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Photo 7.4: The original Park nursery has recently been renovated and is now used as a “by reservation use only” picnic area for large groups. Interestingly, in the 1971 Elysian Park Master Plan, this area was mistakenly identified as an abandoned trailer park.



Photo
Photo 7.5: Dramatic changes in landscape occur between the formal landscaped areas of the Fremont Gate lawns to the wild, rural environs of Buena Vista Hill. Improvements should be made to these areas to provide a series of more gradual changes that might encourage Park users to explore these areas.

area) [Photo 7.4] and the meadow in Buena Vista valley, which is the only area with picnic tables and barbecues. There are no public rest rooms in this general area, but a few drinking fountains do exist. Throughout this area, the contrasts between developed and undeveloped areas are striking, as one can walk from the manicured lawn of a traditional park space such as at the Fremont Gate to the semi-rural abandonment of Buena Vista Hill in the space of twenty feet [Photo 7.5]. While these differences provide for a variety of experiences, they may be so sudden as to present barriers to exploring and enjoying the more wild areas of the Park.

By comparison, Radio Hill contains no developed Park facilities or amenities. Its entire area is completely wild, untended by Park staff and reliant solely on rainfall for watering. The resulting vegetation gives the appearance of being too uncivilized to read visually as part of Elysian Park. As it is also closely bounded by private property which limits access, Radio Hill ends up functioning more as a rustic backdrop to urban development than as a pastoral landscape framed by its urban surroundings. It has become the background, something not quite so special, something of secondary importance. This reversal dangerously discounts the value of the open space Radio Hill provides to the community, and may make it easier for outside development forces to justify introduction of non-park uses on the property. It currently serves two non-park functions as a location for one of the City's radio broadcast towers [Photo 7.6] and as a home for a community of transients [Photo 7.7]. While asphalt covered hiking trails have been developed on both Radio and Buena Vista Hill, most have become impassable as a result of at least a decade of deferred maintenance [Photo 7.8]. The better maintained system of dirt fire roads [Photo 7.9] provides a more manageable path system for hikers. Viewpoints exist on both Radio Hill and Buena Vista Hill [Photo 7.10], but are currently inaccessible by car - a situation that greatly limits either overlook's use.

Indeed, levels of use in the area appear to be directly tied to ease of automobile access, with the picnic areas in Buena Vista Valley and the passive recreation areas around the Fremont Gate being the most accessible, and therefore, best used facilities. Except where Park Road/Casanova Street crosses the freeway near the top of the Solano Valley residential community, it does not appear that pedestrian access to the Park is a major source of potential Park users. Otherwise, there are few originating sources for pedestrian traffic nearby, and the steep topography of the Park and the absence of inviting pedestrian entrances/stairways into these areas leaves those on foot to the same circulation routes as used by vehicular traffic. This often means walking in the street, as most Park roads have no sidewalks. A pedestrian walkway along the Pasadena Freeway connects the two eastern areas of the Park, but appears to be rarely used. While improvements to this walkway may solve some access problems to and from Radio Hill and the rest of the Park, it appears that the passage is soon to be taken by Caltrans to facilitate a lane addition to the southbound Pasadena Freeway.

With the exception of Buena Vista Point, the Buena Vista Hill system of roads encourages fairly good use of Park facilities by visitors, but at much lower use levels than the main Park areas in Chavez Ravine and Solano Canyon. At Buena Vista Point, a closed access road prevents vehicular traffic to what was at one time a well developed view point [Photo 7.10] (large turn around, trails, drinking fountains). Access is thus limited to pedestrians, and a few do use Buena Vista point on foot, but far fewer than would visit the look-out if automobile access were returned to the area. The reintroduction of auto access may also serve to improve the sense of security on the area, a concern that is discussed below. Access is even more severely limited to Radio Hill, resulting in almost no use of the area by any Park visitors (it is used by more permanent Park residents, however - namely homeless men). No public vehicular or pedestrian access exists to the area, the closed access roads that do exist are hard to find, and any chance of informal "back country" hiking access to the area is limited by the fact that almost all of the Hill's perimeter backs onto private property.