

Plan of the Arroyo Seco Parkway

The  
**Arroyo Seco Parkway**

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A brief discussion of the  
proposed Arroyo Seco  
Parkway and its relation  
to a Boulevard from the  
Mountains to the Sea.

Issued by the  
**Los Angeles Park Commission**  
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# The Arroyo Seco Parkway

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THE PARK project known as the Arroyo Seco Parkway has been before the public in definite form for more than a year. In April, 1912, the City Council went on record as favoring the purchase of the necessary land by the assessment district plan. Owing to delays of various nature, the final ordinance was never submitted for adoption and recently the Council has taken up the matter for reconsideration.

KNOWING that any great movement cannot succeed, unless the people are in favor of it, the Park Commission has prepared the following statement regarding the parkway. The Commission believes that a complete understanding of the facts will insure the support of all citizens.

### History of the Parkway.

FOR many years, citizens and organizations of Los Angeles, especially those in the northeast section of the city have urged the necessity of securing the valley of the Arroyo Seco for park purposes, and thus preserve to posterity the most beautiful example of natural scenery within the limits of the city.

From time to time the project has been actively discussed and on several occasions definite attempts have been made to induce the city authorities to act in the matter, but never with success, on account of the lack of any method of financing the purchase of the land. Three years ago, the proponents of the scheme secured the passage of the state Park Act making possible the acquisition of parks by the assessment district plan and it was believed the realization of the park was finally at hand. However, no definite movement was made to take advantage of this law until the spring of 1911 when the present Park Commission, recently come into office, decided to take up the matter.

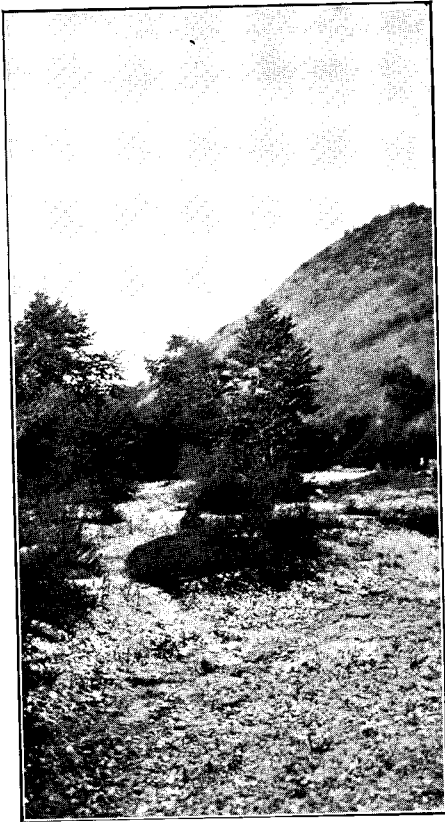
After considerable study and investigation, the original plan for a purely neighborhood park was enlarged to the present more ambitious scheme for a metropolitan parkway through the cities of Los Angeles, Pasadena and South Pasadena and a portion of Los Angeles County, to the mountains of the National Forest Reserve. To this scheme, the three cities and the county have pledged their support.

Pasadena has secured already more than two-thirds of her portion of the parkway area and South Pasadena and the County await but the assurance that the Los Angeles portion of the scheme is assured to secure the land within their boundaries.

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The Arroyo Seco (The Dry River.)

### The Official Record.

THE petition requesting the City Council to acquire by condemnation the lands for the Arroyo Parkway marks the official beginning of the present project. This petition, signed by the Park Commission and representatives of various civic organizations was submitted to the City Council on December 19th, 1911. After the usual process of investigation by committees and boards, the Council on April 16, 1912, approved the Park area and assessment district as outlined by the Park Commission and instructed the City Engineer and Attorney to prepare the ordinance of intention.

Owing to delay, occasioned by uncertainty as to the location of the extension of a certain street across the parkway area, the description of the boundaries for this ordinance were never furnished. Recently, the cause of this delay having been adjusted the question was again opened by the City Council and at this time it was proposed to alter the assessment district and substitute a much smaller district for the original district outlined by the Park Commission.

