67 Jo Pond/Cedar Spring Trail to Palm Canyon Trading Post (see map opposite)

LENGTH: 13 miles
HIKING TIME: 8 hours
ELEVATION GAIN: 1,300 feet
ELEVATION LOSS: 5,850 feet
DIFFICULTY: Strenuous
SEASON: October to April
INFORMATION: USDA Forest Service, Idyllwild, (909) 382-2922 or (951) 659-2117

For sheer, majestic vistas and spectacular spring flora, few trails in or near the Coachella Valley match the Jo Pond/Cedar Spring Trail, with its entire length stretching from atop the Desert Divide Ridge/Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) to the Indian Trading Post in Palm Canyon. This is a shuttle hike. Someone must drop you off at the Cedar Spring Trailhead in Garner Valley and pick you up at the Indian Trading Post in Palm Canyon. The best time for this adventurous hike, in regard to temperature, flora, and river runoff, is March to mid-April. The views are inspiring and beautiful as you hike up and over the Desert Divide Ridge, make your way along West Fork Canyon, and finally emerge over the sprawl of Palm Canyon before reaching the trading post at the canyon's head. Take your camera, hope that the snow is still blanketing the higher peaks, and be prepared for the rigors of an almost 6,000-foot drop in elevation— protect those knees and toes!

DIRECTIONS

TO REACH THE TRAILHEAD, drive 28 miles south on Hwy. 74 from Hwy. 111 in Palm Desert, or almost 11 miles east of Mountain Center on Hwy. 74 if you come from Hemet. Turn north onto Morris Ranch Rd. at the CDF Fire Station, and proceed 3 miles to the sign that reads "Park Off Pavement." After parking, pick up the trail for Cedar Spring just a few hundred yards up the road.

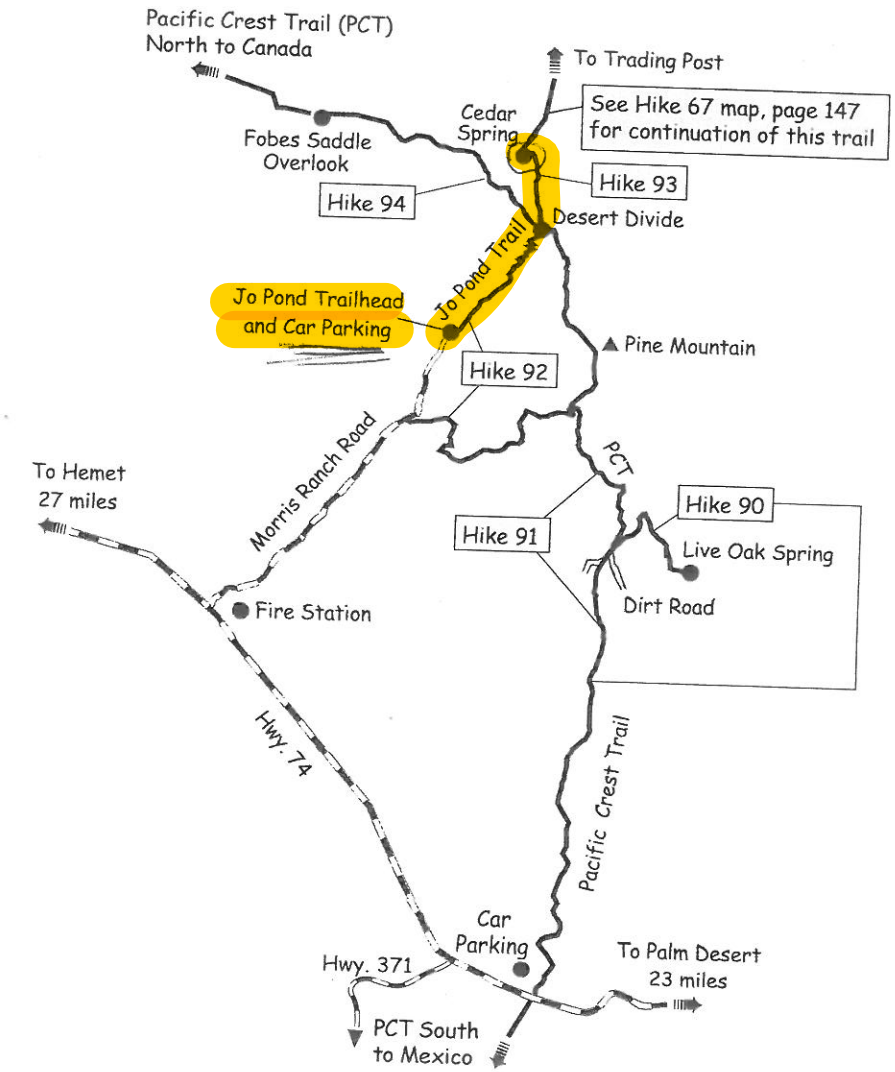
You spend the first 0.5 mile walking through beautiful oak woods, along a rushing stream and over a stunning meadow before beginning the ascent up the slope to the PCT and Desert Divide Ridge. At the trail's beginning, a large sign marking the southern terminus of the Jo Pond Trail indicates 3 miles to Cedar Spring, 7 to the picnic tables above West Fork Canyon, and 12.5 to the Indian Trading Post (it says 15 miles to the tollgate, which is 2.5 miles beyond the trading post).

As you climb toward the PCT, looking south you can see the Palomar Mountain Observatory atop Palomar Mountain and sections of Garner Valley. Once you're at the crest, and as you begin your descent over the ridge, the entire Coachella Valley spreads out before you, with Palm Canyon's 16-mile length snaking its way far below to the east. After a mile you will reach the cool incense cedar grove and camping area of Cedar Spring. From here the trail should be signed, indicating a climb left from the campground, along a stream/gully, and eventually climbing up and over to the burned mountainous area northwest of Cedar Spring, consumed by the July 1994 fire.

Once over this section, you will be hiking along the Garnet Ridge for 3–4 miles, with awesome high-country views of the entire length of the San Jacinto Mountains to the west, made especially scenic by a thick winter snow cover. Palm Canyon will continue to amaze you as you look east, with noticeable green patches, tree-filled canyons, and the obvious meandering trail along its bottom.

After the trail steeply drops for 7 miles down the ridge, with dozens of switchbacks, you will reach a trail junction where you turn right. From here the scenery really captures your aesthetic senses, as the trail comes down along the West Fork Canyon and offers you green valleys, waterfalls, grass-covered slopes, oases, stunning verdant canyons, flowers, and flowering cacti. This part of the hike is more like a trip through a nature preserve than through desert canyons!

After almost 12 miles, you will finally come over the ridge and look into verdant Palm Canyon. The trail quickly takes you to the canyon's bottom along a short section of raging stream and up to the Indian Trading Post for a richly deserved cool drink. This hike does test your ability to come down a steep trail . . . strong knees are a must!


Pacific Crest Trail (PCT)
North to Canada
To Trading Post
See Hike 67 map, page 147
for continuation of this trail
Cedar
Spring
Fobes Saddle
Overlook
Hike 94
Hike 93
Desert Divide
Jo Pond Trail
Jo Pond Trailhead
and Car Parking
Pine Mountain
Hike 92
Morris Ranch Road
PCT
To Hemet
27 miles
Hike 90
Hike 91
Live Oak Spring
Dirt Road
Fire Station
Hwy. 74
Pacific Crest Trail
Car
Parking
Hwy. 371
To Palm Desert
23 miles
PCT South
to Mexico