

The News & Observer

Legendary viewing from a historic hill

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LOS ANGELES

In classic Hollywood movies, romantic teenagers would park along the cliffs of Mulholland Drive late at night, staring out over the glittering valley and dream of Tinsel Town twinkling below.

They don't make movies like they use to, the glitter has been replaced by the obnoxious glow of orange streetlights, and teenagers can't even park along Mulholland any more.

However, tourists still may - at least at one overlook on a hillside about a mile up the famous street. From this spot in the Santa Monica mountains, the lights of the city are sprawled out in the Mulholland Scenic Corridor.

But finding a parking space in the overlook's lot can be no different than locating one anywhere else in the L.A. - which means it seems impossible. Visitors need to have patience and wait. Peeking between the stone fences and multimillion-dollar homes while driving along at 30 mph is no way to fully appreciate the view, especially the prima donna in the black Jaguar wants you to speed up as to not be late for "doing lunch" at the latest hot spot.

A little wait for a parking space, a little walk up a lot of little steps cut into the not-so-little hillside and suddenly there is Los Angeles. All of Los Angeles. From the Mulholland Drive overlook, most of the major sites of La-La Land can be

spotted (and even recognizable if there's a good wind blowing in the from the Pacific Ocean).

The overlook offers a self-guided tour of Los Angeles by providing a skyline sketch of key landmarks. A display of photographs from the city's earlier days (when kids could still park along the street without fear of disturbing the rich and famous who have since migrated from Beverly Hills to the Hollywood Hills) shows how it has grown over the decades.

Farthest to the east and the easiest to recognize is THE sign. On top of one of the highest hills, Mount Lee, the cut-out letters spelling HOLLYWOOD symbolize the rich film heritage in the valley. Built in 1923 as a real estate promotion, the telegraph poles, sheet metal and 4,000 light bulbs were used to proclaim the neighborhood subdivision of HOLLYWOODLAND. The LAND section of the sign fell a few years later after a landslide. The remaining letters were almost lost to time and weather, but a "save the sign" campaign by the Hollywood Chamber of Commerce in 1978 raised funds to rebuild the now historic landmark.

To the right of the sign, the stone-white Griffith Observatory in Griffith Park stands out from the green and brown hillside. The observatory and park are better known for their roles in several motion pictures, especially the James Dean classic film, "Rebel Without a Cause."

The golden dome of the Los Ange-

les municipal building (familiar to anyone who ever watched reruns of the TV series "Dragnet") stands out from the surrounding dark structures of glass and steel. The purple paint of Frederick's of Hollywood glows like vibrant neon from the deep shadows of Hollywood Boulevard. Skyscrapers featured weekly in cutaways of various weekly TV series rise up on the horizon.

Closer to Hollywood, the circular structure of Capitol Records' headquarters rises among the bland rectangular and square buildings nearby. To the southwest, just under the hills, sits the University of California, Los Angeles, and the college community of Westwood. Directly beneath the Mulholland overlook, nestled among the trees, is the famous Hollywood Bowl.

At night, the vista takes on a glow from the neon signs, incandescent streetlights and the perpetual stream of headlights and brake lights. Sadly, tourists cannot possibly discover that view for themselves since the overlook closes at sunset.

With a spike-enhanced 8-foot fence surrounding the hilltop parking lot and overlook, nighttime visitors must illegally park their car along the side of the road, hide in the underbrush from any passing autos, scale the deadly steel barricade and climb the dark pebbled hill. But upon completion of the hiding, climbing, jumping, and hiking, the scenic view of Tinsel Town washes over the viewer with the nostalgia of days gone by and the dreams that legends are made of.