

SECRET STAIRS WEBWALKS

Music Box Loop
Duration: 55 minutes
Distance: 2.5 miles
Steps: 705
Difficulty: 3
Bus: #2, 4, 302, 704

*This is a vigorous walk built around the only officially designated stairs in Silver Lake, the famous location where Laurel and Hardy made their 1932 Academy Award-winning short *The Music Box* for producer Hal Roach. The two comedians had to carry a piano up the steep flight of steps between Vendome Street and Descanso Drive. All you have to do is walk it—once up, once down—and conquer the surrounding hills.*

Begin your walk near the corner of Sunset Boulevard and Parkman Avenue, perhaps with a café con leche at Café Tropical. Heading south down Parkman, you may appreciate the Cold War reminder offered by one of the city's few remaining air raid sirens across the street. Enjoy, too, the peculiar Moorish apartment building at 933 Parkman, from whose minarets the *muezzin* will never call. At the corner of Silver Lake Boulevard, turn right. (To your left, you can see the attractive brick-faced bridge where Sunset passes over Silver Lake. It does so because both boulevards once featured electric streetcar lines, and it was easier to run one street under the other than to make them into intersections. Glendale Boulevard ducks under Sunset, in Echo Park, for the same reason.) Just before the corner, you might note the private dwelling that used to be a church at 800 Silver Lake. At the corner itself, turn right onto Marathon Street.

Walk past the nice Florida palms, past Vendome Street and Dillon Street, and turn right onto Robinson Street. Just after the house at 830—careful, because it's easy to miss—watch for the first staircase on your right. It's a clean, well-maintained set of stairs, with a handrail and a pair of overhead streetlamps, that falls 66 steps through a pair of backyard gardens (one with an impressive collection of garden gnomes and *tchotchkes*) and lands at 837 Dillon. Turn left, and walk up and around the corner.

At the end of Dillon, use the crosswalk to get to the median strip separating the two halves of Vendome, and take the 13 steps to the downhill side. Turn left. Enjoy the odd triangular park to your right and, at the stop sign, cross Vendome again to face the *Music Box* steps.

In that 1932 classic short film, Stan Laurel and Oliver Hardy were obliged to deliver a piano to the top of a steep, barren hillside, up a series of concrete stairs. Today, the hillside is covered with apartment buildings, but the stairs remain—133 steps across multiple landings, with a handrail and some overhead lights, often littered with debris, and very ill maintained for such a landmark.

At the top, you land on Descanso Drive. Continue directly across the street and take the eight rickety wooden steps to the other side of Descanso. Admiring the giant carobs (street-wrecking trees whose roots have turned the asphalt into a rippled, undulating wave), turn right and walk downhill. Along the way, you'll get nice vistas across Sunset, with good views of the steps from Hamilton Way to

Elevado Street and the locked public staircase that used to carry pedestrians from Parkman Ave. to Westerly Terrace.

At the bottom of the hill, where Descanso meets Larissa Drive, catch the next staircase, going up on your left. This is a shaded, slightly crumbling staircase with a stencil at the bottom that commands, "Give Me Love." Climb the 139 steps, with a handrail and overhead lighting and a resting bench half way up, until you land on Descanso once more. Turn right, and head uphill.

At the corner, pause to admire the wild tile and sundial display on the far side of the intersection, and the more subtle tile fountain just to your right. Then turn right onto Micheltorena Street. Walk one block.

There, at the street's elbow, if you're tired or running out of time, you can cut this walk short. Go straight ahead and drop all the way down the majestic Micheltorena steps until you land on Sunset. Turn right, and walk back to Parkman. But if you are not tired or running late, turn left, onto Winslow Drive, and continue walking.

This is a charming street filled with eccentricities. Admire the asbestos-sided Craftsman at 3418 and, next door, its sign-festooned Craftsman sister. (You could spend half an hour here reading the signs warning against flooding or advertising rat poison.) Straight ahead on, at the corner of Maltman Avenue, turn right and begin your descent. After one block, bear right, still heading downhill, onto Golden Gate Avenue, and walk one more block until you hit Sunset. Turn right and head east—unless you are hungry. In the mini-mall to your left is the terrific Cuban restaurant El Cochinito, and a few doors past that is a Baskin Robbins. Go ahead. You've earned it.

Heading east on Sunset, just past the next traffic light at the corner of Sunset and Micheltorena, you will find the magnificent staircase whose top you saw a few minutes before. Now you must climb it. Enjoy the unexpected grapevines to the left and the bougainvillea overhead, and give thanks to contractor George Nichols, who built this staircase in 1925, as you go up 109 stairs to land on Larissa. Continue across Larissa as you go up the 96 stairs that return you to the top of the hill. Here again, you get a handrail and some overhead lights. (But you might want to think twice about walking here after dark. The gathered detritus suggests unwholesome nighttime activity.) Go straight on, turning left at Descanso, and beginning to retrace your steps downhill.

You'll get good views of Downtown Los Angeles on a clear day, with City Hall visible to the far left horizon. Stay on the left side of the road. Just after the house at 3279, take the wooden steps back across the divided road, then find the top of the *Music Box* staircase and climb down the 133 steps to land back on Vendome.

There's one more curiosity waiting. Cross the street, and head left. Half a block on, just past 946 Vendome, step into Garcia Walk. This is a delightful, narrow walk-street, running right through the front yards of a string of small bungalow houses. It's like the walk-streets of Venice, but with a decidedly Latino air. Admire the fine citrus, avocado, and fig trees, the roses, and the *norteño* ballads. You'll emerge at the other end onto an alley known as Reno Street. Take this to the left one block, to Sunset. Turn right and go a block to return to Parkman and Café Tropical.

MAP 18