Knowing that such a change would mean the abandonment of the whole scheme, the Park Commission called a mass meeting of all citizens interested. This meeting, which was very largely attended was held in the City Council Chamber on January 10th, 1913, and a resolution was adopted requesting the City County to hold to its previous decision and retain the large assessment district.

On January 14th, 1913, this resolution was submitted to the City Council and after a discussion of several hours, the matter was deferred until a later date, pending the return of the absent members of the Council.

The Park Commission believes that under present conditions the Arroyo can only be secured by means of an assessment district, and that unless the large district as originally planned is adhered to the whole scheme must be defeated, and thus the greatest park project which the city has ever faced will have to be abandoned. Owing to the rapid increase in building activities and so of real estate values along and in the Arroyo valley, if the project is abandoned now its success at a future time would be very much more difficult if not impossible.

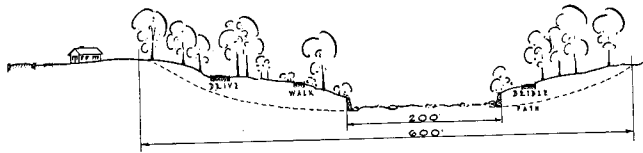
### Description of the Parkway.

THE site of the Parkway is the valley of the Arroyo Seco or "Dry River" which rises in the mountains of the Angeles National Forest, some five or six miles north of the city of Pasadena, and runs for a distance of fourteen or fifteen miles through Los Angeles County, the cities of South Pasadena and Pasadena to a junction with the Los Angeles River opposite Elysian Park in this city. In places the channel is no more than fifty feet in width, while in others it widens to several hundred feet. This variation is due principally to the topography and to the nature of the geologic formations and their resistance to erosion. Although dry throughout the greater portion of the year, the Arroyo Seco, like other California streams is liable to large and sudden floods.

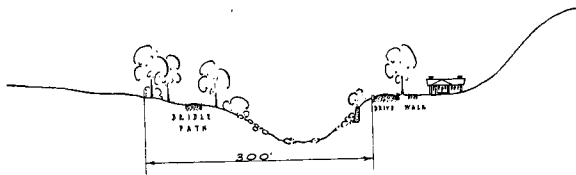
The valley which the stream has carved for itself during its lifetime varies as its channel, but in the main consists of two fairly well defined divisions, an upper and wide valley with bluffs of considerable ruggedness and a narrower lower valley in which the present channel lies.

In locating the boundaries of the proposed Parkway area, the effort has been to secure the lower valley, except where the width is so great as to make this impracticable. This is in order to preserve as far as may be the landscape unit. In certain places, however, the valley widens to such an extent that such boundaries are scarcely feasible, while in others it narrows so that the higher bluffs may be secured to the great increase of the beauty of the parkway.

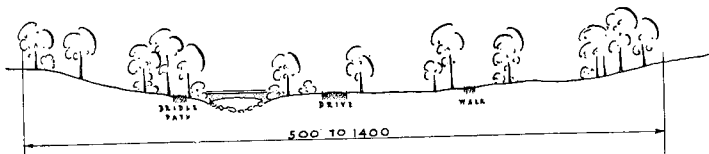
# ~ TYPICAL PARKWAY SECTION ~ SHOWING PROPOSED TREATMENT



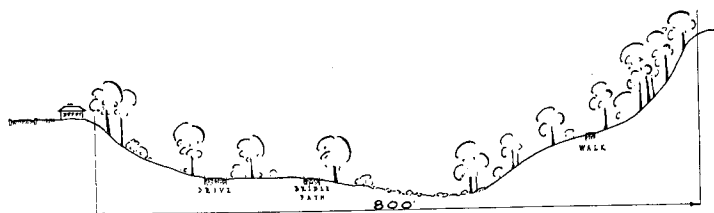
~ CHANNEL RESTRICTED BY RETAINING WALL ~  
DOTTED LINE SHOWS PRESENT WASH



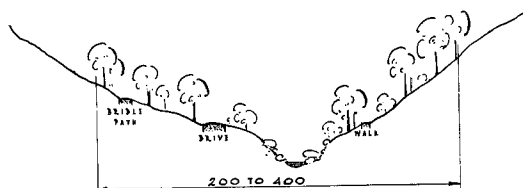
NARROW PORTION-BOUNDARY STREET BECOMES PARK BOULEVARD



