



BETWEEN FRIENDS

news & updates from friends of griffith park /june 2011

Spring turns to summer: time to explore and enjoy Griffith Park's natural and human heritage.

GRIFFITH OBSERVATORY DIRECTOR, DR. ED KRUPP, FAMOUSLY CALLS HIS COPPER-DOMED museum of the cosmos, the "hood ornament of Griffith Park." We humbly submit that the Hollywood Sign is its autograph. Created in the 1920s to promote an upscale real estate development that enjoyed initial success before being sunk by the Depression, the orphaned sign was left to decay over the city before joining Griffith Park in 1945 as part of a 425-acre acquisition that pushed its boundaries west.

The sign's addition to Griffith Park ultimately saved it. As public property, it entered the civic conversation, first as a liability to be repaired, then an icon to be revived. Most recently, protecting the viewshed around the restored Hollywood Sign was the linchpin of the National Trust for Public Land's campaign to purchase and add Cahuenga Peak to Griffith Park. In so doing, the park was expanded again, this time by 138 acres of rare urban wilderness land, populated with native plant and animal species that have managed to endure in this end of the Santa Monica Mountains.

In addition to being L.A.'s largest Historic-Cultural Monument, the park is a treasury of singular landmarks each with its own story to tell. In this issue of *Between Friends*, we invite you to discover the Griffith Park Lecture Series at the Los Feliz Branch Library sponsored by Friends of Griffith Park. First up on June 9th, is the fascinating story of the Hollywood Sign's evolution from billboard to world-renowned emblem. Inside, we also alert you to some very thorny issues, including the proposal to introduce commercial advertising to L.A. City parks. Friends of Griffith Park opposes this, and is advocating to ensure that the only billboard in Griffith Park is the decommissioned Hollywood Sign. Won't you join us?

Look closely and you'll see the world-famous Hollywood Sign beckoning through the mist of Mt. Lee. It's just one of many landmarks within Griffith Park, which is a landmark itself. In the foreground, Yellow Pincushion is in full bloom. It's just one of the native plants that can be seen and savored throughout Griffith Park.



Friends of Griffith Park prepares quick response to Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills Draft Environmental Impact Report

Many Griffith Park users may be surprised to learn that much of the open space that buffers the park is currently at risk. Joining the massive NBC Universal development proposal (now in its EIR stage), another Griffith Park neighbor is embarking on an expansion that will eliminate much of the remaining space on the park's northwest border...not to mention breathing room for the communities of Toluca Lake and greater Los Feliz. Friends of Griffith Park is monitoring both projects and recently filed comments on Forest Lawn's Draft EIR.

NOVEMBER 2008: THE L.A. PLANNING DEPARTMENT invited interested parties to a meeting regarding Forest Lawn's massive expansion plans for its cemetery contiguous to Griffith Park. After expressing the desire to be a good neighbor to the park, cemetery representatives unveiled a proposal adding 200,000 new interment spaces to their 444-acre site, nearly doubling the total capacity for the facility and bringing it to maximum capacity.

In response to the hope expressed that enlightened interment practices might be considered to avoid the adverse environmental impacts that would inevitably result, Forest Lawn staff stated that the company is committed to servicing and upholding the traditional cultural and religious burial rites their clients expect. This translates to water-thirsty lawns and above-ground crypt structures, packed densely onto the facility's remaining undeveloped acreage.

February 2011: Two years and three months later, the Draft Environmental Impact Report (DEIR) for the expansion was released. As with all such documents, a very short time was set aside for public comment. Friends of Griffith Park joined others in asking for an extension and received another 15 days, but with the DEIR encompassing thousands of pages, it was still necessary to work quickly to formulate positions on multiple aspects of the proposal. Our response focused on the adverse impacts resulting from removal of the extraordinarily rich and mature native habitat directly bordering the park, including 632 protected coast live oak trees and 144 protected Southern California black walnut. Many rare plants, including mariposa and Humboldt lilies, will also be sacrificed under the pro-

posed plan. Sennett Creek, whose waters come from natural seeps within Griffith Park, cuts through the Forest Lawn property and connects the Park to the L.A. River. In addition to core loss of rare, pristine riparian habitat, wildlife corridor functionality will be affected adversely.

