

Griffith Park – Mount Hollywood and beyond

7/19/2006

9:30 AM

Dick Battin, leader

Griffith Park, at 4210 acres, is the largest urban wilderness park in the country. It was a gift to the people of Los Angeles by civic-minded Griffith J. Griffith in 1896. Griffith was an émigré who made a personal fortune in California gold mining speculation.

Directions: Follow the signs to Griffith Park from the 134 or 5 Fry.
Go to the OLD ZOO picnic area off of Griffith Park Dr. (on the handout map)
Park as far up the canyon as you can get beside the picnic area.
Restrooms are up the steps toward the zoo.

OTP sanctioned hike: 7.5 miles, about 1500 ft. elevation gain, mostly in the first half of the loop. This goes to the highlights of the park, Mount Hollywood, Dante's View and Amir's Garden.

Alternate hikes: As shown on Ron Obert's excellent map there are many alternatives.

There are many write ups on Griffith Park but I chose to plagiarize most of Ron Obert's excellent write up from his hike # 640 on 11/27/2002.

The hike is a clockwise loop starting at the Old Zoo, climbing Mt. Hollywood, and returning via the Ed Curl trail. We start at the Old Zoo picnic area and go a few hundred yards on a paved path through the cages and grottos of the Old Zoo to a "hole" in the fence. This is between points 10 and 12 on the numerically keyed map. Immediately turn left on the Old Zoo trail (fire road). We will traverse S/E and join the Fern Canyon trail at point 8 (above the Merry Go Round). The climb up Fern Canyon is the most dangerous section of the hike, as this is where most of the park's mountain lions live. Their basic breakfast strategy is to pounce on prey from the foliage to the right and above. Be careful.

Another Warning: this urban park has trails just about everywhere; a map is necessary and will be supplied. A second navigation tip is that, all of hiking will be on what are best described as fire roads (the Hogback is an exception). We will never be on any of the multitude of smaller footpaths. The paved roads, Mt. Hollywood Dr. and Vista del Valle, shown on the map are closed to vehicles.

The upward climb leads us to a crossing of Vista del Valle (3) and a great overlook of downtown LA, and a good place for cookies. The Hogback will get your heart going and leads to the green oasis of Dante's View. Another half mile gets us to the top of 1625 ft. Mt. Hollywood. The Observatory, closed for renovation, is below, and there is an oblique view of the Hollywood Sign, on the slope of Mt. Lee. Our trail leads north toward Mt. Bell, point 39, and a decision. The shorter hike heads down toward Vista del Valle, 16 and the Eckert trail which leads us back to point 12, but misses Amir's Garden. The OTP sanctioned version of the hike leads from point 39 to points 41 and 18, and a close encounter with the Toyon Land Reclamation project. It is a sad historical note that in 1933 there were several thousand, essentially welfare workers, within the park. A small fire broke out and the untrained workers were either told or volunteered to put it out. The wind came up and chaos ensued. Twenty-nine people died on the slope.

Amir's Garden is next and is worth a short visit. Amir Dialameh died in October 2003 at 71 so you will not get to hear his stories but the garden is still there. A brief decent leads to the Ed Curl trail, which traverses above Griffith Park Dr., and returns you to the hole in the fence.