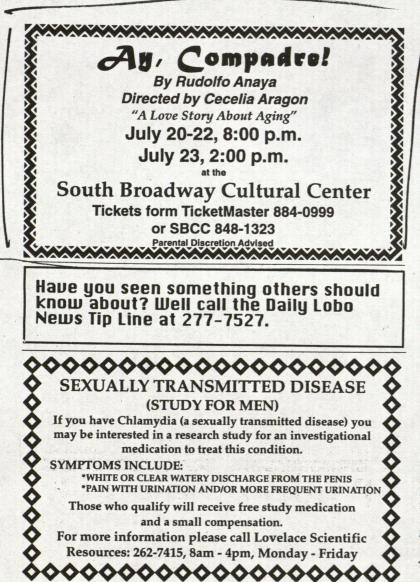
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The Daily Lobo

Be a mountaineer; hike the La Lu

by Bill Herbert Daily Lobo

Sports -

If you're looking for some exercise and adventure, then a day hike in the Sandia Mountains is just minutes away. With over a dozen maintained trails traversing the mountains' 37,000 acres of designated wilderness area, the Sandias offer beauty and challenge to hikers of all abilities.

The Sandias rise from 6,000 feet at the high desert floor to 10,678 feet atop the peak of Sandia Crest, and getting to the top can take a hiker over steep and rugged terrain through four climatic zones.

The best example of this is the famed La Luz trail. At its base the hiker will wind a well worn trail through the foothills and find all the trimmings of the high desert: lizards, piñon pines, cacti, jack rabbits, etc. As he or she ascends higher, the landscape merges into green: tall, lush grasses; spruce, fir, aspen; even an occasional deer or coyote. The canyons then begin to get higher and higher until the hiker is surrounded by cliff walls, steep slopes and rock slides, all at least a thousand feet high. There is a small amount of danger there as the trail crosses the avalanche rock slides about 30 times, and hikers should watch their footing.

However, the slides can also provide a cool relief for the hot and tired hiker. Because there is air and constant shade under the rocks, snow and ice remain below the rock and out of sight. At a few places, large boulders hold the slide back from the trail border, leaving waisthigh gaps where air flows under the rocks and over the ice, creating a natural air-conditioner.

Oddly enough, the high country on La Luz is also a great place for people-watching. As one ascends, there

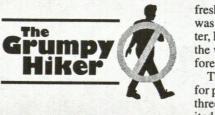
are often climbers and hang gliders to watch, compl loco runners to be passed and always a few slackers took the tram up and are hiking down. But perhap strangest thing about this hike is when one gets t top, there are hoards of people, gift shops and re rants. This is not the scene a hiker usually expects to after climbing 3,600 feet over seven miles. Howeve a welcome relief; water and food are available, at a I and the tram is available for the return trip. It's also to watch unacclimated tourists, who struggled to i heights by car or tram, sweating bullets as they brav relatively flat nature trails (part of the 28.2 mile (Trail) that connect the parking lot, the rock house a peak and the tram, while you, the hiker, the mountain the unstoppable adventurer, turn to walk home inte other glorious New Mexico sunset.

The La Luz Trail is 7 miles to the crest parking 1 the north fork or 7.8 miles to the tramway at the s fork. The fork is located about 200 meters from the and is marked by a sign. La Luz is very strenuous, ing from 3.5 hours for strong hikers to 5.5 hours fo rest of us going up, and about a half-hour less going d Bring no less than three quarts of water, a snack, s good boots and some mole skin or band aids. Alway someone know of your destination and your time o turn in case of disaster.

The La Luz trail head is located at the Juan Tabo nic Area. To get there, go north on Tramway Boule past the Sandia Tramway entrance. When Tramway levard curves west, look for Forest Road 333 on the n side of the road. 333 winds for 2 miles to the picnic a whose driveway is marked by a sign and two stone lars on the left. The trail head is at the east side o parking lot.

COLUMN

Elephant Butte only worth the driv



fresh out of mass. Although the meal was good and the prices were better, I couldn't help but feel like I had the word "heathen" tattooed on my forehead.

Then down to the lake. A day pass for parking at the Butte costs a mere three dollars and allows you unlimited in-and-out privileges. Being a skis, boats, tents, grills and lou chairs. The smell of suntan oil charred beef. More people. W you get the picture. Not to men that the weather was a cool 100 grees in the shade. I gave up on hike and decided to take a dip in lake.

If I have one piece of advice