VALLEY TOO WIDE TO BE ENTIRELY SECURED



ENTIRE VALLEY SECURED



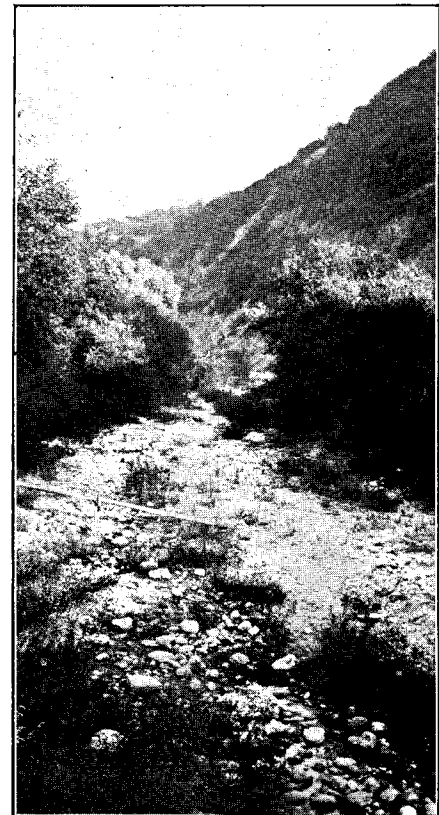
CANYON IN FOREST RESERVE

At Devil's Gate, a short distance north of Pasadena, the Arroyo Valley draws in to a very narrow and rocky gorge of great picturesqueness. Above this gorge it widens again to an extensive basin, heavily wooded in certain portions, forming at present a most beautiful natural park. At the upper end of this valley, which is less than a mile in length, the Arroyo enters the forest reserve, where it extends for several miles up a canyon of great beauty and charm.

This canyon is already much used as a summer resort and numerous camps are located here. With the completion of the parkway this entire reservation known as the "Angeles National Forest," some 1,265,300 acres in extent, becomes available for a great summer playground.

## The Proposed Treatment.

Within the limits of Los Angeles, the Arroyo will, for the most part, be treated merely as a wide parkway, tying up with the other sections to form a great metropolitan reservation. Extensive developments in certain portions make it impracticable to attempt to secure the entire valley, while the number of other park areas



The Arroyo north of Avenue Fifty-two. The boundary will follow the crest to the right.

in the city make only the finer scenic portions of sufficient value to justify the expense of securing them.

Bewteen South Pasadena and Sycamore Grove, the Arroyo is heavily wooded and of great beauty. In most places the natural boundaries may be secured without condemning an excessive area. Below this point, however, the Arroyo is of no great scenic value and a narrow parkway is the logical treatment. This would be ample to provide for the proper handling of the storm water of the stream and yet leave sufficient area for the parkway planting, walks and drives.

The earlier schemes did not contemplate carrying the parkway below Avenue Thirty-five, but the great value of such a parkway lies in its connection with the heart of the city, and especially with a park system such as Los Angeles will eventually evolve. This portion of the project will be expensive to secure and develop, but if the parkway should end at an intermediate point, not connecting with the rest of the city park system, its value to this city, as well as that to the sister communities, would be greatly decreased.

### The Relation to a Park System.

**T**HE relation of the Parkway to a park system for Los Angeles and its part in forming a boulevard from the mountains to the sea is illustrated on the accompanying map.

This plan provides for a drive from the Arroyo Parkway at the junction of Dayton avenue and Avenue Twenty, across the Los Angeles River, near the pigeon farm. From here the drive will follow the steep bluff of Elysian Park along the site of the old ditch line, to a junction with the Elysian Park Drives near Fremont Gate. In carrying out this plan, certain lands will be acquired along the Los Angeles River bed, and others secured by narrowing the channel, from the Arroyo Seco to the new Buena Vista Street Bridge. Such land, if acquired and planted to trees, will greatly enhance the appearance of this section by screening out from the park and parkway the numerous railroad tracks and views of the commercial district. It will also give a better setting to this magnificent bridge and provide an attractive railroad portal to the city. To complete this treatment the small portion of the triangle at the eastern end of the bridge, which is not now owned by the city, will be secured to form a fitting approach to this bridge.

