

Great Outdoors chapter presents
La Brea Tar Pits Day Trip
February 9, 2019 Starting at 10 AM

Please notify the trip leader if you plan to attend.



Contact: [Frederick Brown](mailto:fredincal346@gmail.com). Phone: 562-754-1838. E-mail: fredincal346@gmail.com

The La Brea Tar Pits are a group of tar pits around which Hancock Park was formed in urban Los Angeles. Natural asphalt has seeped up from the ground in this area for tens of thousands of years. The tar is often covered with dust, leaves, or water.

Over many centuries, the tar preserved the bones of trapped animals.

Tar pits are composed of heavy oil fractions called gilsonite, which seeped from the Earth as oil. In Hancock Park, crude oil seeps up along the 6th Street Fault from the Salt Lake Oil Field, which underlies much of the Fairfax District north of the park. The oil reaches the surface and forms pools at several locations in the park, becoming asphalt as the lighter fractions of the petroleum biodegrade or evaporate.

The tar pits visible today are actually from human excavation. The lake pit was originally an asphalt mine. The other pits visible today were produced between 1913 and 1915, when over 100 pits were excavated in search of large mammal bones. Various combinations of asphalt have since filled in these holes. Normally, the asphalt appears in vents, hardening as it oozes out, to form stubby mounds. These can be seen in several areas of the park.



This seepage has been happening for tens of thousands of years. From time to time, the asphalt would form a deposit thick enough to trap animals, and the surface would be covered with layers of water, dust, or leaves. Animals would wander in, become trapped, and eventually die. Predators would enter to eat the trapped animals and also become stuck. As the bones of dead animals sink into the asphalt, it soaks into them, turning them a dark-brown or black color. Lighter fractions of petroleum evaporate from the asphalt, leaving a more solid substance, which encases the bones. Dramatic fossils of large mammals have been extricated from the tar, but the asphalt also preserves microfossils: wood and plant remnants, rodent bones, insects, mollusks, dust, seeds, leaves, and even pollen grains. Examples of some of these are on display in the George C. Page museum. Radiometric dating of preserved wood and bones has given an age of 38,000 years for the oldest known material from the La Brea seeps. The pits still ensnare organisms today, so most of the pits are fenced to protect humans and animals.

For, directions, tickets and information about exhibits, go to: <https://tarpits.org/>