

KRAIG ADAMS

Trans-Catalina Trail Hiking Guide

Avalon to Two Harbors in 2 days

2027 season edition · updated October 2026

Contents

	Welcome
	At a glance
	Is it open? (October 2026)
	Straight answers
	When to go
	Permits, campgrounds and rules
	Getting there
Day 1	**Avalon to Little Harbor**
Day 2	**Little Harbor to Two Harbors**
	Other ways to do it
	Where I slept, food and water
	What I paid
	Gear for this route
	Weather and safety
	Using the GPX files
	Before you go, check these
	One-page trip sheet
	About this guide

Welcome

In July 2020 I hiked the Trans-Catalina Trail across Santa Catalina Island, off the coast of Southern California, in two days. I took the ferry to Avalon, walked up to Hermit Gulch, where the trail starts, and crossed the island's dry interior past Black Jack and the Airport in the Sky to a night at Little Harbor Campground, on the beach. The next day I went over the hills to Two Harbors, up the Silver Peak Trail along the island's west end, down to Parsons Landing, and back along the coast road to a night at the Banning House Lodge above Two Harbors. Two days, about 42 miles by my GPS. It's the trip from my film Hiking the Trans-Catalina Trail in California.

It was kind of a weird hike. It was a desert island with no running water, no rivers, no streams. It was very hot, with a lot of direct sunlight, but the sea fog would roll in over the hills every morning and sometimes in the evening. A lot of the campsites were full with car campers and bikepackers, but no one else was hiking the trail: I didn't see a single other hiker. I'm glad I did it, to say that I did it and to know what it's like.

Good to know first (October 2026). The trail is open, and the way I went is now the official route: the Catalina Island Conservancy moved the trail's end from Starlight Beach on the far west end to Two Harbors, so it now loops from Two Harbors over the Silver Peak Trail to Parsons Landing and back along the West End Road, like my Day 2. Through October 2026 part of the trail near Black Jack is closed to hikers at night for the Conservancy's deer removal work, which runs for years. The hiking permit is still free and still required. See Is it open?.

What's inside

- Where things stand in October 2026, and straight answers to the questions people ask about the Trans-Catalina Trail
- When to go, the permit, the campgrounds and the rules, and the boats to Avalon and back from Two Harbors
- Both days: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my film

- Other ways to do it, where I slept, food and water, what I paid and gear for this route
- Weather and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps before you start: the Conservancy says cell service is limited or missing on much of the trail. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Prices, boat timetables and rules change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.



Boats anchored in a cove below the West End Road, Day 2 mile 15.7.

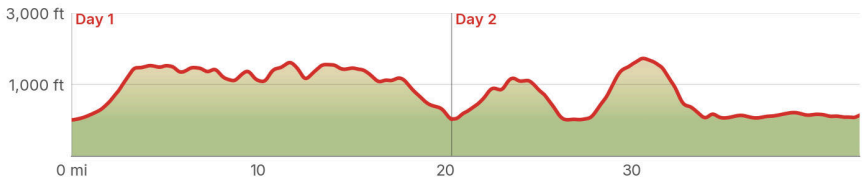
At a glance

QUICK FACTS	
Distance	42.2 miles (67.9 km) by my GPS. My film says 40; the official trail is 38.5
Climbing	About 7,530 ft (2,290 m) up and 7,390 ft (2,250 m) down
Days	2: 20.4 miles on Day 1, 21.9 on Day 2
Start	Avalon. The trail starts at Hermit Gulch Campground, 1.5 miles up the canyon
Finish	Two Harbors, with its boat to San Pedro
When	I went July 28 and 29, 2020
Difficulty	Long climbs and descents on dirt roads and steep trail, with almost no shade. Heat and water are the hard part
Permits	A free hiking permit, and a booked campsite for every night

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Avalon to Little Harbor	20.4 (32.8)	3,637 / 3,612	Little Harbor Campground
2	Little Harbor to Two Harbors by way of Parsons Landing	21.9 (35.2)	3,888 / 3,780	Banning House Lodge

Distances and climbing are from my GPS (see Using the GPX files), with the walk to the trailhead, a side trip to the airport and the climb to my lodge.





My route: across the island from Avalon to Little Harbor on Day 1; on Day 2 over the hills to Two Harbors, along the west end ridge on the Silver Peak Trail, down to Parsons Landing and back along the coast to Two Harbors. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Is it open? (October 2026)

Checked on the official pages on October 1, 2026.

Open. No closure, fire damage or reroute is posted on the trail, and the Conservancy's fire danger was LOW. Its last storm notice, in January 2026, closed roads but not the hiking trails.

Closed at night near Black Jack (through October 2026). The Conservancy is removing the island's mule deer. Through October 2026, hiking in its area around Middle Ranch, "including portions of the Trans-Catalina Trail," is suspended from 90 minutes before sunset to 90 minutes after sunrise (on October 1, 5:07 p.m. to 8:17 a.m.). In those hours use the main roads (Airport, El Rancho Escondido and Middle Ranch Roads), and stay off its four-wheel-drive roads. Black Jack Campground stays open, and daytime hiking isn't affected. The work is permitted to January 2036, so expect more notices like this in 2027.

Deer hunting (fall 2026). From October 24 to December 18, 2026, island residents may hunt deer in daylight, in zones that rotate around Conservancy land. The Conservancy says it's the last recreational hunting season.

The trail now ends at Two Harbors. In the Conservancy's words, the trail "previously ended at the remote Starlight Beach before it was redirected for a more logical end in Two Harbors." It now loops from Two Harbors up the Silver Peak Trail to Parsons Landing and back on the West End Road, the way I walked on Day 2.

The permit. Still free and still required: book it by date on the Conservancy's website, or pick it up at its Trailhead visitor center in Avalon. See Permits, campgrounds and rules.

The boats. From October 20, 2026 to January 4, 2027 no boats go to or from Two Harbors on Tuesdays and Thursdays, Thanksgiving excepted. The Catalina Island Company says this happens every winter, from late October to late March; last winter it ran to March 30, 2026. The 2027 timetables weren't out yet. See Getting there.

