

HISTORIC AMERICAN LANDSCAPES SURVEY

GRIFFITH PARK ZOO (Old Zoo)

HALS NO. XX-##

Location: Griffith Park, 4730 Crystal Springs Drive, Los Angeles, California 90027.

Latitude: 34.133970 Longitude: -118.288494 (from center of picnic area)
(iTouchMaps.com)

Griffith Park is a 4,310 acre, Los Angeles city park, in the Los Feliz area of Los Angeles, California. The park is located 6 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles, at the eastern end of the Santa Monica Mountains. The north and east borders of the park are adjacent to the 134 Freeway (Ventura), and the 5 Freeway (Golden State). The south border is Los Feliz Boulevard, but including the Municipal Plunge and playground, south of the boulevard, and to the west are the residences of the Los Feliz and the Hollywood Hills areas.

Griffith Park Zoo (Old Zoo) was built in 1913, and is “inset at the north-facing base of hills forming Spring Canyon, below Old Zoo Trail.”¹

A Civilian Conservation Corps Camp was built where Travel Town is presently. And another camp was erected in what is now the Crystal Springs Picnic Area. There are no known remnants of the camps.

Significance: Griffith Park is Los Angeles Historic Cultural Monument No. 942, adopted on January 27, 2009. Colonel Griffith J. Griffith donated the 3,015-acre property to the City of Los Angeles in 1896, and still it remains the largest private land gift for Los Angeles, and has mostly an untouched landscape in the center of an urban metropolis. Large portions of this landscape appear to retain integrity dating back to the period of native American land use. Within the park are some of the city’s most iconic treasures – Griffith Observatory and the Hollywood Sign, also Historic Cultural Monuments, as well as the Feliz Adobe, and a Gabrielino Indian site.² The Old Zoo is one of the few remaining of its era, showing the standard of zoological gardens. Under the National Register of Historic Places Criteria, Griffith Park, the Old Zoo, and the work of the men from the federal programs could qualify under A) associated with historic events; B) associated with a significant person; C) that embody the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; and D) that have yielded or may be likely to yield information important to prehistory or history; as a district and a site.

¹ ICF Jones & Stokes. *Historic-Cultural Monument Nomination*, May, 2008. Report.

² Ibid

Description: Griffith Park ranges in altitudes of 325' to 1,625', with seven peaks that exceed heights of 100' above sea level.³ The main entrance to Griffith Park is from the south end, at the corner of Riverside Drive and Los Feliz Boulevard. Riverside Drive changes names at Los Feliz Boulevard and becomes Crystal Springs Drive. About 1-1/4 miles north, up the park road, there's a left turn at Griffith Park Drive, towards the Harding-Wilson Municipal Golf Courses.

This road leads to the Old Zoo Picnic Area, with diagonal parking on one side. This picnic area has several concrete picnic tables with connecting benches. It is shaded by mostly Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), with turf as the ground cover. The surrounding areas are rocky and hilly, with chaparral and mixed scrub of toyon and sumac.

Upon parking, visitors may walk to the Old Zoo by either of two entrances. The northern entrance appears to be newer, with 10-foot wide concrete stairs, leading up to the picnic area, also used as outdoor summer theater. The southern entrance is a gently curving sloped asphalt road leading directly to the Old Zoo. To the right of this opening is a stacked and mortared, broken concrete retaining wall, with three large natural boulders at the right corner next to the road.

There's a well-groomed, grassy picnic area, with seven, modern-style, painted concrete, rust-colored picnic tables and benches. The area is shaded by many mature trees, which are placed in no particular pattern. A majority of the trees are Sycamore (*Platanus racemosa*), along with Eucalyptus, and a few Coast Live Oak (*Quercus agrifolia*). The Eucalyptus varieties are: *E. cinera*, *E. robusta*, *E. camaldulensis*. The other trees in the picnic area are: Golden Medallion Tree (*Cassia leptophylla*), Deodar Cedar (*Cedrus deodara*), one Weeping Bottlebrush, (*Callistemon viminalis*), a couple of Olives (*Olea europaea*), one Fern Pine (*Afrocarpus falcatus*), and *Pittosporum spp.* The trees are heights ranging from 12 feet to 70-80 feet, for the Eucalyptus. This picnic area was once used as zoo enclosures and buildings, separated by metal fences.

