

DAY HIKE

A Short Stroll to Nostalgia on the Bush Canyon Trail

By JOHN McKINNEY

"To the Bat Cave, Robin."
With that cry, Batman and Robin of TV fame hopped into the Batmobile and sped off to their hideaway. This dynamic duo's underground lair was not, as you might guess, a movie set built on a studio back lot, but a real cave in the southwest corner of Griffith Park. The little gremlins and goblins—and their nostalgic baby boom parents—will particularly enjoy the short walk to the Bat Cave, one of the few caves in the park.

"Batman" was not the only TV show to make use of the area known as the Bronson Caves. About every Western from "Gunsmoke" to "Bonanza" used the caves as a hide-out for desperadoes. "Star Trek," "Mission Impossible" and many more shows filmed here.

Long before movie makers discovered the caves, the rocky walls of the canyon were quarried by the Los Angeles Stone Co. During the early years of this century, the crushed rock from this quarry formed the railbed for the Pacific Electric Transit System. By 1915, the famous Red Car trolleys traveled from downtown Los Angeles to the Santa Monica Bay beach communities, to Orange County and San Bernardino.

It was rightly characterized as the most comprehensive system of urban and suburban transportation in the world. Now that's something to be nostalgic about. In later years, the crushed stone from the quarry was used to pave such thoroughfares as Sunset and Wilshire boulevards.

For the urban mountaineer wishing to escape to the wilds of Griffith Park, Brush Canyon Trail offers not only the short stroll to the Bat Cave but a moderate workout to many of the park's most popular destinations—Captain's Roost, Dante's View and Mt. Hollywood. Brush Canyon Trail is much less traveled than other routes to Mt. Hollywood and offers

the same great clear-day views of the metropolis.

Directions to trailhead: Your task is to enter Griffith Park from the south. The basic idea is to get to Franklin Avenue in Hollywood and travel to a point midway between Vine and Western. You can exit the Hollywood Freeway (U.S. 101) in Hollywood on Gower Street, cut over to Franklin Avenue and travel east to this point, or exit the Santa Monica Freeway on Western Avenue and travel north all the

way across town to Franklin, then turn west.

From Franklin Avenue, turn north on Bronson Avenue or Canyon Drive (the streets soon join and continue as Canyon). Follow Canyon Drive a winding mile through the Hollywood Hills into Griffith Park. You can park alongside the road near a picnic area or in a small parking lot by the

trailhead at road's end.

The Hike: Those heading directly for the Bat Cave will look to the right (east) side of Canyon Drive for a red wall, a white pipe gate and a Griffith Park locator sign that reads "49." You'll join a fire road and head south a short distance to the Bronson Caves. Heed the "No Climbing" signs on the steep canyon walls above the caves.

Those hikers bound for Mt. Hollywood will join the unsigned fire road (Brush Canyon Trail) at the end of Canyon Drive. The lower stretch of this trail is popular with local dogs and dog walkers. During the 1940s, Dog World magazine proclaimed Hollywood "the doggiest area in California." Judging by the number of exercising canines and owners on this trail, perhaps it still is.

