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## LOOKING BACK

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# Matilija dam fiasco

A prominent feature of Matilija Canyon, northwest of Ojai, used to be Hanging Rock, pictured here.

Engineers, looking for a place to anchor a water-conserving dam back in 1946, picked a spot near Hanging Rock.

In the process of building the dam, designed to conserve water for use in the Ojai Valley and Ventura, the landmark was lost.

The dam itself proved something of a fiasco. It cost twice what had been budgeted, and angry voters punished the proponents by putting them out of office.

The great storms of 1969 and 1978, when

total annual rainfall in the canyon exceeded 80 inches, brought down vast amounts of silt into the lake.

That reduced its already small water storage capacity (only 7,000 acre feet to begin with.) Then, when cracks appeared in the concrete along the lip of the dam, alarmed residents below feared it might fail.

The county responded by notching the dam, reducing its capacity even further.

The reservoir used to be a favorite fishing spot. But now fishing is forbidden, as is boating, although the water shines as blue as ever.

(Photo courtesy of Ventura County Historical Museum.)