

Step Back Into Time Along Metate Trail

One of the things I love about San Bernardino County is that there is so much history to be discovered. I'm not speaking about 100-year-old buildings, monuments or roads, but bits and pieces of history that connect us to those peoples who lived in our mountains and valleys hundreds of years ago.

I discovered some of those connections a few years ago when I was first introduced to the Metate Trail near Lake Arrowhead in the San Bernardino National Forest. The trail is an easy one to follow and is very family friendly. The primary leg is short, just under half a mile, and relatively level. I can hike it in an hour, but I also can easily spend half a day there.

Hundreds of years ago during the summer and fall months the Serrano Indians would travel up the mountain from the hot valley floor to hunt and gather acorns and pine nuts. As part of their encampment, natives used granite bedrock outcroppings to turn the area's plentiful acorns into meal.

To see the metates (pronounced meh-TAH-tehs; Spanish for a flat stone used for grinding) take Highway 173 from Lake Arrowhead to the Metate Trailhead located across from the Rock Camp Ranger Station. Park at the trailhead and walk across the highway to the station's paved road. Walk straight ahead and the road turns into a dirt trail. Go past what remains of a barbed wire fence and follow the trail into the pine and oak trees.



Caption: When you reach the stone monument honoring the Serrano Indians, walk to the left of the monument and follow a short trail to see the bedrock holes where tribal women would grind acorns.

You'll approach a point where the trail splits to the left but keep going straight. The trail will drop a bit and wind a little to the left. Just over a crest you'll see a meadow to the right and more pine and oak trees. Go a bit further and you'll see a wooden bench to the right and off to the left will be a stone monument and plaque. It was placed there in 1938 by the Lake Arrowhead Women's Club to honor the Serrano Indians who camped in the area.

Follow a short, narrow path behind the monument, through some manzanita bushes, and you'll come upon the granite outcroppings. The holes you'll see are the mortars the Serrano women used to crush acorns. I'm guessing they also used the flat granite surfaces as metates to grind acorns.

There are more morteros (Spanish for mortars) and metates in the area than what you've just discovered but these are the easiest to find. Each time I visit I can't help letting my mind wander back to hundreds of years ago when Serrano men, women and children lived and worked exactly where I'm standing. You might try letting your imagination work when you visit.