

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Pedestrian Pandemic Adventures

R. Daniel Foster · Wednesday, September 16th, 2020

Like many, I've been taking tons of walks since the pandemic struck. I've explored just about every nook within a few square miles around my Los Feliz one-bedroom flat. So when I saw that an expanded second edition of Paul Haddad's [10,000 Steps a Day in L.A.](#) had recently been published – now with 57 routes – I was eager to try out some of his treks.

We all crave variety during these times, our lives narrowed to predictable routines. Just exploring another part of the city on foot can boost one's morale. Exploring these routes either alone or with a loved one while following social distance protocols does the one thing the pandemic restricts: it widens your horizons.

It's also a connective experience, as Haddad points out in his book – beyond the joy of sharing new sights with friends.

"Once you get a few dozen treks under your feet, an interesting thing starts to happen," Haddad writes. "Linkages form from one community to the next. And although they retain singular identities, taken together, they tell the narrative of Los Angeles in all its messy, chewy goodness."

The 57 routes span the southland – from Simi Valley to the South Bay and Pasadena to Pacific Palisades. The walks include maps, detailed directions, parking suggestions, historical insights, trivia and optimal spots to picnic or grab a bite nearby. Each walk is about five miles.



Forest Lawn's Taylor Monument, "Protection" – the tomb of J. Hartley Taylor and his wife, Nettie Barbara Taylor. Designed by German sculptor Herman J. Schultheis / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Walking a graveyard can be improbably uplifting

For my first walk, I chose [Forest Lawn in Glendale](#), formerly a small 1906 cemetery that [Hubert L. Eaton](#) transformed into 300 acres of rolling green hills, now lush with old growth pines, magnolias and yes, fading cut flowers. It had been a few decades since I visited; I forgot just how gorgeous the graveyard is – yes, some of the statuary is kitschy, but the grounds are Edenic. I've been twice since that first walk (always midweek) and there's been nary a (living) soul. You'll have the place to yourself. It's an optimal spot if you're looking for some solo contemplation or quality time with a friend.



With its fantasy architecture, Forest Lawn is like a theme park for the dead / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Like many moody existential teenagers, I once took long walks in cemeteries where I grew up, in St. Paul, Minnesota. Now, walking among graves made me glad to be alive. I took along a good friend, Ziggy; we had a blast hunting down the celebrity graves that Haddad outlines in his book. The short list: The Wonderful World of Oz author L. Frank Baum, Michael Jackson, Larry Fine (of [the Three Stooges](#) comedy team), Chico and Gummo Marx of the [Marx Brothers](#), Alan Ladd, Nat King Cole, George Burns and Gracie Allen ([Burns and Allen](#) comedy duo), Elizabeth Taylor, Jimmy Stewart and Walt Disney.



Forest Lawn's "Babyland" / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Strolling amid a Gothic castle and churches paned with Italian stained glass ... the experience was like visiting a theme park for the dead (check out Babyland, anchored with an exuberant naked toddler statue). The property also harbors "two of the largest religious paintings in the Western hemisphere," according to its website. Like some other buildings, the [Hall of Crucifixion-Resurrection](#) where the paintings are housed is temporarily closed.

Buddhist chants for the dead

We did manage to duck inside the [Freedom Mausoleum](#), probably because an interment was happening on the second floor. Exploring the first floor, we could hear Buddhist chants wafting down. Climbing the stairs, we saw two Buddhists in ochre robes swinging incense pots and chanting as a coffin was wheeled past – everyone was masked.



The Freedom Mausoleum / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

It was a poignant sight. We sat down on benches to silently take in the scene and listen to the chants. As along any of Haddad's walks, you never know what you'll encounter – reason enough to take the treks.