The asphalt road leads around the picnic area, in a curve to the right, with the remains of the Old Zoo on the left. The rocky caves are formed and sculpted to appear like large stacked boulders. They are golden and brown in color and are textured to appear like sandstone, and are irregular in shape and size. The first four caves are the largest, and are about 20-30 feet high. There are two or three 6-foot high openings within, and in some, narrow stairs leading up to a rear entrance that opens to the road above. Concrete picnic tables have been placed in

³ ICG Jones & Stokes. "Griffith Park Landscape Elements of the Historic-Cultural Monument Nomination, October, 2008. Report.

front of the caves, and all the structures have a low, one-foot wall with openings, in the same stone style. Access to the caves are open, to allow climbing throughout these large structures. In a fenced-in niche to the west of the larger caves, are the remains of an old and non-functioning drinking fountain, built in the same shaped-rock style. Just past this are smaller pens, with openings about 3 feet wide that appear to have been for smaller animals. These are enclosed with black wire metal fencing. All the caves are set into the hill, on which native shrubs abound. In comparing the historic photos to the existing conditions, it appears that, from the picnic area to the cages, the land has been filled. The historic photos show much deeper pits to separate the larger animals from the people. This no longer is the case. The road continues right up to the cave openings.

Retaining walls of “Park Style” designs run throughout this area. They are made of colored concrete, in various natural hues, imitating stacked stone. At this point, there is a road that diverges sharply left, and doubles back, sloping up to reach the upper rear side of the structures. This road is called Old Zoo Trail. It leads past the rear of the large pens, which are fenced at this side with a newer chain-link fence that has been pried open in areas. The cave structures can be accessed from this side. Farther uphill is a corrugated, metal building with small wire and metal cages. This also has a chain-link fence, and it too has been pried open. Up and around a bend is another concrete structure with metal bars covering the open front. The downslope side of the road has what looks like to be an original wire fence. The road leads to more hiking trails.

Continuing down the lower road, there are small cages, most likely for birds or reptiles. Next to those are 10’ tall cages with metal fencing surrounding each enclosure. The round metal vertical and horizontal bars separate each of the eleven cages. At the rear of each cage, stone-like concrete caves with openings of about 3-1/2’ tall are set back about 12 feet. A few of these cages have open doors at the front. Up against a 2-foot retaining wall, there’s another remnant of a hand-made stone drinking fountain. Across from these cages, on the other side of the road, the ground slopes down into a canyon. Besides the mature trees named above, there is one 30-foot Silver Maple (*Acer saccharinum*), along the road. Drainage channels, retaining walls, stoppage dams, and culverts, made in both the stacked-rock “Park Style”. Many using rock from the Los Angeles River, are throughout this area.

History: The land is the former Tongva settlement (Maugna).⁴ The tribe, later known as the Gabrieleno, is now known as the Tongva-Gabrieleno Tribe. As a reward for

⁴ USCS, Geographic Names Information System, U.S Department of Interior, geonames.usgs.gov, June 2014. Website.

his military service and involvement in establishing the city of Los Angeles, the land, in 1795, was awarded by the Spanish governor, to Corporal Jose Vincent Felis. One of the original Spanish land grants, made up of 6,647 acres, it was called “El Rancho de Nuestra Senora de Refugio de Los Feliz”, or Rancho Los Feliz, “The Happy Ranch.”⁵ The land extended to the west from where Gower Street now exists, and to the Los Angeles River to the north and east, as it bends. The southern end is the northern border of the Los Angeles Pueblo property. The rancho included the areas of what is now East Hollywood, Silver Lake, Franklin Hills, and Los Feliz, and was passed on through the Feliz family until about 1863.⁶ The succession of ownership of the Rancho was Don Antonio Coronel, John Baldwin, and Thomas Bell.

