HIKING MOUNT LEE TO THE HOLLYWOOD SIGN
Casey Schreiner
61 Comments

DISTANCE 6.5 miles
ELEVATION GAIN 1098 ft
TIME 3 hours
DIFFICULTY Moderate
SEASON All

HOW TO GET THERE From the south side of Griffith Park, head north on Canyon Drive from Franklin Avenue. Once the road enters Griffith Park it's stopped by a locked gate at the trailhead. Park in the small lot at the trailhead, along the street, or in the spillover lot just south of the trailhead. Detailed driving directions »

NOTABLES
Hike to the Batcave and Hollywood Sign
Local L.A. hike with easy access
Dog-friendly trail
Wide dirt path with a manageable grade
Good workout

DIRECTIONS
MAP GPX
TRAIL CONDITION  Good. Most of the trail is on well-maintained and well-traveled fire road, with a bit of distance on paved road, too. However, there is very little signage along the way, and none of the junctions are marked – so make sure you study up before you hit the trail.

Get up close and personal with two of L.A.'s landmarks on this moderate 6.5 mile out-and-back in Griffith Park – the iconic Hollywood Sign AND the Batcave from the 60's TV series “Batman.” This dog-friendly route is popular with local hikers, fitness buffs, and equestrians, and is a good way to tack a local workout into your hiking routine. This mostly shadeless route is rarely steep, but it does have a very steady incline for almost the entire route. Be sure to bring water – especially if it’s a sunny day – and watch out for rattlesnakes!

Let's face it – eventually you or someone you know is going to want to hike to the Hollywood Sign. It's sort of a right of passage for Angelenos and tourists alike. Although many people are confused and disappointed to learn that it's not actually possible to hike to the Sign itself (a chain link fence and lots of security cameras prevent hikers from reaching the giant letters), this route takes you to the peak directly behind the sign for some beautiful views of the city and a day well-spent outside.

While this route is a bit lengthier than other approaches, it does avoid the contentious and – as of late – downright nasty access battle currently raging in the Beachwood Canyon neighborhood of Los Angeles. Residents there are upset that hikers were parking on narrow, winding neighborhood streets to access a public park on established trails, and have taken to hiring private security guards to block that access, post intimidating (and unofficial but official-looking) signs to discourage visitors, petitioned Google to remove directions from Google Maps, and have filed a lawsuit against the city to close those trails.

The debate is ongoing, but for now you can (and should) skip all that hullabaloo and head to Canyon Drive north of Franklin. At the end of this road inside Griffith Park, there's a small parking lot near the gated trailhead as well as a larger spillover lot just a bit further south. Park here and hike north – but before you do, backtrack south a bit the gate, hang a sharp left onto a dirt road.
This is not on the route to the Hollywood Sign, but this very short side-trip will take you to another Hollywood landmark – the Bronson Caves – perhaps better known to most as the BATCAVE.

The Bronson Caves were formed by the Union Rock Company, which operated a quarry here from 1903 through the late 1920s. The quarry's scars in the landscape are still visible as these sort of strange, unnatural amphitheaters (and, of course, the caves), and are especially clear when you view the region from above or on Google Earth. The area was originally named Brush Canyon, but became known as Bronson Canyon for the street in the nearby neighborhood.

You can walk through the cave if you’re not claustrophobic. It's very short, just be sure to stomp around a bit in case any rattlesnakes are taking a nap in there.
These caves are probably most recognizable from the 60's *Batman* series, but they've also been used in a lot of movies, too, including films like *Army of Darkness* and *The Searchers*, one of my personal favorites.

On a clear day, it is also possible to see the Hollywood Sign from the other side of the Caves. While we could make it out, the hiking weather on this particular day was “extra hazy.”
Return back down the dirt road and take a right at the pavement, passing the parking area and heading toward this locked gate.