Responses from both the State of California Department of Fish and Game and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy affirmed our views. These agencies pointed out that there is no satisfactory mitigation for the demolition of mature, protected species. Replanting at a different site does not replicate the complex plant community that has been lost, nor does it address the destruction of the wildlife-nurturing habitat the community provided.

Forest Lawn is required to propose development alternatives and has presented four alternate approaches to its preferred project plan. Friends of Griffith Park has recommended the best of these alternatives – the option with the least impact on Griffith Park. We believe that almost all of the company's business goals can be accomplished by its modest scale-back of its intentions, while protecting most of the sensitive habitat that would be otherwise destroyed. We remain hopeful that Forest Lawn will remain true to their originally stated goal of being a good Griffith Park neighbor and look forward to seeing the completed EIR.

Visit friendsofgriffithpark.org to read our response to the Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills DEIR as well as the comments made by the California Department of Fish & Game and the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy. Friends of Griffith Park's comments on the NBC Universal expansion Environmental Impact Report are also there.

This view of Forest Lawn Hollywood Hills is taken from an overlook in Griffith Park. The denuded land you see was scraped and excavated based on a conditional use permit dating to 1948. Besides building multiple new structures, additional native habitat is expected to be bulldozed under the current proposal favored by the cemetery company.



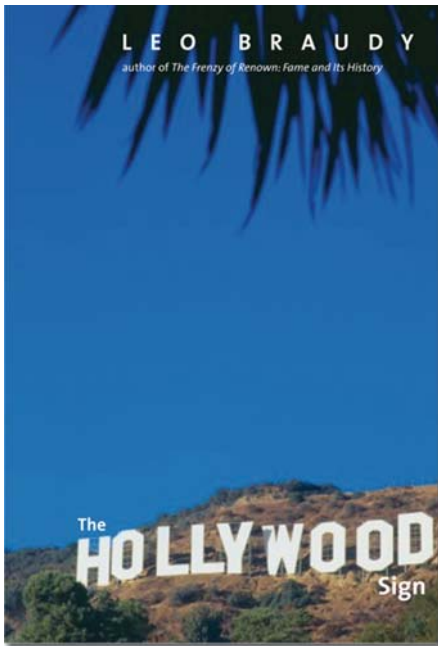
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Copies of Leo Braudy's book will be available for purchase and signing from Skylight Books, Los Feliz.

The Griffith Park Summer Lecture Series kicks off June 9 with The Hollywood Sign

Get out your calendar and mark these dates. You're invited to a series of free Thursday evening lectures focusing on Griffith Park's fascinating human and natural history sponsored by Friends of Griffith Park. The Los Feliz Branch Library provides the ideal setting for presentations by authors, academics and experts on the people, events and ecologies that have shaped the Park. Doors open at 6:30 p.m. Program starts at 6:45 p.m. Make plans now to be there!

Thursday, June 9

Landmark Within A Landmark:

The Hollywood Sign in Griffith Park

Leo Braudy, author of *The Hollywood Sign: Fantasy and Reality of An American Icon*, will explain how this enduring emblem of Los Angeles evolved from a real estate billboard into an international symbol of glamour that vies with the Observatory as Griffith Park's most famous landmark. A University Professor at USC, Braudy has written more than 11 books and 150 articles, and is considered one of America's leading cultural historians and film critics. Book sale and signing will follow his talk.

Thursday, July 14

Historic Fern Dell and the Great Depression

Follow the history of this spring-fed canyon in Griffith Park: its genesis as a Native American council grounds, transformation into a lush fern-filled oasis, and expansion and beautification during the New Deal. In the depths of the Depression, Griffith Park was home to Civilian Conservation Corps workers who left behind a legacy of "Park Rustic" style that can be seen in Fern Dell today.

Thursday, August 11

Major Mammals of Griffith Park

Griffith Park is home to the City's greatest concentration of native fauna within urbanized Los Angeles. Ecologist Dan Cooper, Scientific Director of the Griffith Park Natural History Survey, focuses on the habits of Griffith Park's predator species: bobcats, coyotes, grey fox, raccoons, and even mountain lion, discussing the natural habitat and prey animals that nourish and sustain them and how humans can help in their continued existence.

