



2024

TrailLink Unlimited



Guides



**Mt. Lowe
Railway Trail**
California



Mt. Lowe Railway Trail

California

The path of an old tourist railway rolls through dizzying heights in the mountains near Pasadena in Southern California. Visitors are



The path of an old tourist railway rolls through dizzying heights in the mountains near Pasadena in Southern California. Visitors are rewarded with inspiring views of rugged mountains, canyons, and the urban landscape below and can inspect ruins of mountaintop resorts and the remains of the railway.

Unlike the mostly smooth, straight routes followed by typical rail-trails, the Mt. Lowe Railway Trail clings to canyon sides as it meanders through the San Gabriel Mountains in the Angeles National Forest. Carry plenty of food and water, as neither is available on this trail.

Scientist and inventor Thaddeus S.C. Lowe created the railway as a tourist destination in the 1890s. It made a 2,200-foot ascent up Rubio Canyon from Altadena on a

62% grade achieved by using gears and counterbalanced passenger cars powered by electricity—the only such trolley in the country. Present-day visitors are spared that climb up the Great Incline (which was demolished after the railway ceased operating in 1938) by starting their explorations from a trailhead on a roadway named Chaney Trail about a mile north of Altadena. Still, the route climbs about 1,400 feet to the ruins on Echo Mountain and 2,400 feet to Mt. Lowe Trail Camp.

Passing through the gate, you'll take Mt. Lowe Road, a fire road, 2.4 miles to reach the junction with the Mt. Lowe Railway Trail. Take the right fork onto the dirt trail, which leads to the ruins of the White City resort in 0.8 mile.

The resort included a 70-room, Victorian-style hotel, as well as an observatory, a casino, a dance hall, a zoo, and more. After Lowe went bankrupt, the Pacific Electric Railway acquired the operation. Along with a historical marker and artifacts from the railway, such as cars, wheels, and giant gears, you'll find foundations remaining for many buildings that were claimed by fire, landslides, and neglect over the years. Facing south, you'll have views of the Los Angeles Basin. (From here, the Sam Merrill Trail heads downhill to the Cobb Estate trailhead in Altadena and serves as an alternative way to reach the White City ruins.)

Returning to the trail junction, head right (north) onto Mount Lowe Road, which overlaps the Mt. Lowe Railway Trail and Echo Mountain Trail routes, to follow the old railway corridor's Alpine Division, which ran between White City and a tavern near Mount Lowe. Soon you'll negotiate the longest straight section of the railway route, spanning just 225 feet. This leads to two tight switchbacks, the first called Horseshoe Curve and the second, Circular Bridge, the site of a wooden trestle suspended over the canyon below.

The trail continues along a mountainside overlooking Millard and Grand Canyons for nearly 3 miles to Mt. Lowe Trail Camp,



Mt. Lowe Railway Trail

California

States: California

Counties: Los Angeles

Length: 5.8 miles

Trail end points: Angeles National Forest to Echo Mountain to Mt. Lowe Trail Camp

Trail surfaces: Dirt, Gravel

Trail category: Rail-Trail

Trail activities: Horseback Riding, Mountain Biking, Walking

Parking & Trail Access

There is no easy way to get to the Mount Lowe railway Trail. The easiest is to follow the paved access road up to the rail-trail near its Echo Mountain end point.

To reach the access road and trailhead from Interstate 210 in Pasadena, take the Lake Avenue exit. Head north on Lake Avenue for 3.7 miles to Loma Alta Drive, which is at the base of the steep massif. Turn left (west) on Loma Alta Drive and go for 1.1 miles to Chaney Trail; a flashing yellow light marks the road. Turn right (north) on Chaney Trail and follow this for 1.4 miles, passing a display about the Forest Adventure Pass, to a gate. If the gate is open, you can proceed for another 1.1 miles to a saddle where you will find another gate and the beginning of the paved access road. There is limited roadside parking.

Visit the [TrailLink map](#) for parking options and detailed directions.



Mt. Lowe Railway Trail

California



Trailhead



Restroom



Parking



Water Fountain



Tunnel



TrailLink
by Rails-to-Trails Conservancy

[TrailLink.com](https://www.TrailLink.com)