You are now on the dirt-path continuation of Canyon Drive. Here, the trail begins its moderate but relentless climb – about 600 feet in a mile. There’s a bit of shade in these early parts of the trail, but it’s few and far between – so if it’s hot or sunny, be prepared to sweat!

Like I mentioned, this is a popular trail. You’ll be sharing it with joggers, dog-walkers, babies in action-strollers, hiking groups, boot camps, and equestrians. Be sure to give the horses ample room if you’re passing.
At about the 1.8 mile mark, you will reach a three way junction with the Mullholland Highway - another wide dirt path. Take a left at this junction and hike west. For the next 0.9 miles, the trail is mercifully level, although you're exposed to full sun.

You'll also start to see the Hollywood Sign from some interesting side angles, too (note that 'interesting' in this instance also means 'difficult to photograph').

If it's clear, you'll actually have better views of the Griffith Park Observatory and Mount Hollywood to the east.
At 2.3 miles, the fire road hits another 3-way junction with Beechwood Drive. Keep to the right to stay on the Mullholland Highway and continue another 0.3 miles to another junction – this time with the paved Mount Lee Drive.

If you just want views of the Hollywood Sign, you might be better off taking a left here and descending a bit – but if you want to top Mount Lee and get behind the sign, take a sharp right onto Mount Lee Drive and start steep incline.

From here, it’s about another 0.9 miles to the summit of Mount Lee. The road wraps around the north side of the peak, so you’ll get a few valley views before the road turns back to the south face. If it were less hazy, you’d be able to see the San Gabriels pretty well from this vantage point, too:
As soon as the road rounds a sharp bend to the south face of the peak, you'll be able to see the Hollywood Sign behind the scenes – and through a fence.

Even though you can’t get really close to the letters, it’s pretty cool to see them from this angle, and realize how big they actually are.
Just to the left of the locked gate at the Mount Lee radio towers, there’s a short path that climbs to the actual summit of the mountain, just next to some USGS seismic monitoring equipment. Soak in the views of L.A. and the Hollywood Reservoir from here, then return back the way you came.
For an alternate route to the Hollywood Sign that’s shorter in distance but tougher in elevation and trail difficulty, consider tackling Mount Lee from the west via Cahuenga Peak.
ELJEFE says:
August 2, 2016 at 2:09 pm
Are bikes allowed anywhere in the trails?
Reply

CASEY SCHREINER says:
August 2, 2016 at 4:18 pm
Bikes are not allowed on the trails anywhere in Griffith Park.
Reply

SHAWN says:
May 11, 2016 at 10:35 am
Casey, THANK YOU for the well thought out instructions for this hike. I brought my wife/son to LA for mothers day weekend and this was the first thing we did Friday morning. I printed the page and we had our own “turn by turn” GPS. This route offers breath taking (and famous) views of the city below…and we managed to get up, summit, and come back in down in 2 hours. My wife seems to think everything is a race I guess. haha
I have been to LA several times but this was their first trip and I can’t think of a better ”introduction” to the city. We look forward to taking advantage of the other trails on future trips. Much success on your book coming out!
Reply

CASEY SCHREINER says:
May 12, 2016 at 10:24 am
So glad you two enjoyed your time in Griffith Park! Looking forward to your next visit :)
Reply

SAF says:
April 27, 2016 at 7:43 am
I would like to do this hike on a Saturday morning. How early would you recommend going to avoid heat or crowds?
Reply

CASEY SCHREINER says:
April 27, 2016 at 9:58 am
As early as you can, especially on the weekend. This is a hugely popular trail in a hugely popular park, but wake up early and you’ll likely be on your way down while the big crowds are just getting started!
Reply

NADINE says:
October 19, 2015 at 5:40 pm
Is there a way to get to the starting point without a car?
I know there were shuttle busses but I heard the service got discontinued so I was wondering if there's another way to get there! :) Thanks so much.