Colonel Griffith J. Griffith, a newspaper journalist and mining success in the boom of the 1880s, purchased the 4,071 acres in 1882 from Thomas Bell. The land included 250 acres of land along the Los Angeles River with the water rights. Griffith used the land for growing crops, ranching, and raising sheep, horses, dairy cows, and ostriches, living on the property for 12 years. On December 16, 1896, Colonel Griffith and his wife, Christina “Tina” Mesmer Griffith, donated 3,015 acres to the city of Los Angeles, giving the city the water rights of the river.⁷ Some of the land had previously been developed by Griffith, with housing in the areas he named Los Feliz, Kenilworth, and Ivanhoe, and he kept a portion for himself with the Harding Golf Course.⁸ The property was just above the border of the northern end of the city. The park was annexed to Los Angeles on February 18, 1910.

“A menagerie in Ostrich Farm Canyon, which was present when Griffith owned the property, grew into the city zoo.”⁹ The zoo started in around 1910, with just a few pens, cages, and a varied assortment of animals, as an addition to the tourist attraction of the ostrich farm. It was located close to Riverside Drive and Los

⁵ Seligman, Donald A. *Los Feliz and the Silent Film Era: The Heart of Los Angeles Cinema, 1908 to 1930*. Los Angeles, California: Los Feliz Improvement Association, 2013. Print.

⁶ Masters, Nathan. L.A. as Subject - “How L.A. Got One of the Country’s Largest Urban Parks,” KCET online article. (http://www.kcet.org/updaily/socal_focus/history/laassubject/griffithparkhistory.html), August 22, 2012. Website.

⁷ Ebert, Mike. *Griffith Park: A Centennial History*. Los Angeles, California: The Historical Society of Southern California, 1996, Print. 135.

⁸ KCET

⁹ Ebert, Mike. *Griffith Park*. 135

Feliz Boulevard, along what is now Crystal Springs Drive. The new zoo opened in about 1913, moving the animals from the ostrich farm, which had since closed. The City Council reversed its promise to use \$25,000 to improve the park. Frustrated by the decision and still involved in the development of the park, Griffith released a self-published book, *Parks, Boulevards and Playgrounds* in 1910, emphasizing the importance of the proper development of the park. This book was later used by Griffith's son as a guide for the reforestation of the park.

Griffith Park has a history of providing work for the unemployed. In 1914, through local bonds and individual subscriptions, 1,200 men were employed in Griffith Park to build the aviary, bear pits and cages for the zoo, along with roads throughout the park. The new zoo had "welded wire fences, encircling groups of trees for the various livestock, wolves, monkeys, and even some cats." The bears lived in caves set up against the hillside.¹⁰ Many of the animals were supplied through donations and sales with the closure of the Selig Zoo, located in what is now Lincoln Park.

In 1922, World War I veterans were employed to clear additional picnic areas, and in 1924, Van Griffith, son of Colonel Griffith, and now a City Park Commissioner, devised a program to employ transient men, who received 40 cents an hour and a box lunch, to build trails in the park. March of 1931 brought in a \$5 million bond, with the City Council designating the funds for roads, parks, and playgrounds. That bond employed 25,000 men for a half-day at \$4 per day for over one year. Through this bond, the workers were able to build "13 miles of bridle trails and mountain roadways, to create and improved picnic areas, and expand the parking." Additional relief funds were obtained as city employees voted to divert 1% of their pay for the unemployed to clear brush in the park.¹¹

The Great Depression brought the need for federal programs to put people back to work, as unemployment was at 25%. Weeks after President Franklin D. Roosevelt took office in 1933, he created programs that would bring employment to millions throughout the nation. "The government's plan was to undertake public works, rather than to supply relief."¹² With the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) and the Civil Works Administration (CWA), county-

¹⁰ Eberts, Michael. *The Development of Los Angeles City Government: An Institutional History 1850-2000, Volume 2, Chapter 17 Recreation and Parks*, Los Angeles, California: Los Angeles City Historical Society, 2007. Print. Pg. 137.

¹¹ Ebert, Mike. *Griffith Park*. 152

¹² *Civilian Conservation Corps*, Dir. Robert Stone. PBS: American Experience. 2009. Documentary.

funding entities, there were thousands of unskilled and semi-skilled workers in Griffith Park receiving paychecks.¹³ Unfortunately, these men were working in Griffith Park when a fire broke out on October 3, 1933, with 29 of these men losing their lives fighting the fire.