### Need of Parkways in Los Angeles.

**L**OS ANGELES is today one of the greatest tourist cities in America, as well as one of the most popular residence cities for people desiring beautiful and attractive homes. On this account, Los Angeles should take the front rank in rational improvements that go to make the city beautiful. However, such has not been the case in past years. In the development of its park system,

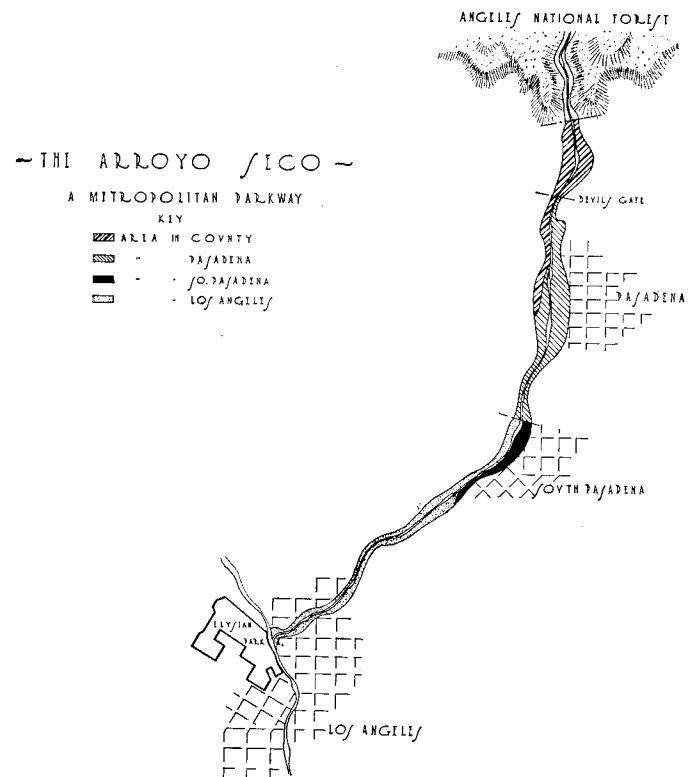
Los Angeles is today far behind most cities of corresponding size in this country. Los Angeles has, outside of Griffith Park which is a natural scenic reservation and not a city park in the true acceptance of the word, only eight hundred and eighty-one acres of park land. Of this, five hundred and forty-eight acres are in Elysian Park, which on account of its lack of suitable street car and boulevard connections is almost unused. This leaves available for every-day park use, less than four hundred acres of park lands, within the built-up districts. This small area of park holdings is composed of many small segregated areas without connecting boulevards or parkways.

In contrast to Los Angeles, Kansas City with a somewhat smaller population, has two thousand acres of developed park lands, fifteen miles of parkways and seventeen miles of boulevards.

Minneapolis, also a slightly smaller city than Los Angeles, has thirty-three hundred and ninety-one acres of improved parks and twenty-three miles of parkways and boulevards.

