

HIKING

OTP Hike #0182

# A Walk in the Western 'Wilds' of Griffith Park

By JOHN MCKINNEY

"A rock is a rock, a tree is a tree. Shoof it in Griffith Park."

This was an oft-repeated dictum of cost-conscious movie producers during the 1920s, '30s and '40s, and resulted in many film companies heading for the "wilds" of Griffith Park.

The brushy hills of the park, laced with bridle trails, were a particularly popular locale for Westerns. For this reason alone, it seems fitting that the Gene Autry Western Heritage Museum is located in the northeast corner of Griffith Park.

Cowboy movie lore is part of a permanent exhibition that the museum calls "The West of the Imagination." Most of the museum, however, is devoted to interpreting the "real" West, with paintings, artifacts and audiovisual material.

Taking a hike in the morning, picnicking in the park or lunching at the museum's cafe, then touring the museum in the afternoon add up to fine way to spend a day.

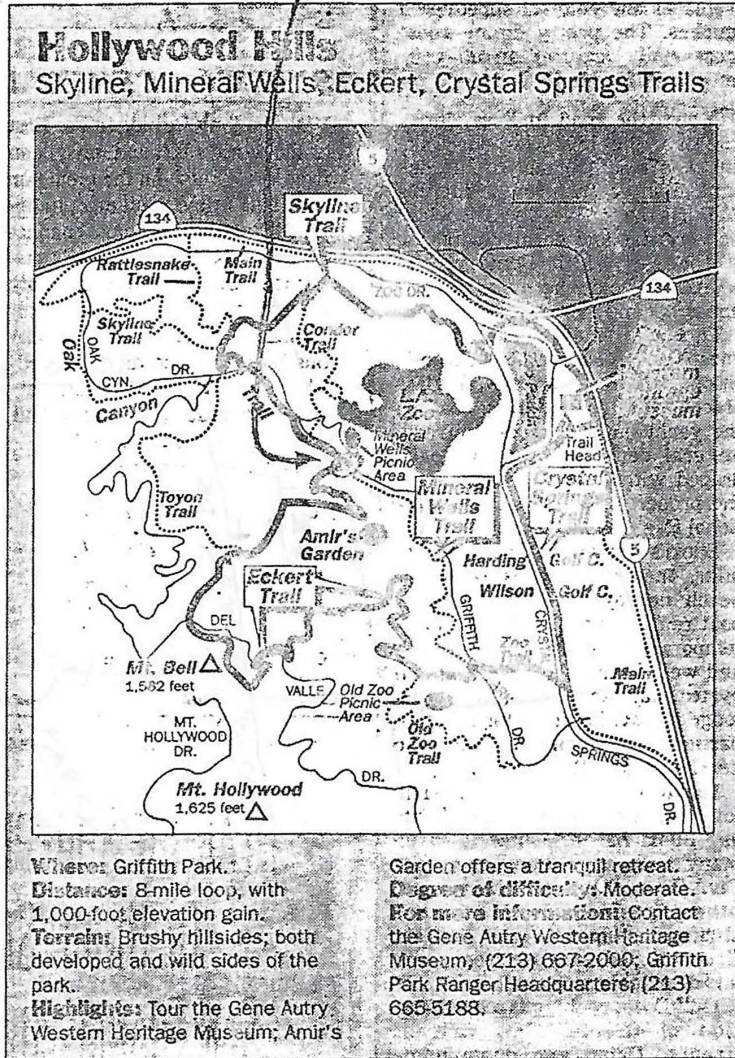
Keep alert; there are lots of trail junctions and changes of direction.

**Directions to trail head:** From the Golden State Freeway (I-5) or Ventura Freeway (California 134), exit on Zoo Drive and follow signs to the Los Angeles Zoo parking lot. Park near the Autry museum.

**The hike:** Walk across the lawn on the south side of the museum toward Interstate-5 and bear left (north) on the bridle trail. The trail enters an underpass below the park's freeway off-ramp, then curves westward around the zoo parking lot. A line of eucalyptus trees filters out some of the freeway din.

Next you pass through two more pedestrian/equestrian underpasses. (The first of these has poor drainage, often resulting in muddy going for hikers.)

Emerging from the second underpass, you join unsigned Skyline Trail; as it begins a westward ascent. How this trail got its name is anybody's guess. The only visible skyline is that of Glendale, and this skyline emerged relatively recently—long after the trail was built and named.



Courtyard at Autry Museum.

left onto Mt. Hollywood Trail and continue your ascent.

The trail crosses paved Vista Del Valle Drive and soon comes to another junction. (A right turn will take you around 1,582-foot Mt. Bell, just a bit smaller than 1,625-foot Mt. Hollywood, highest peak in the park.) Bear left, then soon make another left onto Eckert Trail, which leads back down to Vista Valle Drive. Walk down the paved drive 100 yards or so and rejoin the dirt road on your left.

You'll begin a long, looping descent. Below are two of the park's golf courses, the museum and the Los Angeles Zoo. Just above Old Zoo Picnic Area, you'll intersect Old Zoo Trail. Either a left or a right on the trail will eventually lead you to Griffith Park Drive; or, simply improvise a route through the picnic area, crossing Griffith Park Drive and making your way to Crystal Springs Drive. On the far (east) side of the drive is Crystal Springs Trail. Follow this trail as it leads north by the golf courses. A bit more than a mile of level walking on the bridle trail returns you to the museum.