**ANNIE** says:
September 20, 2015 at 12:26 pm

We did the Hollywood sign hike based on this yesterday—thank you so much! Didn't find the bat caves but still, in the heat was a tough hike.

**STELLA** says:
August 31, 2015 at 8:45 pm

I would like to find someone who wants to hike the mount Lee on the 6th or 7th of September. Where can I post it?

**GERRY MATTHEWS** says:
August 21, 2015 at 4:24 pm

I love doing that hike! The other day however I mixed it up and went to the Hollywood sign by way of Mount Chapel. Really fun little single track scramble that let's you out on Mount Lee Drive.

**CINDY** says:
June 8, 2015 at 12:52 pm

3 hours round trip or one way? Thanks for the detailed info!

**CASEY SCHREINER** says:
June 8, 2015 at 12:55 pm

All times and distances are round-trip unless otherwise noted.

**JESSICA** says:
June 2, 2015 at 12:30 pm

Just did this hike yesterday— and I think there might be a mistake in the directions. Directions state, “If you just want views of the Hollywood Sign, you might be better off taking a right (should say left) here and descending a bit – but if you want to top Mount Lee and get behind the sign, take a sharp right onto Mount Lee Drive and start steep incline.

We took a right and made it to behind the sign without issue, thanks for this write up!

**CASEY SCHREINER** says:
June 2, 2015 at 12:37 pm

Got it! Thanks for the catch, Jessica – and glad you had a great hike :)

**RENEE YETZKE** says:
April 28, 2015 at 12:36 am

Is this hike still accurate? Is it 6 miles round trip?

**HAPPYFUNGA19** says:
April 17, 2015 at 12:33 pm
I just went on this hike last weekend. It is absolutely amazing! Definitely want to go again. Thank you so much for taking pictures and giving directions. We would have been so confused without them. One bit of encouragement, after the first 1.1 miles, the trail flattens out, so don’t be discouraged by the beginning incline. Happy hiking! :)

Michael Janos says:
January 5, 2015 at 4:53 pm

Casey, I live in Baltimore and am a former resident of L.A. and will be visiting L.A. in April 2015. Right now, I’m researching various options for hiking to the top of Mt. Lee. So far, I’m getting the impression that Hollyridge Trail is still closed to the public after almost a year, and that the easiest weekday hike that is still open to the public is the Brush Canyon Trail (at the end of Canyon Blvd.) Would that be accurate? And also, is the trail around Hollywood Reservoir still open to the public with available parking? Thank you very much.

Casey Schreiner says:
January 5, 2015 at 5:03 pm

The Hollyridge Trail opened today, but if you want to have an actual hike and not fight crowds, I highly recommend trekking up past Cahuenga Peak and the Wisdom Tree instead. If Hollyridge isn’t your thing, there are lots and lots of options for getting up there.

The Hollywood Reservoir is also still open.

Michael Janos says:
January 6, 2015 at 5:53 pm

Thank you very much, Casey. It will be on a Friday afternoon that I do this hike to Mt. Lee. With Hollyridge trail now re-opened, are you suggesting that parking on Beechwood near the trailhead could be a problem (esp. on a Friday afternoon)?

Casey Schreiner says:
January 6, 2015 at 7:09 pm

It’s one of the most popular routes in the entire city, so prepare for some time spent looking for parking. From what I’ve read, the entire area is now heavily parking restricted on the weekends, but if you’re planning on a weekday afternoon you’ll have better luck. Have a great hike!

Mindy Mitts Herpy says:
December 28, 2014 at 8:01 pm

Thank you for the perfectly described route, especially the parking, which can often be the hardest part of the outing! We ventured with a group of 22 from 5 to 55! And enjoyed a visit to nearby Pinks before heading home.

Casey Schreiner says:
December 29, 2014 at 10:59 am

Wow, that’s a big group! Glad you enjoyed the hike!

VRE says:
August 15, 2014 at 12:32 pm

is 3 hours round trip or just one way
All times and distances are round trip unless otherwise noted.

