

FEB 20, 1991 9:30 HENRY ITO

L10 SUNDAY, DECEMBER 2, 1990

Christmas Berry Season on Griffith

BY JOHN MCKINNEY

The trails of Griffith Park offer fine winter outings, particularly when the rich green crown of the toyon bush is aglow with a mass of red berries.

At a time when most members of the chaparral community have donned their gray apparel, the toyon—also known variously as Christmas berry or California holly—is the most festive of flora.

It's believed that masses of this California native shrub growing on the hills above Hollywood gave the community its name. The toyon bushes growing along the trails to Griffith Park's higher peaks—Mt. Bell and Mt. Hollywood—frame fine city views, and can be quite photogenic on clear days.

To the Native Americans who once roamed these hills, the sweet toyon berries, boiled or toasted, were a treat. Spanish Californians crushed them into a drink.

To some modern-day conservationists, toyon has an unhappier meaning. For years, to their horror, the city of Los Angeles dumped garbage in Toyon Canyon.

It all began at the turn of the century, when eccentric oilman Col. Griffith J. Griffith gave 3,000 acres of his ostrich farm to Los Angeles on the condition that it remain forever a park.

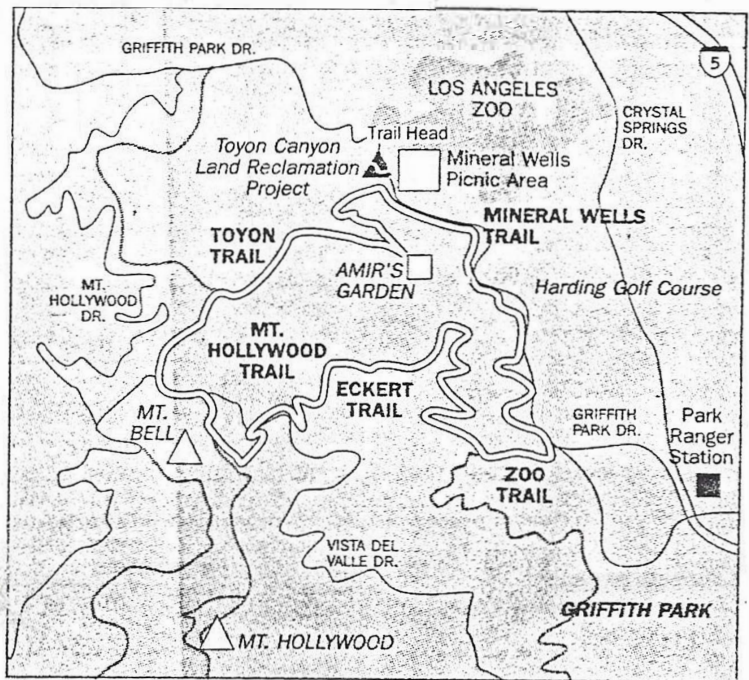
Heirs of Griffith took the city to court in 1950, when Los Angeles proposed dumping in Toyon Canyon.

The city responded by saying no violation of public trust was taking place because the city was actually "improving the park," since once the dirt settled and hazardous methane gas was burned off, the mountains of garbage would be contoured into picnic grounds and softball fields.

Today, Toyon is no longer a canyon, but a mountain of earth-covered trash awaiting landscaping. You can see it on a loop trip through the center of the park. Fortunately, this loop hike is much more than a dumpsite-seeing tour.

Amir's Garden, a tranquil retreat just half a mile from the trail head, is one lovely spot en route. Iranian immigrant Amir Dialameh planted the two-acre oasis that now bears

HIKING / Hollywood Hills



Mineral Wells, Toyon, Mt. Hollywood, Eckert Trails

- **WHERE:** Griffith Park. and zoo views.
- **LENGTH:** 5-mile loop, with 800-foot elevation gain.
- **DEGREE OF DIFFICULTY:** Moderate.
- **TERRAIN:** Brush-covered hills.
- **FOR MORE INFORMATION:** Call Griffith Park at (213) 665-5188.
- **HIGHLIGHTS:** Hollywood, valley

his name. It's a great place for a picnic or to escape the busy city below.

Another hike highlight is 1,582-foot Mt. Bell, just a bit smaller than 1,625-foot Mt. Hollywood, highest peak in Griffith Park.

Mt. Bell, located in almost the exact geographic center of the park, offers good views of Hollywood, the Hollywood Hills and the San Fernando Valley.

In some ways, the loop around Mt. Bell is a typical Griffith Park hike: You'll get some views that please and some that won't; you'll enjoy the good trails and be annoyed at the lack of trail signs.

Keep alert on this hike; there are lots of trail junctions and changes of direction. Consider picking up a trail map at the Ranger Station in

the park center, on Griffith Park Drive.

Directions to the trail head: Griffith Park, with its central location, is accessible by numerous freeways and surface streets.

From the valley side of the park, take the Ventura Freeway (134) and exit on Forest Lawn Drive in Burbank. Follow it into the park, turn right on Griffith Park Drive and continue to the Mineral Wells Picnic Area.

From the south side of the park on Los Feliz Boulevard, turn north on Griffith Park Drive and follow it just past the Harding Golf Course clubhouse and driving range to the Mineral Wells Picnic Area.

CONT.

Park Trails

Park in the picnic area and look for a three-way trail junction and the extreme lower end of the picnic ground, close to where the road splits to go around the picnic area.

The hike: At the unsigned junction of three bridle trails, you'll see that both the trail on your left and the one on your right (Mineral Wells Trail) parallel Griffith Park Drive. The trail on your left (heading southeast) will be your return route.

Join the middle trail and ascend moderately to steeply half a mile to Amir's Garden. You'll leave behind some of the din of the Ventura and Golden State freeways and find an eclectic collection of pine and pepper trees, asparagus fern and spider plant, as well as a host of succulents. There are even some plants perched atop posts.

After catching your breath, leave behind Amir's and climb again for another half a mile to a junction near water tank 112. To your right, you'll spot all that remains of Toyon Canyon. Then bear left at the junction onto Mt. Hollywood Trail and continue your ascent.

The trail crosses paved Vista Del Valle Drive and soon comes to another junction. A right (west) turn will take you around Mt. Bell.

In a hundred yards or so, you'll spot a number of "goat trails" that enable the agile hiker to scramble up to the top of Mt. Bell. Great views of the Hollywood sign and the San Fernando Valley are the hiker's clear-day reward.

To complete the loop, bear left at the above-mentioned junction, then soon make another left onto Eckert Trail, which leads back down to Vista Del Valle Drive. Walk down the paved drive a hundred yards or so and rejoin the dirt trail on your left.

You'll begin a long, looping descent. Below are the park's golf courses and the Los Angeles Zoo.

The trail passes by the site of the old zoo, now a picnic area, then parallels Griffith Park Drive a final mile and returns you to the Mineral Wells Picnic Area and the trail head.