Straight answers

How many days do I need? I crushed it in two days. I know a lot of people take three or four days to do it, but if you can, I think two days is the way to go. Spend some extra time in Avalon, and spend some extra time at Two Harbors. The Conservancy plans it in three to five days and calls three days very challenging. See Other ways to do it.

How hard is it? It's 42 miles and about 7,500 ft of climbing by my GPS, about 9 hours each day with my stops. In my film I called it not that difficult compared to other hikes I've done. The Conservancy warns that many people underestimate the elevation gain and loss, and there's very little shade. The trail is a mix of dirt roads and steep singletrack.

Do I need a permit? Yes: a free hiking permit from the Conservancy, and a reservation for every campground you sleep in. Wild camping isn't allowed.

Is there water on the trail? Only from taps. There are no streams you can count on, and the Conservancy says natural water isn't safe to drink. There's water at every campground except Parsons Landing, at Haypress and at the Airport, and none between Two Harbors and Parsons Landing. I had one liter and ran out on Day 2. See Where I slept, food and water.

When should I go? Spring and fall, says the Conservancy. I went in late July and it was hot. Most of the rain falls from November to March, and rain can close the trails. See When to go.

How do I get there and back? By boat. Catalina Express runs from San Pedro, Long Beach and Dana Point to Avalon, and only from San Pedro to Two Harbors. Go out of San Pedro and come back to San Pedro, and you park once.

Can I fly a drone? Not without written permission from the Conservancy: drones are banned on its land.

What about the bison? They're wild, big and fast. The Conservancy says to stay at least 125 feet away. See Weather and safety.

Can I bring my dog? On a leash, and only to Black Jack, Little Harbor and Parsons Landing: dogs aren't allowed at the Hermit Gulch or Two Harbors campgrounds, or on any beach in Los Angeles County, which includes Catalina's. On Catalina Express a dog needs its own ticket, a signed waiver for each trip, a leash and a muzzle or an airline-style carrier, and dogs can't ride the Wildlands Express. The Conservancy requires current rabies, distemper and Bordetella shots.



The trail through dry grass on the way to Black Jack, Day 1 mile 10.8.

When to go

Late July, as I did. I went on July 28 and 29, 2020. It was hot with a lot of sun, even with the morning sea fog rolling in until around 9 a.m. On Day 2 I started very early, at like 6 or 7 a.m., and the sea fog was still rolling through, so it was very foggy up on the ridges. If I'd waited an hour or two it probably would have cleared up.

The seasons. The trail is open all year. The Conservancy calls spring and fall the most temperate months for hiking, with a chance of rain in spring. Summer has the longest days but the most heat; plan to hike earlier in the day. Winter is the rainy season: mud, and sometimes closures. Nights can drop to about 40°F, especially at Black Jack.



A prickly pear in flower by the trail, Day 1 mile 16.2.

Average temperatures at the Airport in the Sky (NOAA, 1991 to 2020). The airport sits at 1,602 ft, near the middle of the trail and at about its height. In Avalon's older records (1909 to 1988), summer days on the waterfront ran about 5°F cooler.

MONTH	HIGH / LOW (°F)	RAIN (IN)	DAYS OF 90°F OR MORE
January	62 / 50	3.0	0
February	60 / 49	2.8	0
March	61 / 49	1.7	0
April	64 / 50	0.8	0.2
May	67 / 52	0.4	0.6
June	70 / 55	0.2	1.2
July	77 / 59	0.1	2.0
August	79 / 62	0.0	3.4
September	78 / 63	0.1	4.5
October	73 / 58	0.5	1.9
November	67 / 54	1.0	0.1
December	60 / 49	2.2	0

Fog. Low cloud from the sea is common in late spring and early summer; Southern Californians call it May Gray and June Gloom. On my trip it rolled over the hills in the mornings and sometimes in the evenings.

Santa Ana winds. Hot, dry winds from the mainland, mostly in fall and winter and most often in December, with high fire danger and rough seas that can cancel boats.

Daylight (2027, Avalon). Mid-March: sunrise 7:04 a.m., sunset 7:01 p.m. Mid-June: 5:43 a.m. and 8:04 p.m. Mid-September: 6:37 a.m. and 7:00 p.m. Mid-December: 6:50 a.m. and 4:47 p.m. The campground rules say no hiking from sundown to dawn.

Permits, campgrounds and rules

From the pages of the Catalina Island Conservancy, which looks after the island's interior, and the Catalina Island Company, which takes the campground bookings, checked on October 1, 2026.

The hiking permit. Free and required for everyone hiking on Conservancy land, so that rangers can reach you about wildfire, damaging winds or heavy rain. Book the "Complimentary Hiking Permit" for your dates on catalinaconservancy.org, or get it in person at the Conservancy's Trailhead visitor center at 708 Crescent Avenue in Avalon (8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily). In 2020, once I had my campsite reservation, I filled out some extra things online, and that was my permit. Today get the permit on its own, even with a campsite booked.

Booking the campgrounds. All five campgrounds on the trail are booked through the Catalina Island Company, online or by phone at 310-510-4205 (Two Harbors Visitor Services, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily). Each year's dates open on January 5 at 8 a.m. Pacific time; January and February open on December 1. You can put several nights at different campgrounds in one cart. Fees are per person, per night, and change with the season: you see the price when you search your dates. A $9.25 reservation fee isn't refunded; cancel at least 14 days ahead to get the rest back. The campgrounds' minimum stay doesn't apply to Trans-Catalina hikers. Check-in is at 2 p.m. and check-out at 11 a.m., quiet hours are 10 p.m. to 9 a.m., and hammocks aren't allowed. Conservancy members get 50% off at Black Jack, Little Harbor and Parsons Landing (membership starts at $50).

