

Lily Rock: The History & Legends of Idyllwild's Granite Monolith



Lily Rock—known to rock climbers as **Tahquitz Rock**—is an iconic 1,000-foot granite monolith rising above Idyllwild, California. Its rich history spans ancient Cahuilla legends, 19th-century pioneer history, and its evolution into a birthplace of modern American rock climbing.

Cahuilla Legend: The Shaman Tahquitz

According to ancient legends of the Cahuilla Native Americans, the rock is intrinsically tied to **Tahquitz** (or *Takwish*), a powerful shaman possessed by an evil spirit. Banished by the creators for his misdeeds, Tahquitz took refuge in a cave within the rock face.

- **The Myth:** Legend says he remains trapped beneath the mountain alongside a rattlesnake and a condor. The rumblings and tremors felt in the area aren't natural earthquakes, but Tahquitz playing evil tricks.

Origin of the Name

While local residents and the Cahuilla people historically referred to the monolith as *Tahquitz* or *Taukwitch Rock*, it officially received the name "**Lily Rock**" on an 1898 USGS topographical map. Two main theories explain the name:

- **Natural Appearance:** The striking, lily-white hue of the granite rock face.
- **Lily Eastman:** A popular historical account credits the name to Lily Eastman, daughter of Dr. Sanford Eastman (an early director of the Southern California Colony Association). She was widely admired for her beauty before tragically passing away young from tuberculosis.

Birthplace of Modern Rock Climbing

The towering face of Tahquitz/Lily Rock has been Southern California's premier multi-pitch climbing destination for nearly a century.

- **Pioneering Routes:** Technical routes were established as early as 1936 (starting with "*The Trough*"), turning the rock into a training ground for legendary climbers like Royal Robbins and Bob Kamps.
- **The Yosemite Decimal System (YDS):** In the 1950s, local climbers refined and standardized the YDS at Lily Rock. This grading system was eventually adopted nationwide and remains the gold standard for measuring rock climbing difficulty in North America.

Explore Lily Rock: To experience the monolith up close, hike the popular trails departing from **Humber Park**, take the **Ernie Maxwell Scenic Trail**, or view its sheer face from the **Deer Springs Trail**.

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