### The Opportunity of Los Angeles.

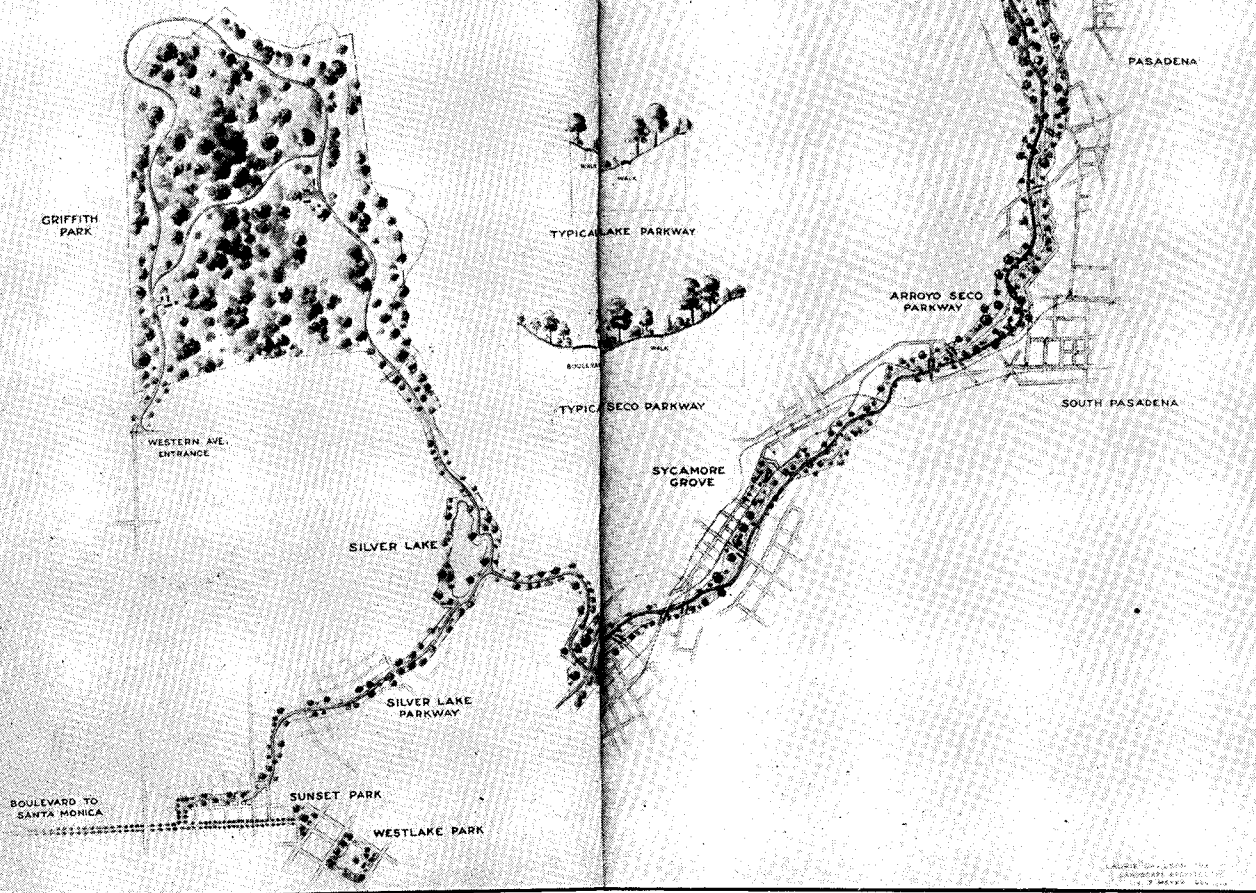
**N**O CITY in America, or in fact in the world, has greater possibilities for civic beauty, as regards topography and climate, than Los Angeles. As a start toward park development commensurate with what the city could and should have, the Park



# THE ARROYO SECARKWAY

A DIAGRAM ILLUSTRATING ITON TO THE  
SILVER LAKE PARKWAY, GRIFFITH ANN PARKS AND THE  
COURSE OF THE PROPOSED BOULEVARD FROM MOUNTAINS TO THE SEA.

ACCORDING TO THE PLAN OF  
THE LOS ANGELES PARKS  
1912





be secured to form the main park feature of that community.

The relation of the Parkway to the various municipalities and the county, is illustrated on the diagram on page 9.

### The Assessment District Plan.

**T**HE method of park acquisition which causes the benefited district to pay for the park site is very generally held, and has been practiced almost since the beginnings of park extension in this country. It is the nearest approach to the principle of excess condemnation which American laws and American city charters have made possible.

It has been proved beyond any question, in hundreds of towns and cities throughout the land, that the creation of a park causes an increase in the value of all real estate in the vicinity—an increase usually considerably in excess of the cost of the park and its development. This fact, being so there can be no doubt of the justice of the principle which requires that a small portion of the values so created shall be surrendered for the purchase of the park site. Some cities go much further and demand that the benefited district not only pay for the acquisition of the site, but



The Arroyo near Avenue Fifty-eight. There is water here throughout the year. The Valley is wide and flat with a fine growth of trees, especially sycamores.

for the development of the park, and in a few cases, for the maintenance as well.