The campgrounds, in trail order

CAMPGROUND	CONSERVANCY'S MILE	WATER	FIRES	DOGS	NOTES
Hermit Gulch	The trailhead, 1.5 miles from the Avalon waterfront	Yes	No	No	Coin showers, a live-in ranger, tent cabins
Black Jack	10.7	Yes	No	Yes	1,600 ft. Toilets, a cold outdoor shower, shade from pines. The coldest camp
Little Harbor	18.9	Yes	In the rings	Yes, not at Shark Harbor	On the beach. Toilets, a cold outdoor shower, a live-in ranger in summer
Two Harbors	24.2	Yes	In the fire pits	No	About a quarter mile from the village. Cold showers, chemical toilets
Parsons Landing	30.8	No	In the rings	Yes	Eight primitive beach sites, a pit toilet. Buy a locker with water and firewood in Two Harbors



Black Jack Campground, Day 1 mile 11.3.

Parsons Landing locker. There's no water at Parsons Landing. Order a locker from Two Harbors Visitor Services: in 2026 it held a 2-gallon jug of water, a bundle of firewood and a fire starter for $27, and you pick up its key or code there before you hike. The Catalina Island Company recommends at least a gallon of water per person per day.

Gear haul and rentals. The Catalina Island Company hauls gear to Two Harbors ($10 round trip) and Little Harbor ($42 round trip, $21 one way), not to Black Jack or Parsons Landing. Little Harbor, Two Harbors and Hermit Gulch rent tents ($40 a night) and sleeping pads ($7), and sell firewood ($14 a bundle), 16 oz propane ($16) and sleeping bags ($60).

Fires and stoves. Campfires only in the fire rings at Little Harbor, Two Harbors and Parsons Landing; none at Hermit Gulch or Black Jack. Collecting wood, driftwood included, isn't allowed. Use a camp stove, flame low, in the campgrounds' cooking areas. All open flames are banned island-wide during Red Flag Warnings, and there's no smoking anywhere in the wildlands.

No wild camping. Camp only in a campground you've booked. Starlight Beach isn't a campground. Campsites can't be used for day use without an overnight reservation, though you can walk through a campground to reach the beach.

Wildlife. Don't feed, approach or disturb any animal. Stay at least 125 feet from bison. A sign in my film says "Do Not Feed Foxes."

Drones. Flying a drone on Conservancy land, recreational or commercial, isn't allowed without the Conservancy's written permission. I flew a drone on this trip in 2020; today you'd need that permission first.

Other rules. Stay on roads and trails open to the public, and don't hike from sundown to dawn. Hitchhiking is prohibited on Conservancy land. Bikes need a Conservancy pass and a reservation for each ride. Dogs on a leash at all times.

Getting there

My way in, 2020. I flew into Los Angeles (LAX), took an Uber down to Long Beach and spent the night. Early the next morning I dropped my bag off at a hotel there that I'd been to before: I'd booked my after-the-hike room there, so they let me store my duffel bag for a couple of extra days. At seven I boarded the ferry and headed over to Avalon, the main town on the island. You should spend some time there if you can. It's a little pricey, but very cool and unique. A lot of people have golf carts; it's a thing. At the end I took the ferry from Two Harbors to San Pedro and went back to the hotel to grab my bag.

The boats (2026). Catalina Express runs from San Pedro, Long Beach and Dana Point to Avalon, and it's the only boat between the mainland and Two Harbors, which it serves only from San Pedro. So the easy plan is out of San Pedro to Avalon and back from Two Harbors to San Pedro: you park once. If you sail from Long Beach, plan on a taxi or rideshare back from San Pedro at the end. The crossings take about 1 hour from Long Beach, 1 hour 15 minutes from San Pedro to Avalon or to Two Harbors, and 1 hour 30 minutes from Dana Point; boats from Two Harbors that stop in Avalon take about 2 hours 30 minutes.

- **Fares.** Online, Catalina Express sells one-way trips, which is what this trail needs: San Pedro to Avalon, then Two Harbors to San Pedro. For dates after October 6, 2026 the booking page showed $44.50 for an adult each way, with taxes and fees added at checkout. Its fares page lists round trips from October 6, 2026 at $103 to Avalon and $101 to Two Harbors, the island's wharfage fee included. Fares can change; check them when you book.
- **Two Harbors timetable.** In spring 2026 (March 31 to June 21) two boats a day left Two Harbors for San Pedro every day, at 11:45 a.m. direct and 4:45 p.m. by way of Avalon. In summer 2025 there were three a day. From October 20, 2026 to January 4, 2027: no boats on Tuesdays or Thursdays (Thanksgiving excepted), the 11:45 a.m. on the other days, and the 4:45 p.m. only on Mondays and Fridays to Sundays. The Catalina

Island Company says the Tuesday and Thursday gap comes every winter, from late October to late March; last winter it ran to March 30, 2026. The 2027 timetables weren't out yet; plan your last day around the boat.

- **Booking.** Book ahead: Catalina Express says its departures often sell out, especially in summer and on holiday weekends. Arrive at least an hour before your boat. Changes are free more than 48 hours ahead.
- **Backpacks and fuel.** Two pieces of luggage up to 50 lbs each, plus a carry-on; backpacks up to 4 ft tall, with straps buckled and nothing tied to the outside. No stove fuel on the boat: stoves only with the canister removed, and fuel canisters are bought on the island.

Parking (2026). San Pedro (Catalina Sea and Air Terminal, Berth 95): $23 a day. Long Beach (Catalina Landing): $26.95 a day. Dana Point: $24 a day, on level 3 of the harbor parking structure only.

Avalon to the trailhead. The trail starts at the back of Hermit Gulch Campground, at the top of Avalon Canyon Road: 1.5 miles from the waterfront by my GPS, mostly uphill along the road. Avalon's on-demand shuttle, COAST, runs anywhere within the city limits from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m., from $2, and Hermit Gulch Campground is inside the city limits.

Stove fuel. Buy it on the island. The Two Harbors General Store lists MSR IsoPro canisters, but that's near the end. In Avalon, hikers report canisters at Chet's Hardware (117 Catalina Avenue, 310-510-0990); call ahead. I didn't carry a stove.

