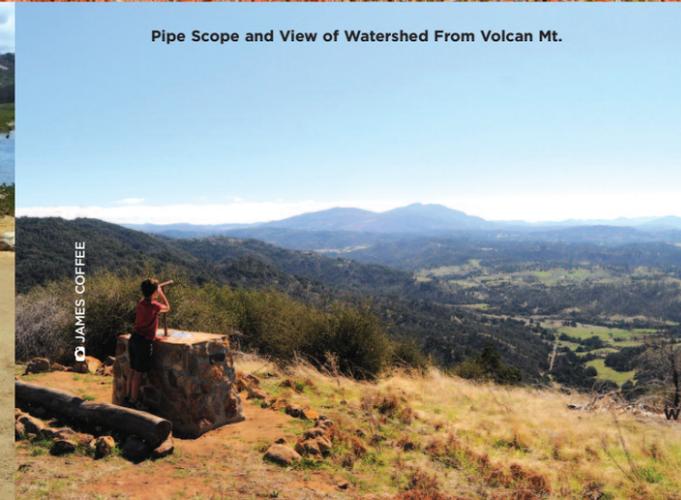
Mule Hill Trail



River Park Overview, Volcan Mt.



River Path Del Mar



Pipe Scope and View of Watershed From Volcan Mt.



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For kids who just want to go fast:

The **North Shore Lake Hodges segment** of the Coast to Crest Trail is hugely popular with mountain bikers — and since it’s relatively flat and wide, it’s perfect for mini-mountain bikers who are still learning or gaining confidence.

For kids with lively imaginations, don’t miss the recently completed Hodgee Statue at Del Dios Community Park. Local artists carved a likeness of Lake Hodge’s local legend from a decaying eucalyptus tree. If you stick around after sunset, you might catch Hodgee’s eyes changing from green to glowing purple.

For kids who can’t stay on the ground:

The **Highland Valley Trail** has a picnic area at the end and coast live oaks that beckon young climbers. The first section of this trail also features a Children’s Interpretive Walk, a native plant garden, and Discovery Points that highlight native wildlife.

The Rattlesnake Viewpoint on the **Del Dios Gorge segment** of the Coast to Crest Trail is a sitting and viewing area just west of the Lake Hodges Dam. Native rocks have been formed into a rattlesnake-shaped bench with a scope and interpretive panels.

For young birdwatchers and naturalists:

Several spots in the River Valley are well-known among birders — the region is a key spot along the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds. The trails around the **San Dieguito Lagoon**, which include the **River Path Del Mar**, the **Coast to Crest Trail segment**, and the **Dust Devil Nature Trails** all provide excellent vantage points for observing shorebirds and, depending on the time of year, lots of migrating species.

In the spring, watch the nesting platforms near the Fairgrounds parking lot. For the past several years, ospreys have built nests and raised young here. You might get to see an osprey catching fish or the juvenile ospreys learning to fly and hunt!

Crest Canyon in Del Mar (just south of the Lagoon) is a short trail and an excellent example of an urban canyon. It’s also a great location to see native plants, including Torrey Pines and other rare plants like Del Mar manzanita.

The Lagoon trails are also stroller/wheelchair-accessible. Visitors to any of these three hikes can end their hike with a visit to Viewpoint Brewing Company, where they can birdwatch and enjoy craft beer and a snack while the kids play games nearby, like cornhole and Skee-Ball.

The trails around Lake Hodges, especially the **Bernardo Bay Trail**, are just as good for birdwatching. The prickly pear cactus you’ll find here provides a habitat for the threatened coastal cactus wren. And every so often, people report bald eagle sightings at Lake Hodges!

Bernardo Bay is also a prime spot for wildflowers — bring a camera and a good guidebook to help your kids identify different plants and determine if they’re native or invasive.

To make the most of your family hike, we recommend you bring binoculars and a magnifying glass to get a better look at all things great and small, and leave your cell phone at home (unless you are using it for GPS or photos).

For more information visit **WWW.SDRP.ORG** or **WWW.SDRVP.ORG**, the site of the San Dieguito River Park JPA.