

2/15/97

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Hike #359

Season: All Year

Ferndell Trail

Ferndell Canyon to Griffith Observatory

2 1/2 miles round trip; 500-foot elevation gain

~~Ferndell Canyon to Mount Hollywood~~

5 miles round trip; 1,000-foot elevation gain

Griffith Park, one of the largest municipal parks in the world, holds plenty of surprises for the hiker. Among these surprises is well-named Ferndell, where a brook bubbles through a woody, fern-lined glen.

Another surprise is the grove of coast redwood (*Sequoia sempervirens*) that thrives in the bottom of the dell. The redwoods complement the native sycamore and alder, which shade this oasis in the heart of the Hollywood Hills.

Hopefully, your sense of surprise won't be lessened when you discover that human engineering, not Mother Nature, is responsible for the life-giving brook that waters Ferndell. Recycled water from Griffith Observatory's cooling system is released from the top of the hill and sent merrily on its way down to the dell.

Still, the urban mountaineer can be grateful for the brook, which attracts numerous birds including brown towhees, robins and jays. Around sunrise and sunset, Griffith Park's deer often descend from the hills for a drink.

Moco-Cahuenga Canyon is believed to be the Indian name for Ferndell. The name's origins are a bit fuzzy, but Moco was supposedly the meeting ground of the Cahuenga Indians.

This day hike visits two of the park's most interesting sights. First, the trail climbs to Griffith Observatory, where you can tour a little museum and catch the planetarium show. More ambitious hikers can continue to the top of Mount Hollywood, highest peak in the park, for great views of the metropolis.

Directions to trailhead: This day hike begins at the south end of Griffith Park off Loz Feliz Boulevard. One way to go: Exit the Hollywood Freeway (101) on Sunset Boulevard and head east to Western Avenue. Turn left and follow Western north until it jogs right onto Los Feliz Boulevard.

Turn left on Ferndell Drive and park alongside the drive. If parking is scarce, continue up the road a little farther to Ferndell Picnic Area.

The Hike: Join the path to the east of Ferndell Drive. Large sycamores shade the trail which ascends alongside the moss-covered banks of a brook, past tiny waterfalls, to Ferndell Picnic Area. The picnic ground has

plenty of tables and is a great place for a post-hike lunch stop.

As you walk toward the redwoods and past the picnic area, stay to the right, east, side of the brook.

(Two other trails that ascend from Ferndell should be noted. One trail follows the left, west, bank of Ferndell Brook. A second trail, which departs from the end of the picnic area where Western Canyon Road makes a wide left turn, climbs to an intersection with the trail that connects Mount Hollywood with the Observatory; this path is a good, optional return route.)

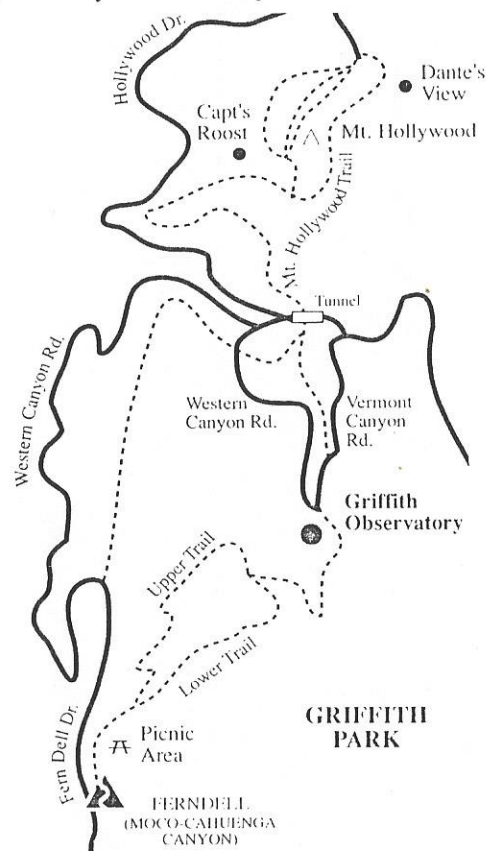
Your trail, officially known as Lower West Observatory Trail, lingers for a time alongside the east bank of Ferndell Brook, then begins to climb out of the dell. Gaps in the eucalyptus and chaparral allow good views of the Hollywood sign above and the city below. Three-fourths of a mile from Ferndell is an unsigned three-way junction. You'll bear right, continue a quarter-mile to another junction and bear left, then ascend another quarter-mile to the Observatory.

From the Observatory, enjoy clear-day views of Hollywood and its hills, Century City, the Wilshire corridor and downtown, as well as the beach cities to the south and west.

Those hikers bound for Mount Hollywood should walk to the north end of the Observatory parking lot, where a handsome trail sign points the way to Mount Hollywood. The path soon begins ascending a tree-shaded ridge. After a quarter-mile's travel, you'll cross a ridge that's above the Mount Hollywood Drive tunnel. Here you'll pass a junction with a trail leading left down Western Canyon to Ferndell. (This is the optional return route mentioned above.)

Continuing your ascent, you'll climb west, then east.

By now you've figured out that Mount Hollywood is not the mountain crowned by the



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historic Hollywood sign, where disappointed screen actresses leap to their deaths. You can, however, see the sign quite well as you near the summit of Mount Hollywood.

After ascending a long westward switchback, you'll reach a junction and fork left, heading north then west around the shoulder of Mount Hollywood. You'll pass Captain's Roost, a eucalyptus-shaded rest stop, then take the first right turn up the fire road to the top of Mount Hollywood. Wonderful sunsets can be observed from the 1,625-foot peak, and on clear days the entire Basin is spread out before you from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

To return via a different route: Leave the peak and join the first fire road leading right. Soon you'll pass Dante's View, a two-acre retreat of pine, palm and pepper trees high on the south-facing slope of Mount Hollywood. From Dante's, you descend to the trail that brought you up from the Observatory.