Shuttles on the island (2026). The old Safari Bus no longer runs. The Conservancy's Wildlands Express (book ahead) runs from Avalon to the Airport in the Sky and from the Airport to Little Harbor, with a stop at Black Jack Junction: $27.16 a leg, one backpack on your lap or at your feet. Nothing runs by road to Two Harbors except private shuttles (from $320 a vehicle from Avalon). Between Two Harbors and Avalon, the Cyclone boat ($29) runs only from May to early October.

Two Harbors is going cashless. The Catalina Island Company's businesses there, the boat ticket window included, are moving to cards and phone payments only. There's a cash-to-card kiosk outside the General Store.



Me on the Big Springs Ridge Trail, from my drone, Day 1 mile 17.0.

DAY 1

Avalon to Little Harbor

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
20.4 mi (32.8 km)	**3,637 ft** (1,108 m)	**3,612 ft** (1,101 m)	**9 hours** (8:49 a.m. to 5:48 p.m.), about 7.4 of them moving

HIGH POINT

1,660 ft (506 m), just past Black Jack Campground

LOW POINT

Avalon and Little Harbor, at sea level

ON THE WAY

Hermit Gulch Campground (mile 1.5), the top of the Hermit Gulch Trail (3.3), the Haypress water tap (5.9), Black Jack Campground (11.3), the Airport in the Sky (13.6), Little Harbor Campground (20.3)

SLEEP

Little Harbor Campground, on the beach

FOOD AND WATER

Water at Hermit Gulch, Haypress, Black Jack and the Airport; food at the Airport

My day

I came over on the morning ferry and started walking from the Avalon waterfront at 8:49. Hermit Gulch Campground, at the top of the canyon road, is the official start; from there the trail climbs out of the canyon. There were distractions everywhere on this hike: telephone poles, power lines, roads, fences, cell towers, just stuff. Maybe because there were no trees to hide it.



The water tap and the animal-proof bins at Haypress, Day 1 mile 5.9.

There's no running water on the island, so I was entirely dependent on the water taps along the trail, mostly at campsites. I filled up at the tap by Haypress Reservoir. I passed Black Jack around lunchtime and kept going: Black Jack Campground is something I skipped, for a good reason. There was no one there, and it's kind of a crappy campsite. If you can push through, do the extra miles to Little Harbor.



The Airport in the Sky, Day 1 mile 13.6.

The little airport was actually kind of nice. At the grill I got a burger and got to talk to some pilots, and it's just right off the trail, so make sure to stop.



The Big Springs Ridge Trail, Day 1 mile 16.9.

I reached Little Harbor at 5:45. There's a beach, and it's just much nicer. I set up my tent under the shade shelter at my site and made a fire in the fire ring. I'd brought a sausage I didn't plan on cooking over an open fire, but that was awesome: it tasted great, and it was really fun to cook. At night I charged my iPhone from my used drone batteries and went through my footage.



The trail above Little Harbor, late on Day 1, mile 19.1.

The trail

Avalon to Hermit Gulch. From the waterfront I walked through town and up Avalon Canyon Road to Hermit Gulch Campground (about 280 ft) at mile 1.5. The trail starts at the back of the campground.

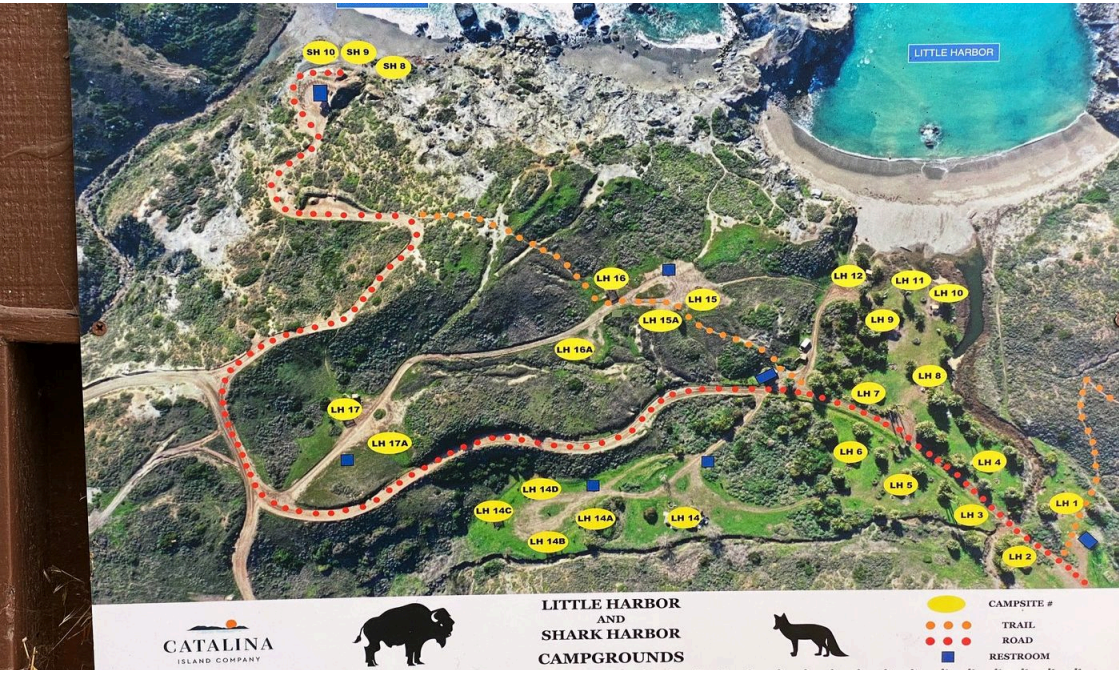
The Hermit Gulch Trail. The first big climb: about 1,160 ft (354 m) up in 1.8 miles of singletrack, out of the canyon to Divide Road at about 1,475 ft (mile 3.3). The Conservancy lists a sun shelter and a toilet near the top.

Divide Road to Haypress. The trail follows the dirt road along the ridge for 1.8 miles, then drops to Haypress Reservoir (mile 5.9): a water tap, toilets and picnic tables, the first water after Avalon.