This same principle of the public right to this unearned increment, has been extended to finance other forms of civic necessities, such as sewers, streets and boulevards, and of the justice of this principle there can be no doubt. However such improvements at the best are transient and with time wear out so that the benefit is lost, whereas in the case of parks, there can be no loss of benefit or value, as the actual value of that land for which the district pays is always there.

It is argued, by opponents of the Park assessment plan, that the whole city should pay the cost of park lands when acquired, inasmuch as all parts of the city enjoy and so benefit by the park area. It is true that all parts of a city benefit by each and every park property, but there is likewise no doubt that the district in which the park exists derives a greater benefit than those portions which are more remote. As it is impossible to have park areas exactly evenly distributed, the burden is very fairly shared, when each district pays for the site of its parks and the city as a whole develops and maintains them. This is the principle now generally adopted by American cities in their Park Development.

The same principle applies in the case of streets, in that each individual street or district is assessed to pay for the original development of its street or streets, which are, however, used and maintained by the entire city in whose benefits the entire city shares.

It is the desire of the present Park Commission to so arrange the assessment districts for the various contemplated park extensions that there shall be no overlapping of assessment districts.

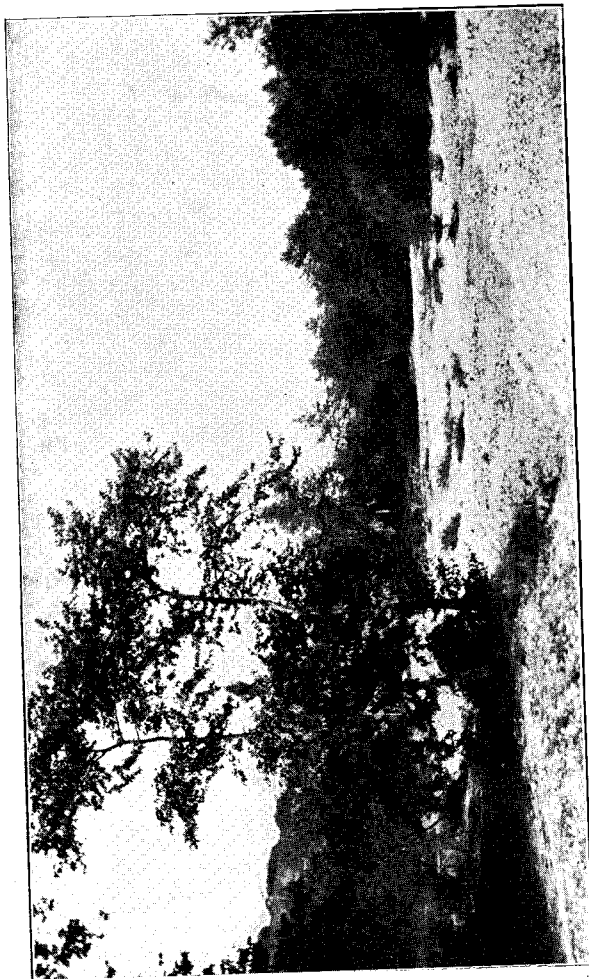
At present there are three park districts undergoing assessments for condemnation of park lands and the fourth, for the Arroyo Seco, is now proposed. The diagram on page 13 indicates these several districts.

The entire southwest section is being assessed to acquire the additions to Exposition Park. That portion of the city comprising Hollywood and Colegrove is purchasing a parkway entrance to Griffith Park and giving the city the only entrance from the city side to this great 3000 acre reservation.

The northwest section of the city with an assessment district is securing three miles of the Silver Lake Parkway—the central feature of a parkway system for Los Angeles. The entire east and northeast sections of the city and the downtown business section will form the assessment district for the Arroyo Seco parkway.

A fifth district to include that area between the Arroyo and the Silver Lake assessment districts is proposed to acquire the "Crest Drive Parkway" connecting Silver Lake with Elysian and Griffith Parks.





A typical view of a dry portion of the Arroyo, illustrating well its peculiar beauty and charm.