I know a lot of griffit park opens at 6:00 around sunrise. Are there any gates or anything to stop you from going a little bit earlier? say 5:30?

I think that may depend on where you’re going in … There is a gate on Canyon Drive (almost got caught in there after sunset). Now, you could conceivably park south of the gate and scramble around it – but you would be doing that at your own risk and at the very real risk of getting a ticket from a ranger.

Great hike, thanks for the advice and directions!! I enjoyed every minute of it!

Is it 6.5 miles and about 3 hrs travel time one way? Or is that roundtrip? thanks!

Dogs need to be on-leash in Griffith Park, yes.

Is this still current? I’d love to do this next month when I travel to LA.
May 1, 2014 at 1:59 pm

Barring any fires, earthquakes, or mudslides, Griffith Park will still be open to you :)

May 30, 2013 at 6:15 pm

Great write-up! I especially enjoyed your pictures.

November 22, 2011 at 8:17 pm

Hoping to take this hike this weekend. Does there happen to be any place along this path for a picnic? (Even if its just a nice grassy area, out of the way of hikers)

November 13, 2011 at 7:26 am

heading out to LA this week to visit our daughter. I usually hike Fryman every morning, but I think I’ll do this hike one morning, sounds wonderful:

October 5, 2011 at 1:02 pm

To heck with The Bat Cave. The first movie I know of that was filmed at The Caves was the original ‘Invasion of The Body Snatchers’ from 1956 starring Kevin McCarthy and Dana Wynter. Not to mention that Beachwood Village, one canyon to the west also played a large part in the movie. Also the Mullholland Highway bridge over the Hollywood Freeway was featured.

September 11, 2011 at 12:11 pm

Is this information still accurate? I am looking to do this hike next weekend.

September 11, 2011 at 6:44 pm

Sure is, Jill!

February 25, 2011 at 8:21 am

Hi :) I just was talking about hiking up there! Thanks for the useful information! I appriciate it! Great work :) x

February 22, 2011 at 1:17 pm

Thank you for this post it was super helpful when I went and did this hike yesterday. I have linked it to from my recap you can find here.


Thanks again I appreciate it!
Great hike. Your directions were perfect, as was the weather. It was amazingly clear, especially on the valley side (which I think is rare). It took me about 2.5 hours even though I took my time.

Cool Hike. Now it's checked off my bucket list. It took me 2.5 hours, and I took my time and took a bunch of pictures. I wish I would have know about the Batcave! The only downside is all the smog. I wish it were a clear day, they say you could see the Pacific Ocean on a clear day in the background.

Thanks for the writeup! I hiked this twice recently using the route you suggested and it was wonderful.

Hey Chanceblue, ill do it for 10 bucks.

Like this hike. Really get a chance to see ALL of Los Angeles.

These pictures are great. Would anyone know a tour guide who can take a group of 30 to the Hollywood sign and back? They are willing to pay a fee.

I've added this to my "must hike" list. Sounds like the quintessential LA hike.

I did this hike today and the weather was perfect with a little breeze! Really great views of all of Los Angeles, all the way to the ocean and out to the San Gabriels! There seemed to be a trail, that if I went right instead of left I would make it over to Griffith Park Observatory... is that correct?

Next time you do this hike watch for the end of the fence right before the road turns the corner to the sign. There is an awesome single track trail to the taller Cahuenga peak and beyond. It seems like your doing something wrong but the land beyond the fence is now
city property and unofficially part of Griffith Park. Its a great change of scenery and no one goes up there. Also there are some great single track trials that follow the ridges to the sign rather than walking on a horse pie fire road. See you up there!

- ADAAYAK says:
  May 20, 2010 at 10:49 am

  Cool write up – I never knew the batcaves from the 60s Batman were actually filmed up by the Hollywood sign. That trivia will come in handy some day I know it.

- in the Discussion

...enter your comment here...