Haypress to Black Jack. About 5.5 rolling miles across the island's interior, crossing Airport Road, Renton Pass Road and Middle Ranch Road (mile 8.3), down to about 1,070 ft at Upper Cape Reservoir Road (mile 10.1), then up to Black Jack Campground (1,600 ft, mile 11.3): water, toilets, a cold outdoor shower. On the Conservancy's 2026 map, the trail from about Middle Ranch Road to Black Jack is inside its night closure area.

Black Jack to the Airport. Up past the campground to the day's high point (1,660 ft by my GPS, mile 11.8) on Cape Canyon Road, down to about 1,100 ft, and back up to the Airport in the Sky (1,602 ft, mile 13.6). The restaurant, water and toilets are at the terminal building, a short walk off the trail. The restaurant was open daily from 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. in 2026.

The Airport to Little Harbor. From the airport the trail, then Empire Landing Road, heads west for about 2.3 miles. Then the Big Springs Ridge Trail runs about 4 miles down the ridge to the coast, losing about 1,200 ft, to Little Harbor Campground (mile 20.3). The Conservancy lists a sun shelter on the way.



The map of the Little Harbor and Shark Harbor campgrounds, at Little Harbor.

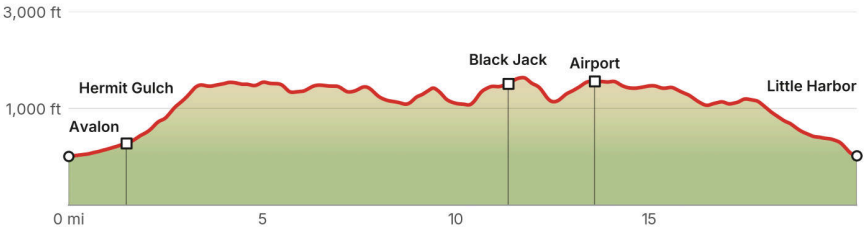
If you need to get off

From Black Jack Junction and the Airport, the Conservancy's Wildlands Express goes back to Avalon (book ahead), and taxis come up from Avalon. Before Haypress, walk back down to Avalon. From Little Harbor the Wildlands Express runs to the Airport and on to Avalon only with a reservation, once or twice a day. In an emergency call 911.

Watch this day

Film, Day 1 · My talk about the trip after the hike





Day 1 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Morning fog over the coast above Little Harbor, Day 2 mile 2.4.

DAY 2

Contents

Little Harbor to Two Harbors

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT	TIME I TOOK
21.9 mi (35.2 km)	**3,888 ft** (1,185 m)	**3,780 ft** (1,152 m)	**8.7 hours** (6:48 a.m. to 3:29 p.m.), about 7.7 of them moving

HIGH POINT

1,765 ft (538 m), on the Silver Peak Trail

LOW POINT

Sea level, at the harbors and Parsons Landing

ON THE WAY

Two Harbors (mile 6.2), the high point (10.1), Fenceline Road (11.2), Parsons Landing (13.6), Two Harbors again (21.0), the lodge (21.9)

SLEEP

The Banning House Lodge, above Two Harbors

FOOD AND WATER

Water at Little Harbor and Two Harbors only; food in Two Harbors

My day

I started out of Little Harbor very early, at 6:48, and the sea fog was still rolling through, so it was very foggy up on the ridges. That area was still very beautiful and very isolated. Once again I didn't see anyone on the trail; just me out there hiking, and some deer running up the hill. Honestly, the trail after Little Harbor is much better than the first half. Things get better as you go, getting toward Two Harbors.

Eventually you get to Two Harbors. It's a lovely little town: there's a hotel, a restaurant, people renting out paddleboards and bikes, and a general store where you can get food. The town has Wi-Fi, and LTE worked for me. I stopped there for about half an hour before heading out on the last section, around the west end and back.



Me in Two Harbors in my long-sleeve hoodie, the morning of Day 2.

Bring extra water for that section, from Two Harbors back to Two Harbors, because there was barely any water, especially high up. All I had was one liter, and I was definitely without water for a couple of miles in the hot sun up there. Bring more than one liter: that's what I'm suggesting.



The Silver Peak Trail along the west end ridge, Day 2 mile 9.8.

From the ridge I came down to the beach at Parsons Landing and walked back along the coast road to Two Harbors, then up to the Banning House Lodge. It was very expensive, but treat yourself, am I right? Staying at the lodge was definitely extra. It was fancy, and I wanted to treat myself a little bit. I made friends with some older couples staying there, sipping wine and eating cheese. At night a fox showed up and was just barking at us, and eventually it jumped up on the table looking for scraps. It was very cute, very nice to see a fox.



The beach and campground at Parsons Landing, Day 2 mile 13.6.

The trail

Little Harbor to Two Harbors. From the campground the trail climbs Lower Jensen Hunting Road, about 880 ft in 2 miles, then follows the hills north to Banning House Road (about 1,135 ft, mile 4.1) and drops about 1,100 ft down it into Two Harbors (mile 6.2). The Conservancy says there's only one shade shelter between Little Harbor and Two Harbors, and no water until Two Harbors.



The road across the isthmus from Two Harbors toward Catalina Harbor, Day 2 mile 6.6.

Two Harbors. The village on the island's narrow isthmus: the boat pier, the General Store, the Harbor Reef Restaurant, showers, lockers and Two Harbors Visitor Services (Parsons Landing lockers, gear haul, boat tickets). Fill up with all the water you'll need to Parsons Landing and back: there's none on the way.

The Silver Peak Trail. From the village the route crosses the isthmus to Catalina Harbor (mile 6.6), follows its shore, then climbs the Silver Peak Trail, a dirt road, about 1,400 ft in 1.8 miles to the ridge of the island's west end. The road rolls along the ridge to the day's high point (1,765 ft, mile 10.1) and on to the Fenceline Road junction (about 1,530 ft, mile 11.2). Silver Peak itself (1,804 ft) is about a mile farther west along the ridge, off the official route. The Conservancy lists a few sun shelters between Two Harbors and Parsons Landing.



The coast from Fenceline Road on the way down to Parsons Landing, Day 2 mile 11.9.