All programs take place at

Los Feliz Branch Library of the Los Angeles Public Library
1874 Hillhurst Avenue (at the corner of Franklin Avenue)

Los Feliz, CA 90027

(323) 913-4710



A vintage photo postcard of Fern Dell in Griffith Park.



Coyotes often go about their business in plain view, while other predators, (bobcats for example), are a challenge to detect.

L.A.'s 2011-2012 budget requires parks to subsidize the DWP and pay \$16 million for its services.

Historically, our municipal parks have provided free placements for facilities essential to LADWP operations. Obvious to the eye are electrical relay towers, emergency reservoirs and water tanks. Less visible are giant underground conduits that transmit water to a thirsty Los Angeles. No one has computed the amount of recreational acreage lost in the process, but one figure is clear: the DWP pays Rec and Parks nothing for the privilege. Nevertheless, under the rubric of "cost-recovery," the City is asking parks to pay \$16 million for the utilities they use and their properties help deliver. Is it fair to ask the parks to simultaneously subsidize and pay the DWP?

L.A. CITY CHARTER SECTION 593 REQUIRES the appropriation to Recreation and Parks of an amount not less than 0.0325% assessed value of all property assessed for city taxes. This appropriation and any additional monies the Mayor and City Council may elect to provide are to be used only for the financial support of the department. While the City's General Fund is not obligated to pay for Rec and Parks operating expenses such as utilities, it has done so for decades.

We presume this is out of sense of fairness. After all, our municipal parks support the DWP by providing the utility with land upon and underneath which it erects permanent structures that deliver its products to its paying customers. These customers are the people of Los Angeles who own the parkland, but who collect nothing from the DWP for its use.

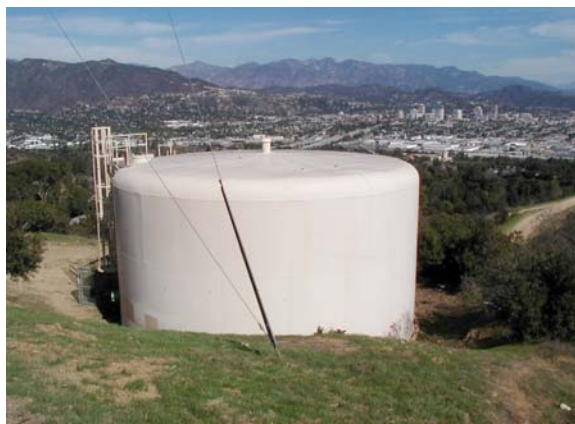
This is a recent phenomenon. In a switch from established precedent, the 2010-2011 City Budget forced the Recreation and Parks Department to pay for water and power at its more than 400 properties. The 2011-2012 City Budget does the same, this time kicking a hole in the parks' operating budget to the tune of \$16 million.

This one-way cost recovery plan is patently unfair: the DWP is not being asked to pay lease market rates (franchise fees) to Recreation and Parks to occupy its lands and will continue to use

them free for the transfer, storage and delivery of water and power.

Right now in Griffith Park a substantial portion of the 44-acres of dedicated parkland referred to as the "Headworks" is being excavated and reshaped to house the new emergency water storage facility for Northeast L.A. that will replace Silver Lake reservoir. Currently the DWP is excavating Griffith Park to a fifty-foot depth to replace the 8-foot diameter River Supply Conduit pipes running its length which bring water to city areas south of the park. Over time, DWP water tanks have been placed in the park – today there are some 18 throughout, both active and decommissioned. And for almost a century electrical relay towers too numerous to count have crossed Griffith Park delivering power from the valley to the basin.

Cost-recovery should be a two-way street. Either the parks should charge franchise fees to the DWP for its tenancy, or the DWP should return to its previous practice of providing parks with free water and power. Friends of Griffith Park will continue to advocate for this. If you would like to help restore \$16 million to this year's parks budget, send an e-mail message or letter to your City Councilmember and Mayor Villaraigosa and copy it to Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager of the Department of Recreation and Parks. Find their postal and e-mail addresses on the "Contact" page at friendsofgriffithpark.org.