The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was created to employ people with skills. Thousands of craftsmen, artists, writers, actors, musicians, were given work through this program. Funds in this program were responsible for controlling floods along the Los Angeles River, and renovation of the zoo, with “new elk and deer paddocks, new lion and bear grottos, new roads and buildings.”¹⁴

The Civilian Conservation Corps, created to train and teach young men skills that would enable them to continue into the future. The men of the CCC had to be 18-25 years old, with families in need of aid. They received \$30 per month, with \$25 of their allotment going to their families. Living onsite in camps, the men were fed three meals a day. According to oral histories, they were fed better than they had ever been. There would eventually be three CCC camps in the park, with the first camp being announced on September 28, 1933.¹⁵ Through October and November of 1933, letters flew back and forth, from Park Commissioners; Frank Shearer, the Park Department Superintendent of Griffith Park; and the Secretary of the Department of the Interior, to reconsider the closing of the camps, due to lack of funding. By November of 1933, the projects completed by the CCC, amounted to over \$3 million dollars, and furnished work for 12,207 men. In April of 1934, a CCC camp (Camp Griffith Park or SP-21) was re-established after requests from the Los Angeles Parks Department for construction of fire trails and to guard against a recurrence of the fire of the prior year.¹⁶ Work of constructing Camp Griffith Park started in May of 1934, with the dedication in July. Funding was still an issue in March of 1935, with Robert Fechner, Director of Emergency Conservation Work, stating, “he will direct a substantial increase in CCC Camp SP-21, Griffith State Park.”¹⁷ President and Mrs. Roosevelt were in attendance for the dedication of a statue honoring the CCC by artist John Palo-Kangas on Oct. 1, 1935. Called “Spirit of the CCC” or

¹³ Ebert, Mike. *Griffith Park*. 155

¹⁴ Los Angeles Times, “Griffith Park Water Lines Near Completion”, 2 Jan 1938: pg A2

¹⁵ Los Angeles Times, “Park Camp Chosen for C.C.C. Unit”, 28 Sep 1933: pg A8

¹⁶ Los Angeles Times, “Camp in Park to be Erected”, 10 Mar 1934: pg A14

¹⁷ Fechner, Robert, Director of Emergency Conservation Work, Department of the Interior; Board of Park Commissioners, City of Los Angeles. Los Angeles City Archives, Erwin C. Piper Technical Center, Box #A600, Letter to Park Commissioners, 25 Mar 1935.

“Iron Mike”, the statue mysteriously disappeared, perhaps when the camp was dismantled. The statue has been remade in bronze and now sits in the Travel Town Museum. This camp was later developed into the Crystal Springs Picnic Grounds. From May of 1936 through November of 1938, the work programs continued with companies from Camp Tuna Canyon, and Camp Brand Park, working in Griffith Park. Tree and shrub plantings, new fire breaks, check dams, and new parking areas were built by these companies. A new and third camp would be built, called Camp Riverside, SP-40, at the site of the former Municipal Boy’s Camp, and later would become Travel Town.

In 1941, with the United States’ involvement in World War II, the Camp Griffith Park site became a temporary settlement for thousands of soldiers returning from the war, as well as a detention center for Americans of Japanese descent arrested and removed from their homes. It was also used as a POW camp for Japanese, Italian and German prisoners, and had a capacity for 600. In 1943, the CCC camps closed as more of the trained young men went off to war, and in 1947, Camp Griffith Park became part of the public park. Located where Travel Town now exists, there are no remnants of the camp.