Down to Parsons Landing. Fenceline Road drops steeply, about 1,120 ft in 1.6 miles, to the West End Road, which leads down to Parsons Landing (mile 13.6): eight primitive campsites on the beach, a pit toilet and the lockers, and no running water.

Back along the West End Road. A short stretch of trail climbs above the road east of Parsons Landing, then the dirt road follows the coast about 7 miles back to Two Harbors, between sea level and about 200 ft, past coves full of anchored boats. The Conservancy lists a toilet and a shade structure at Lion Head (my mile 18.6). The road reaches Two Harbors at mile 21.0. I went on up Banning House Road to the lodge (mile 21.9).



The ocean from the West End Road, Day 2 mile 18.4.

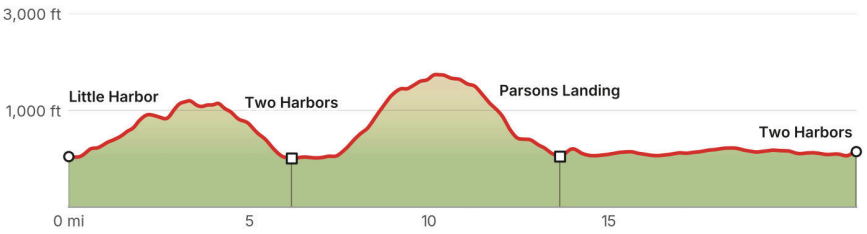
If you need to get off

The only way off the west end is back to Two Harbors: the West End Road is the easier way to Parsons Landing and back, and the Catalina Island Company calls the coastal route fairly flat. From Two Harbors, Catalina Express goes to San Pedro, and from May to early October the Cyclone goes to Avalon. Between Little Harbor and Two Harbors, the shortest way out is on to Two Harbors. In an emergency call 911.

Watch this day

Film, Day 2 · My talk about the trip after the hike





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

My way: two long days

Avalon to Little Harbor, then Little Harbor around the west end to Two Harbors: about 20 miles a day by my GPS, with almost all the water at the campgrounds. You need only one campsite. Start early: there's little shade, and you can't hike after sundown.

The Conservancy's way: three to five days

The Conservancy's planning page offers three days and two nights (very challenging), four days and three nights, or five days and four nights. Its guided Trans-Catalina Trek takes five days, with these figures:

DAY	FROM, TO	MILES	UP / DOWN (FT)
1	Avalon to Black Jack	10.7	3,432 / 1,936
2	Black Jack to Little Harbor, by the Airport	8.3	1,023 / 2,505
3	Little Harbor to Two Harbors	5.6	1,550 / 1,563
4	Two Harbors to Parsons Landing, by the Silver Peak Trail	6.6	2,071 / 2,071
5	Parsons Landing to Two Harbors, by the West End Road	7.7	742 / 742

With your own bookings you can join days: Little Harbor in one long day from Avalon, as I did, or Black Jack to Two Harbors (13 miles, says the Conservancy). Some hikers keep food in a locker at Two Harbors for the next night so they can pack lighter.

Three days

Avalon to Little Harbor, Little Harbor to Parsons Landing (11.5 miles, says the Conservancy), and Parsons Landing back to Two Harbors along the coast in the morning, in time for a boat. Order your Parsons Landing locker in advance.

The other way around

If the campsites are full on your dates, the Conservancy suggests walking the trail the other way. From Two Harbors the boat goes only to San Pedro, so starting there also means one port.

Starlight Beach

Until the Conservancy changed the route, the trail ended at Starlight Beach, near the island's west tip. It's now a side trip from Parsons Landing along the West End Road, about 4.5 miles each way by the map, and it isn't a campground. Carry all your water.

In rain or heat

Rain can close the trails; then the Conservancy sends hikers onto the main roads. In heat, start at first light and carry more water than you think.



Two Harbors from the Banning House Lodge, the evening of Day 2.

Where I slept, food and water

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT
Before the hike	In Long Beach	
1	Little Harbor Campground, in my tent	Sea level
2	The Banning House Lodge, Two Harbors	About 160 ft
After the hike	My hotel in Long Beach	

Little Harbor Campground. A sandy beach campground on the island's back side, the only campground there. My site had a shade shelter and a concrete fire ring. Water, toilets and a cold outdoor shower; a live-in ranger in summer. Shark Harbor, the next beach south, has sites too.

The Banning House Lodge. Built in 1910 as the Banning brothers' summer home, on the hill above Two Harbors, and run by the Catalina Island Company. It has 12 rooms with their own bathrooms, a continental breakfast, and a wine and cheese hour from 5 to 6 p.m. with two glasses of wine per guest. A shuttle runs between the lodge and the village from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. The lodge's prices are on its booking page.



The Banning House Lodge's terrace, the morning after Day 2.

Food

I didn't bring my Jetboil Mini, no camping stove on this trip, just because it was two days and I knew there were options to buy hot food. A bit lighter pack without that stuff. I brought the usual snacks: cashews, an orange, Meal2Go bars and a sausage, which I cooked over the fire at Little Harbor. At the Airport I had a burger. At the Banning House I had wine and cheese.

Where to buy food (2026). The only meals for sale on the trail are at the Airport in the Sky Restaurant (breakfast and lunch, 8:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily) and in Two Harbors: the General Store (9 a.m. to 6 p.m., to 7 p.m. on Fridays and Saturdays), the West End Galley (breakfast and lunch) and the Harbor Reef Restaurant (dinner from 5 p.m.). The Catalina Island Company delivers groceries to Little Harbor ($53.50) and Two Harbors ($48) campsites. Avalon has restaurants and shops.

Water

There's no running water on the island; I was entirely dependent on the taps along the trail, mostly at the campgrounds. I had only my one-liter filter bottle and ran out on the west end on Day 2. Bring more than one liter.

The taps (Conservancy's miles). Hermit Gulch Campground; Haypress Reservoir (5.6), the first water after Avalon; Black Jack Campground (10.7); the Airport (12.75); Little Harbor Campground (18.9); Two Harbors (24.2). None between Two Harbors and Parsons Landing, none at Parsons Landing (buy the locker), and none on the West End Road back.