Above, the 44-acre Headworks site in Griffith Park is providing free land for DWP reservoirs. Below, for two years and counting, construction for the River Supply Conduit project's huge underground pipeline running the length of Griffith Park has disrupted public access. A private utility would pay franchise fees to the landowner. Not so the DWP.



LADWP installations that support the utility's bottom line are so common in Griffith Park as to be unremarkable. Yet Griffith Park and other city parks that host transmission towers, tanks, reservoirs and more, receive no financial consideration from the DWP. Indeed, the Rec and Parks Department is being told to pay the DWP \$16 million this year for the water and power it helps the utility provide to its paying customers. Imagine the maintenance, security and programming being lost as a result of this hit to the park's operating budget.

Sixth-graders conquer a peak, encounter the natives and have a blast on Griffith Park's second Landmark Anniversary



Channeling the spirit of park benefactor Colonel Griffith, to mark the second anniversary of the Park's dedication as a city landmark, Friends of Griffith Park partnered with the Inner City Outings Committee of the Sierra Club to underwrite an outdoor adventure for urban kids. It is the first in a series of outings we are sponsoring to help introduce children to the excitement of the natural world.

ON MARCH 27, 2011, TWENTY SIXTH-GRADE STUDENTS FROM Camino Nuevo Charter Academy Burlington convened for an outing in Griffith Park that blended outdoor education and enjoyment.

Before embarking on a climb to Mt. Hollywood, Friends of Griffith Park's guest biologist Miguel Ordeñana gave the assembled students a tutorial on native bobcats and briefed them on how he studies and maps their movements in the park. He also explained how to identify the tracks of wild mammals and birds, and thanks to recent rains, viewing conditions on the ground were perfect for spotting. Throughout the hike, it was not uncommon to hear a young voice shriek excitedly, "I think I found something!" then see students and adults scrambling to make the discovery together.

Meanwhile, native flora was pointed out by plant buff, Gerry Hans. The first lesson was that there are native and non-native plants in Griffith Park, and with blooming season in high gear they were all wonderful to behold. By the time Mt. Hollywood peak was reached, the morning fog had lifted revealing breathtaking views of the Hollywood Sign, Los Angeles, and Glendale. Looking out over the park, students were encouraged to reflect on the impact that fires have had in shaping Griffith Park's ecosystems and the roles that people play in helping to preserve and protect the park.

Camino Nuevo teacher, Erin Armstrong, writes, "Students have expressed how much they enjoyed the experience and how grateful they were for the opportunity to visit and learn. They especially thank Friends of Griffith Park for providing nutritious snacks and lunches, as well as a bus for transportation between the school and park. Students are excited to return to park to hike with their families and friends, so they are truly becoming invested environmental advocates for the future!"

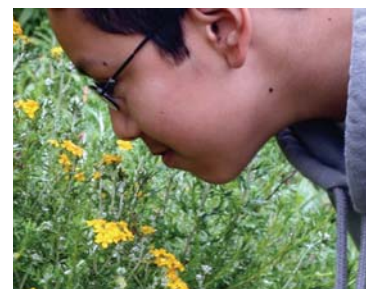


Above: After reaching the summit of Griffith Park's Mt. Hollywood, students and hike leaders descended to relax, refuel and compare notes at Dante's View. A definite highlight of the outing was learning how to distinguish between the tracks of bobcats, coyotes and the elusive gray fox. Left: young hikers agree that lunch tastes better served outdoors on a picnic table.



Using GPS remote equipment, guest biologist, Miguel Ordeñana, demonstrates how the park's native bobcats are tracked once they are collared. When one came within range, students were actually able to hear beeps emanating from its direction.

Right, it's always a good idea to tread lightly. Although you may never see one of the park's elusive bobcats, they are closer than you think. Below, students take in the view from Mt. Hollywood. Looking west they can see the storied Hollywood Sign and the towers on Mt. Lee.