In the fifties, with complaints having mounted for decades about the conditions of the zoo, there was a push for a “World Zoo.” Criticized for being “inadequate, ugly, poorly designed, and under-financed”, by Department of Recreation and Parks General Manager, George Hjelte, there’s talk about building a new zoo in Chavez Ravine in Elysian Park or in Pacoima’s Jessup Park. With the final decision to keep the zoo in Griffith Park in a different location, east of the Old Zoo. Voters passed an \$8 million bond designated specifically for a new zoo. With a master plan developed by Charles Luckman & Associates, the ground breaking took place in the fall of 1964. In 1966, the “Old Zoo” closed after more than 50 years, and in December of that year, The Greater Los Angeles Zoo opened, becoming home to 2,200 animals from 250 different species, on 110 acres, with parking for 3,200 cars.¹⁸ The remains of the old zoo are left in place with the pen area in the center, becoming new picnic grounds.

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¹⁸ Ebert, Mike, *Griffith Park*. 311

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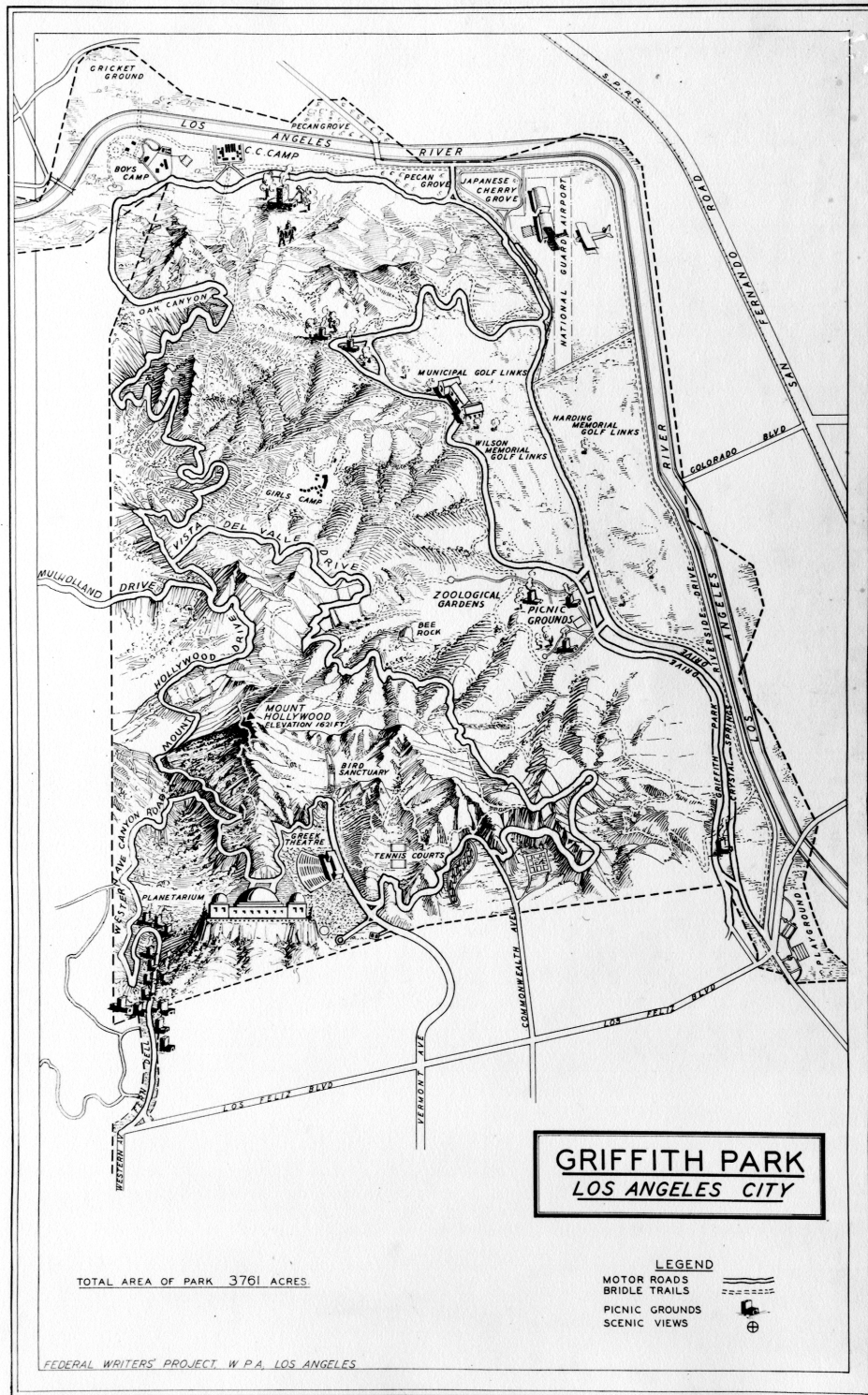
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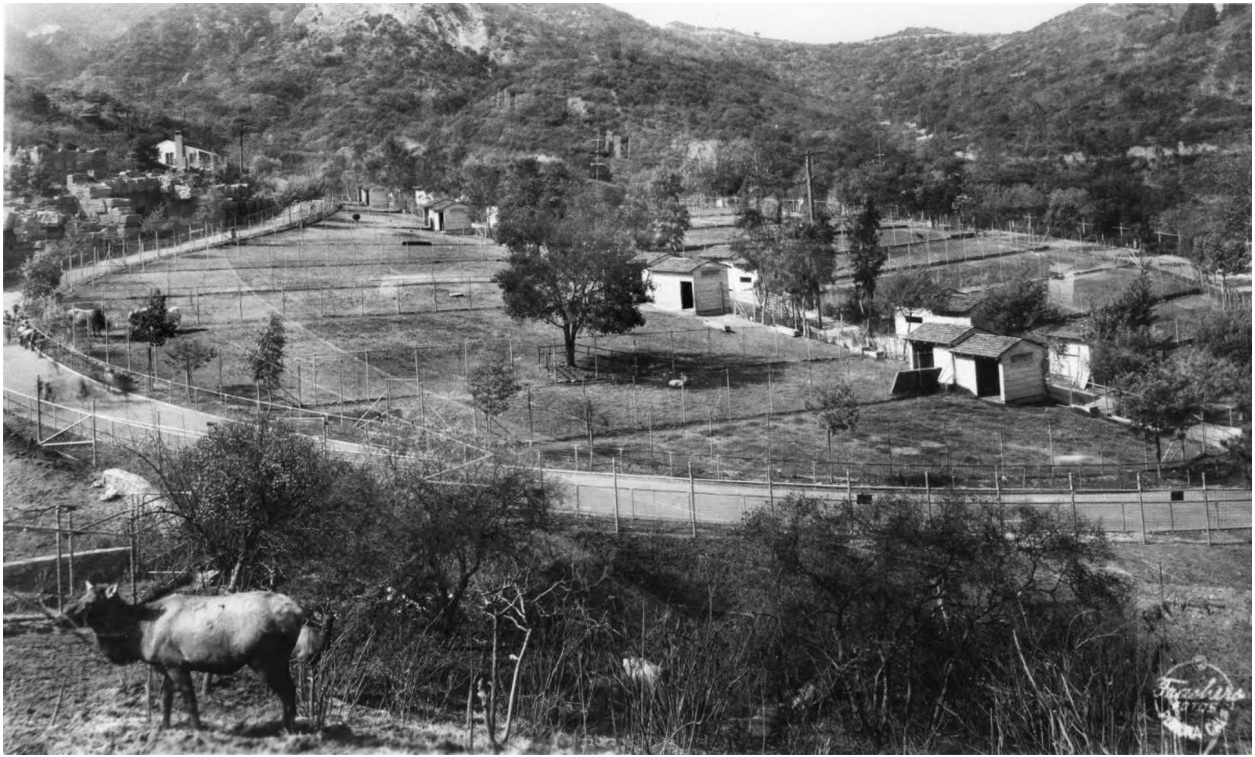
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WPA map of Griffith Park, 1937, Los Angeles Public Library, Map Collection



Griffith Park Zoo, 1940. Photographer: Burton Frasher, Pomona Public Library



Bear in Zoo Grotto, n.d. Photographer: Ralph Morris, Los Angeles Public Library, Photo Collection



Old Zoo Remains and Park Area. Photo by Libby Simon, May 21, 2014



Old Zoo Cages and Grotto. Photo by Libby Simon, July 28, 2014



Old Zoo Small Cages, Photo by Libby Simon, July 28, 2014

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