How much to carry. The Conservancy says to be able to carry 3 liters, and in its newer guidance about a gallon per person for a full day of hiking. Most of the island's streams dry up by May, and natural water isn't safe to drink.



The beach at Two Harbors, the evening after Day 2.

What I paid

My film puts the trip at about $500 to $550, very expensive compared to most hikes. If you just get rid of the hotel, you could probably do this hike for $150, with just the campsite and groceries.

ITEM (2020)	WHAT I PAID
Round-trip ferry tickets	$80
My campsite at Little Harbor	$35
The Banning House Lodge, one night	$300
Restaurants and trail snacks	$120
Total	**$535**

For your budget (prices posted in 2026). Catalina Express, adult: $44.50 each way online, plus taxes and fees (round trips $103 to Avalon and $101 to Two Harbors, wharfage included). Parking at San Pedro $23 a day. Campsites: per person, per night, dynamic, plus a $9.25 reservation fee. Parsons Landing locker $27. Wildlands Express $27.16 a leg. Cyclone boat $29. The hiking permit is free.

Gear for this route

What this route needs

- Water for at least 3 liters, and more for the west end in heat
- Sun protection: the Conservancy recommends sunscreen, a hat and clothing that covers your arms and legs
- Shoes with good grip for steep dirt trails
- A warm layer for nights down to about 40°F, and a rain jacket from fall to spring
- A tent and sleeping bag (or rent at the campgrounds), a headlamp
- Stove fuel bought on the island, if you cook
- A satellite messenger or beacon: cell service is patchy
- Your hiking permit, campsite bookings and a card for Two Harbors
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone

Paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through these links, at no extra cost to you. As an Amazon Associate I earn from qualifying purchases.

I carried everything for two days in my backpack in 2020, with my tent and sleeping bag, and no stove. Here's my kit from the film's gear list, what I'd take now, and what I filmed with.

What I carried in 2020

From my film's original gear list.

- **Pack:** Hyperlite Mountain Gear Southwest 2400 (Hyperlite)
- **Tent:** NEMO Hornet 1P (NEMO), now the Hornet OSMO
- **Sleeping bag:** UGQ Bandit quilt (UGQ). Similar: Hyperlite Mountain Gear 20° Quilt (Hyperlite).
- **Liner:** Outdoor Vitals Sleeping Bag Liner (Amazon)
- **Sleeping pad:** a Therm-a-Rest mat
- **Pillow:** Klymit Pillow X (Amazon)

- **Water:** Katadyn BeFree AC · 1L (Amazon). A one-liter filter bottle, which I absolutely love: it's collapsible, it doesn't break like the water bladders I've had before, and it filters the water.
- **Headlamp:** SLONIK rechargeable headlamp (Amazon)
- **Emergency beacon:** Garmin inReach Mini (Amazon)
- **Sun hoodie:** Amazon Essentials Quick-Dry Tech Hoodie (Amazon). I didn't use any sunscreen, because that's not my thing; I like to cover up with my long-sleeve hoodie, and I definitely needed it. I still got a little sunburned on my chin and the backs of my calves.
- **Cap:** ZOWYA running cap (Amazon). With just a baseball cap, your ears, your neck and your face are going to burn.
- **Sunglasses:** Warby Parker Barkley sunglasses. Similar: Goodr OG Sunglasses (Amazon).
- **Rain shell:** The North Face Dryzzle jacket. Similar: Arc'teryx Beta AR Jacket (Arc'teryx).
- **Puffy:** Patagonia Nano Puff Jacket. Similar: Arc'teryx Cerium Hoody (Arc'teryx).
- **Shorts:** Amazon Essentials training shorts (Amazon)
- **Pants:** Patagonia Terrebonne Joggers. Similar: PATH Projects Killam PX Pant (PATH Projects).
- **Socks:** People Socks merino crew socks (Amazon)
- **Shoes:** Brooks Cascadia 13 (Amazon), now the Cascadia 20
- **Phone:** my iPhone with the AllTrails app. Your phone's GPS works even in airplane mode.

What I'd take now

What I'd add for this route from my current kit.

- **Sun hoodie:** PATH Projects Pyrenees T19 Hoodie (PATH Projects). Cover your arms: there's almost no shade.
- **Cap:** PATH Projects Muir Cap 2.0 (PATH Projects)
- **Sleeping pad:** Therm-a-Rest NeoAir XLite NXT (Amazon)
- **Poles:** Black Diamond Alpine Carbon Z Poles (Amazon). For the steep dirt trails.

- **Stove:** Jetboil Stash (Amazon). If you cook, buy fuel on the island.
- **Navigation:** AllTrails+ (AllTrails, 30% off). Load my GPX files and download offline maps before the ferry. Offline maps need the paid plan.

Filming kit

What I filmed this trip with in 2020. My setup is much smaller now (below). Drones are banned on Conservancy land without written permission: see Permits, campgrounds and rules.

- **Camera:** Sony a6600 (Amazon)
- **Lens:** Sony E 10-18mm f/4 OSS (Amazon)
- **Mic:** Rode VideoMic NTG (Amazon)
- **Batteries:** Sony NP-FZ100 batteries (Amazon). I used two.
- **Tripod:** a tripod
- **Tripod head:** Joby ball head (Amazon)
- **Wrist strap:** Peak Design Cuff Wrist Strap (Amazon)
- **Drone:** DJI Mavic Air 2. With six batteries, of which I used three. Similar: DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon).
- **Battery adapter:** DJI Mavic Air 2 battery to power bank adapter (Amazon). I charged my iPhone overnight from what was left in the drone batteries.

What I film with now

Since September 2026 I film with a smaller setup: the Pocket 4 and the Mic 3 on the trail, and the Mini 5 Pro in the air.