*A student gives a blooming native plant, *Eriophyllum confertiflorum* (Golden Yarrow) a closer inspection. When a mustard plant was cited as an example of a non-native in the park, one student promptly inquired, "Does the park also have a ketchup plant?"*

Despite finding of illegality, plan still afoot to sell advertising in parks

LAST FALL, THE CITY WAS POISED TO ALLOW SUPERGRAPHICS promoting Warner Bros. 3-D movie “Yogi Bear,” on fences, shelters, picnic tables, trash cans, light standards, walkways, and other structures in Holmby Park, Pan Pacific Rec Center, and Lake Balboa Park. The deal, approved by the Recreation and Parks Commission, was made by the L.A. Parks Foundation, which is not a city agency, although its Chair, Barry Sanders, is also President of the Rec and Parks Commission. According to its terms, Warner Bros. would donate a total of \$57,000 to the Foundation which would then deduct marketing costs and an administrative fee before turning over \$42,636 to Rec and Parks.

Park users and neighbors were blindsided by the plan. Upon learning of it, they complained to Councilmember Paul Koretz, who introduced a council motion to rescind Commission approval. At a subsequent Rec and Parks Commission meeting, the City Attorney’s Office informed its Board that their action was a violation of the city’s billboard ordinance. President Barry Sanders told the City Attorney’s Office to “make it legal.”

On April 27th, Friends of Griffith Park attended the City Council’s 2011-12 Budget & Finance Committee Meeting to advocate for proper funding for parks and were dismayed to hear Barry Sanders launch a 20-minute defense of advertising. He opened his remarks with the statement, “This is not a windfall,” admitting that the potential to be gained will not begin to address the parks’ multi-million dollar shortfall or resolve the maintenance, staffing and security losses faced by the system. Given the low return, it is fair to assume that it is the advertisers who will reap the real rewards, gaining unprecedented marketing access to L.A.’s kids.

While budget panel members Parks, Smith and Rosendahl ex-

Images from promotional materials to lure advertisers prepared by the L.A. Parks Foundation show just how pervasive signing will be if the Foundation prevails. Kids still will be able to run in parks, but they won’t be able to hide from the multiple marketing messages that will leap out at them from tables, fences, enclosures, overhead structures and every available surface.

pressed willingness to challenge the ruling against signs, Koretz supported the City Attorney. He also rejected Sanders’ comparison of supergraphic ads to Little League sponsor banners, observing that what Sanders was promoting was a quantum leap in a new and wrong direction. Koretz asked for a solution that would grandfather in league sponsor banners but continue to prohibit advertising. Sanders countered that Rec and Parks should be allowed to make its own regulations and be exempt entirely from the Building & Safety permit process by which we all abide.

For Griffith Park, the stakes couldn’t be higher. Its picnic tables, walls, fences, play structures, pathways and buildings number in the thousands. Sanders’ assertion that Rec and Parks should be exempt from the city’s permit process is also troubling. Such an exemption would sidestep Cultural Heritage Commission review of proposed changes to landmarks that is triggered during the permitting process. CHC review is a reason why the public supported the Griffith J. Griffith Charitable Trust’s successful initiative to designate the Park as a city landmark.

Keeping commercial advertising out of parks is shaping up to be a citywide battle that will require all of us to pitch in. While the threat has been arrested for the time-being, the L.A. Parks Foundation is still courting potential advertisers and Latham & Watkins, (Sanders’ former law firm) is developing language that would exempt parks from the billboard ordinance. Once this is obtained, who is to say that this new scheme won’t morph into a lucrative contract to be turned over to an outdoor advertising company?

Letters and other expressions of concern should be directed to your City Councilmember and the City Attorney’s Office as well as to Jon Kirk Mukri, General Manager, Department of Recreation and Parks, and all members of the Recreation and Parks Commission, including its President, Barry Sanders. Find their postal and e-mail addresses on the “Contact” page at friendsofgriffithpark.org along with more information and documentation on this issue.



Visit friendsofgriffithpark.org for more on these and other topics. If you’re not a member, you’ll also find information there on how to join Friends of Griffith Park.