Hike with John McKinney's guidebook: "Day Hiker's Guide to Southern California" (\$16.95). Send check or money order to Los Angeles Times Syndicate, Dept. #1, Times Mirror Square, Los Angeles 90053.

The trail climbs above the back side of the zoo. (Smile. The zoo's video surveillance cameras are watching you.) Continue past Condor Trail, which branches left. About two miles from the trail head, just as you pass the right fork of Rattlesnake Trail, you'll join the left fork and descend a quarter of a mile to Oak Canyon and Griffith Park Drive.

Cross Griffith Park Drive and bear left on the trail paralleling the road. Half a mile's travel takes you to Mineral Wells Picnic Area and a trail junction. Turn right and ascend, moderately to steeply, a half-mile to Amir's Garden.

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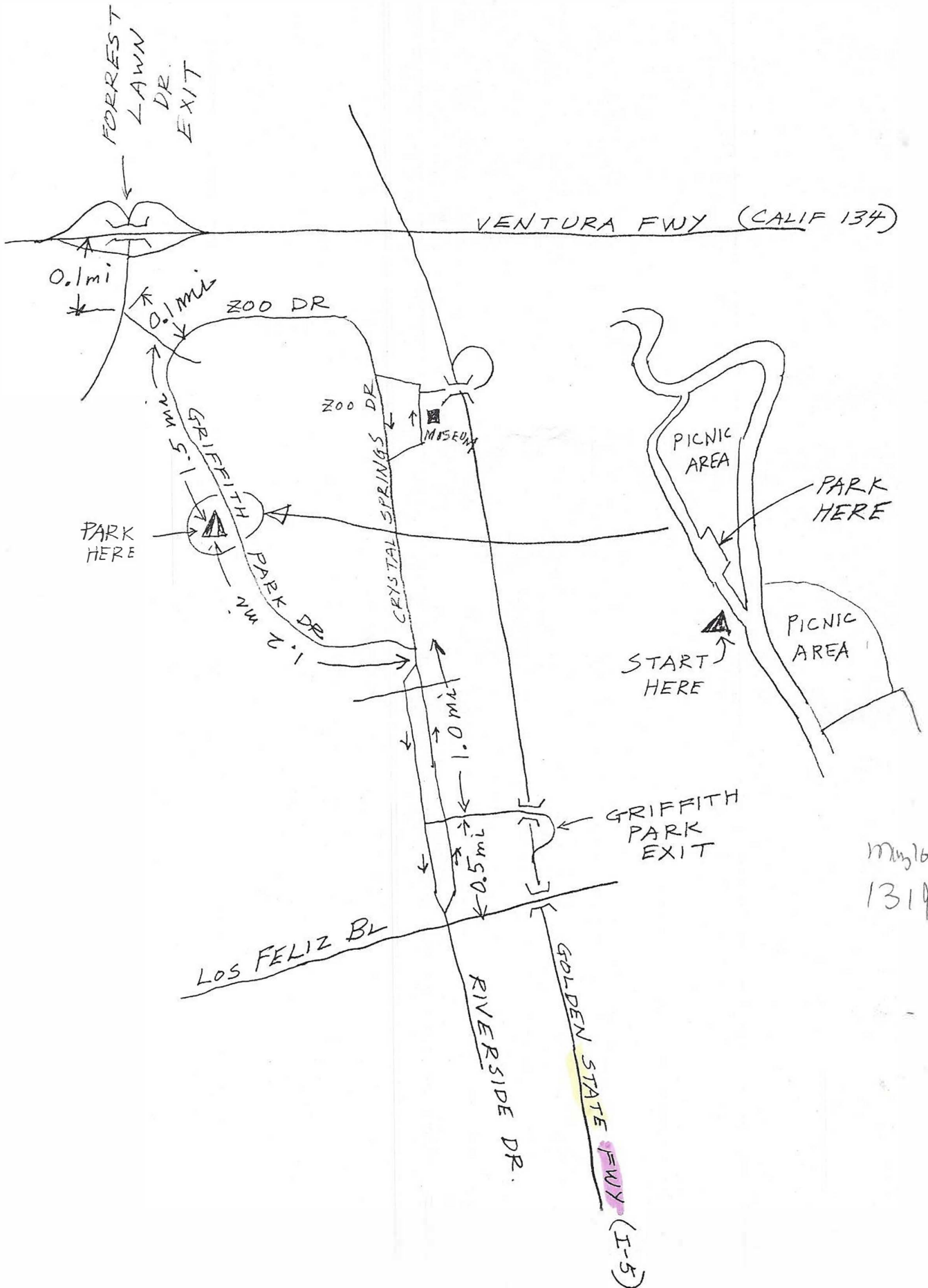
You'll leave behind the din of the Ventura and Golden State freeways and find an eclectic collection of pine and pepper trees, asparagus fern and spider plant, as well as a host of succulents.

After catching your breath, leave Amir's and climb again for another half-mile to a junction near water tank 112. To your right, you'll spot what remains of Toyon Canyon—formerly a landfill, now a mountain of earth-covered trash awaiting landscaping. Then bear

START HERE

SEE ATTACHED MAP

HENRY 6-23-93



Map 6  
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