- **Camera:** DJI Osmo Pocket 4 (Amazon)
- **Mic:** DJI Mic 3 · 1 TX + 1 RX (Amazon). It pairs with the Pocket 4.
- **Drone:** DJI Mini 5 Pro (Amazon)
- **Tripod:** SmallRig Carbon Fiber Tripod (Amazon)

Weather and safety

Emergencies. Call 911. Cell service is limited or missing on much of the trail, says the Conservancy, which suggests a satellite messenger; LTE worked for me in Two Harbors. Catalina Island Health in Avalon has a 24-hour emergency room (310-510-0700). Sheriff, Avalon station: 310-510-0174. Conservancy rangers: 310-510-2595. Leave a plan with someone at home: your route, your campsites and your boat home.

Heat and sun. There's very little shade, and the Conservancy says daytime temperatures can top 90°F; there was an Extreme Heat Warning for Catalina in early October 2026. Heat stroke and dehydration are the main risks. Start early, drink often, cover up, and rest in the shade shelters.

Bison. The bison on the island aren't native: they were brought there and left after a Hollywood movie used them in a film. They're big, a little scary and formidable, so you definitely want to respect them. There are bison warning signs all over, for a good reason. I tried to bypass some on the trail and they didn't like that: I got a little too close for their comfort, and they all started walking toward me, slowly. It was a scary, very aggressive and intense moment, so I doubled back and went all the way around them, and they were looking at me the entire time. The Conservancy says to stay at least 125 feet away, never to block a bison's path, and to know your escape route. Bison can run 35 mph and jump more than six feet.

Snakes, ticks, poison oak and foxes. Rattlesnakes are around all year, most of all from April to October; a bite is an emergency, so call 911. Check yourself for ticks. Poison oak grows in the canyons and creek beds. Don't feed the foxes, however cute: one jumped onto our table at the lodge looking for scraps.

Fire, rain and wind. On Catalina, the Conservancy says, fire season is every season: no open flames during Red Flag Warnings, and no smoking in the wildlands. Report a fire to 911. Winter storms make the trails muddy and can close them, and strong winds and high seas can delay or cancel boats.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings, made with the AllTrails app, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
trans-catalina-trail-day-1.gpx	Day 1: Avalon to Little Harbor Campground, 20.4 mi
trans-catalina-trail-day-2.gpx	Day 2: Little Harbor to Two Harbors by way of Parsons Landing, to the Banning House Lodge, 21.9 mi
trans-catalina-trail-full-route.gpx	Both days in one file, with waypoints for the places in this guide

The tracks show where I actually went: a record of my trip, not official trail lines. AllTrails records nothing while you stand still, so the tracks have no scatter from my stops. They were simplified so that every point of the original recording lies within half a meter of the line. The days measure 32.8 and 35.2 km that way. The OpenStreetMap line of the trail is 18.9 miles from Avalon to Little Harbor and 19.0 miles from there to the end at Two Harbors; my tracks add the side trip to the airport building, the walks through Avalon and Two Harbors, the climb to the lodge and ordinary GPS wander.

AllTrails: on alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import (offline maps need a paid plan). **Gaia GPS:** open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or Import on gaiagps.com. **Garmin:** Garmin Connect on the web, Training, Courses, Import, then send it to your watch. **Organic Maps** (free): download the offline map for California, then open the GPX file with it.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Is it open?

- The notices and the fire danger on catalinaconservancy.org (deer removal can close areas at night)
- Your campsite bookings, and your free hiking permit for your dates

Getting there and back

- The Catalina Express timetable and fares for your dates, especially the boats from Two Harbors
- Parking at the port, and the Wildlands Express or Cyclone if you need them

Conditions

- The forecast for Avalon and the interior (heat warnings, Red Flag Warnings, rain)

Your stuff

- Your Parsons Landing locker, if you camp there
- Water bottles for at least 3 liters, sun protection, a card for Two Harbors
- Offline maps and the GPX files on your phone

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
1	20.4 (32.8)	Avalon to Little Harbor	Little Harbor Campground	Hermit Gulch 1.5, Haypress 5.9, Black Jack 11.3, Airport 13.6
2	21.9 (35.2)	Little Harbor to Two Harbors by way of Parsons Landing	Banning House Lodge	Two Harbors 6.2, high point 10.1, Parsons Landing 13.6, Two Harbors 21.0
Total	**42.2 (67.9)**			**About 7,530 ft up, 7,390 ft down**

Water: Hermit Gulch, Haypress, Black Jack, the Airport, Little Harbor, Two Harbors. None from Two Harbors to Parsons Landing and back.

Places: Avalon · Hermit Gulch · Divide Road · Haypress · Black Jack · Airport in the Sky · Little Harbor · Two Harbors · Silver Peak Trail · Fenceline Road · Parsons Landing · West End Road · Banning House Lodge

Status (October 2026): open; part of the trail near Black Jack closed at night through October 2026 for deer removal. The trail now ends at Two Harbors.

Rules: free hiking permit; campgrounds booked ahead; fires only in campground rings; no drones without permission; 125 ft from bison; no hiking after dark.

Getting there: the boat from San Pedro to Avalon. **Getting back:** the boat from Two Harbors to San Pedro (none on Tuesdays or Thursdays from late October to late March).

Emergency: 911.

About this guide

Trans-Catalina Trail Hiking Guide: Avalon to Two Harbors in 2 days, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated October 2026.

I hiked it on July 28 and 29, 2020, and made a film about it: Hiking the Trans-Catalina Trail in California. Everything in first person comes from that trip: the film and its description, my GPS recordings and my photos. Rules, access and safety facts were checked on October 1, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

Paid links, no sponsors. The gear links in this guide are paid links: I earn a commission if you buy through them, at no extra cost to you. Nobody paid for a mention in this guide, and it isn't sponsored.

Safety. Catalina has real risks: heat and sun with little shade, long stretches without water, steep trails, bison, rattlesnakes, fog and fire. This guide describes my trip and what I found, not current conditions. Trails, closures and rules change. Check with the Conservancy and the official pages, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

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Credits. Photos are mine, from my trip, one of them from my drone; the cover is my film's YouTube thumbnail. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles, from USGS 3DEP and SRTM. Rules, closures and facts from the Catalina Island Conservancy, the Catalina Island Company, Catalina Express, NOAA, the National Weather Service and the City of Avalon.