Walt Disney's grave / Photo: R. Daniel Foster



Actor Jimmy Stewart's unassuming grave, near the Taylor monument / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

For my second visit to Forest Lawn a few days ago, I took my bike. I couldn't find anything about bicycling on the property's website, so I called and asked. Bikes are allowed as long as you wear a helmet. Biking the property is a thrilling experience – you can cover every inch of the grounds inside an hour, whizzing along rolling verdant hills lined with towering pines as you pass fantasy architecture. And on the property's east side, I encountered a flock of about 100 honking geese.



Forest Lawn's grounds are Edenic, anchored with hundreds of old-growth trees / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Hancock Park's celebrity homes

For the second walk, my friend Sue and I took Haddad's greater Hancock Park route that starts and ends in [Larchmont Village](#). This is an optimal walk to admire some stunning residential architecture along with a few storied homes. First up is a Tudor Revival, the [Getty House](#) on the

southwest corner of Irving Blvd. and 6th Street in Windsor Square. The 1921 home has been the official residence of Los Angeles mayors since 1977 when Mayor Tom Bradley moved in.



The Wilshire Ebell Theatre / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

Next up at the corner of Wilshire and Lucerne Blvds., some stellar Judy Garland history. The [Wilshire Ebell Theatre](#) is where Garland was reportedly discovered while performing with her sisters in the 1930s. The stately Italian-style property has been owned and operated since 1927 by a philanthropic women's club that dates to 1894. Further along the route: the gates to Fremont Place, a private 73-home community where King C. Gillette and Muhammad Ali once lived, and at 211 Muirfield Road, Howard Hughes' former home.

Nat King Cole's home, also on Muirfield, is now a bit shrouded behind trees and shrubbery, except for a distinctive brick dormer that peeks out. Haddad offers intriguing history, noting that when Cole moved into the white neighborhood in 1948, neighbors harassed his family and left racial epithets in his yard.



Nat King Cole with his wife, Maria Cole. She was a jazz singer who performed with Duke Ellington and Count Basie / Photo: public domain

"A petition circulated the neighborhood to rid it of 'undesirables,'" Haddad writes. "Ever the cool customer, Nat – who performed nearby at the Cocoonut Grove, where many of this neighbors undoubtedly paid to see his sold-out shows – reportedly deadpanned, 'If I see any undesirables, I'll let you know.'"



Singer and jazz pianist Nat King Cole's former home, 401 South Muirfield Road, Hancock Park.

A pricey suburban stroll

For the third walk, I took my friend Zak to explore the upscale communities of La Cañada-Flintridge, starting at the neighborhood's business district. Within 15 or so minutes, we were well shaded within [Hahamongna Watershed Park](#) with its old-growth oaks. We stopped and ate our packed lunch on a picnic table.

Following the trail for another few minutes, we found it was closed because of construction, so we found another route back to the starting point, taking us past some uber-expensive homes, which of course we either lauded or denigrated (when it comes to discussing how folks spend their considerable wealth, everyone's a critic).



Strolling past some pricey La Cañada-Flintridge real estate / Photo: R. Daniel Foster

The improvised route back was part of the adventure – here I should note that a mapping app like Google Maps will pair nicely with Haddad's book. You can easily find out exactly where you are, confirming you're headed in the right direction.

Other of Haddad's walks I'm considering: those in Burbank, Venice, San Pedro, Pasadena, Boyle Heights and Elysian Park.

That magic 10,000 number

Walking 10,000 steps a day was first popularized in the mid-1960s by [Dr. Yoshiro Hatano](#) who estimated that most folks took between 3,500 to 5,000 steps per day. Upping that to 10,000 could burn up to 20% of daily calories and provide numerous other health benefits. Japanese pedometers became known as [manpo-kei](#), or “10,000 steps meter.”

Haddad likes to daily hit that lofty 10,000 number. “I’ve personally become so obsessed that I’ll sometimes pace my living room before bed just to rack up the steps needed to get to that magical five-digit number,” he writes in his book.

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[10,000 Steps a Day in L.A.](#), second edition with 57 walking adventures, by [Paul Haddad](#).

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