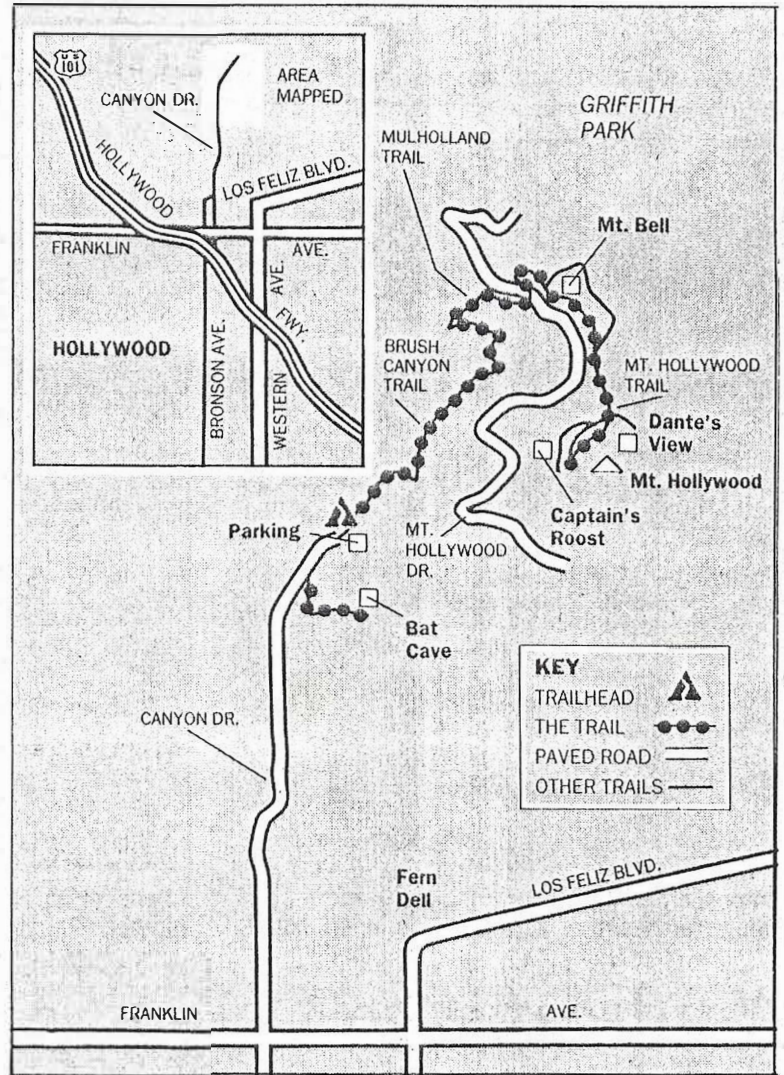
The trail passes some handsome sycamores that line the canyon bottom. The sycamores, cloaked in yellow, brown and rust-colored leaves, provide a welcome burst of autumn color. Who says you can't detect the change of the seasons in Southern California?

However, once the trail begins climbing northeast out of the can-

Bush Canyon Trail

Canyon Drive to Bat Cave, half-mile round trip

Canyon Drive to Mt. Hollywood, 4½ miles round trip; 800-foot elevation gain



JOHN SNYDER / Los Angeles Times

yon bottom and leaves the trees behind, Brush Canyon begins to live up to its name. The sweet licorice smell of fennel perfumes the air, and the toyon (Christmas berry) is already starting to display its red berries. This festive plant is also known as California holly; some believe that masses of this native shrub growing on the hills above Hollywood gave the community its name.

A mile's walk from the trailhead brings you to an unsigned junction with Mulholland Trail. Head right and ascend to a turnout alongside Mt. Hollywood Drive. Turn left, walk a short distance along Mt. Hollywood Drive and rejoin Mulholland Trail on your right.

After a short ascent up Mt. Bell, Mulholland Trail will continue east around the mountain, but you'll bear right on a narrower trail. From graffiti-splattered Water Tower No. 52, you'll join a narrow footpath and descend first moderately, then steeply, to a junction

with Mt. Hollywood.

Junctions with various fire roads let you head toward Dante's View or Captain's Roost, but Mt. Hollywood-bound hikers will head straight for the picnic tables atop the 1,625-foot peak. Wonderful sunrises and sunsets can be observed from the park's highest peak, and on clear days the entire basin is spread out before you, from the San Gabriel Mountains to the Pacific Ocean.

Most hikers will want to return the same way. The very experienced, armed with a good park map, can use Mt. Hollywood Trail and the extremely steep and washed-out trail dropping southwest off Mt. Hollywood Drive to make a loop trip back down to the caves and Canyon Drive.

McKinney is the author of hiking books and a regular contributor to The Times.