

Bottleneck Blog October 2, 2008

Angeles National Forest can collapse time and distance!

In the late 1990s, the four national forests in Southern California instituted a plan: If you wanted to park in most places in the forest, you needed to buy a parking pass.

Why? Congress was cutting national forest funding and they needed the dough. At the time, a lot of people howled and protested -- parking was previously free -- but the U.S. Forest Service stuck to its guns. And the fees are still in effect. You pay either \$5 a day to park or you can get the annual pass for \$30.

So, a couple of weekends ago Ms. Road Sage and I decided to take a nice afternoon hike to the top of Mt. Islip in the Angeles National Forest. We parked at Islip Saddle (where I made the stunning discovery the **Angeles Crest Highway has been closed for nearly four years** but may reopen soon!) and hiked up to the Little Jimmy campground, where the trail to Islip's peak begins. Here's the sign at the start of the trail:



And if you walk another five to 10 minutes (depending on your pace), here's the next sign you encounter:



It doesn't take a genius to figure out one of them is wrong, unless in the Angeles National Forest it's possible for Point A and Point B to be the same distance from Point C, even when B is obviously closer. Who knows? Maybe the Angeles is enveloped in a black hole that collapses time and distance.

In the cosmic scheme of things (pun intended), no big deal. I had a map and knew the first sign was correct.

But this points to a larger problem: trail signs in the Angeles National Forest are often lacking, wrong or offer incomplete information. Look at the sign in the background in the above photo -- a real professional job, eh?

The local national forests have a list on their website of the **projects they say they've completed with the parking fees between 1997 and 2006**, including the boast that permanent toilets are now cleaned four to six times more frequently. Well, without being too graphic, the outhouses at the Little Jimmy campground are really scary disgusting. If I'm doing my math correct, six times zero equals zero.

There's also this little factoid: 19% of the \$26,633,135 collected between '97 and '06 -- a little more than \$5 million -- went into maintaining the fee collection program.

Now, to be fair, the Angeles is a big place surrounded by urbanity. Bodies get dumped there. Lots of trash, too. Fires get started. I'm sure many of the **individual projects completed in the Angeles** were worthwhile.

My favorite one: A photo showing a new sign that reads "Leaving National Forest Fee Recreation Area."

-- Steve Hymon

October 02, 2008 in [Walking](#) | [Permalink](#)

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