Other projects are contemplated, so that each section of the city will do its part—each district secure its own park holdings, so that every portion of the city may be eventually, once, and only once, within a park assessment district.

### **Facts and Figures.**

1. The people of the Arroyo Seco Parkway assessment district will not be assessed for the improvement of this parkway. The assessment district will acquire the land and the Park Department by its general funds will carry out the development.

2. The area of the proposed Parkway within the Los Angeles city limits is approximately three hundred and eighty acres. The buildings of all kinds, within this area are approximately one hundred and twenty-five in number, very few being of any considerable value.

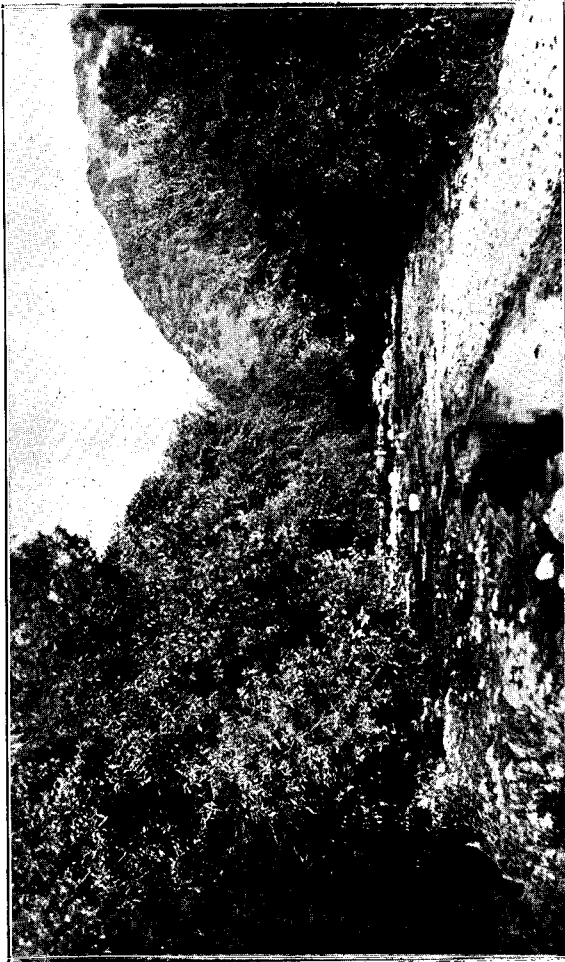
3. The estimated cost of this condemned area, both lands and developments is \$1,200,000.00. The estimated number of lots in the assessment is between sixty and sixty-five thousand. Thus an average assessment of \$20.00 per lot would be sufficient to raise the amount. Such an average could be secured by grading the assessments from \$5.00 or \$10.00 per lot for the outer ranges of the district to \$50.00 for the abutting property, and for the business district.

4. The estimate by the Park Commission of \$1,200,000.00 was the result of a careful valuation made by individual blocks and tracts for both land and buildings within the condemned area. An independent estimate made by local real estate men of Highland Park upon a minimum and maximum basis gave a minimum estimate of \$943,000.00 and a maximum estimate of \$1,332,900. The average of these estimates gave for the land a minimum value of \$1500 per acre or \$300.00 per lot and a maximum value of \$5,000.00 per acre or \$1,000.00 per lot.

5. The assessed valuation of the property to be condemned as given on the books of the city and county assessors is \$186,510.00 which is less than 16% of the estimated condemnation value set by the Park Commission.

6. The length of the proposed Parkway from Elysian Park to the Forest Reserve will be ten and one-half miles, and the total area will be nearly fourteen hundred acres, the larger portion lying within the City of Pasadena, where the area of the Arroyo being secured is between five and six hundred acres. The portion which will be condemned by Los Angeles is approximately three hundred and eighty acres and the area within the County and South Pasadena, three hundred and one hundred acres respectively.

7. There can be no doubt that this parkway will benefit greatly the entire district in which it runs. If the Arroyo Seco valley is not secured for Park purposes, it must inevitably degenerate into a civic eyesore, being as it is ever liable to sudden



Where the sub-flow comes to the surface, even in the driest months.

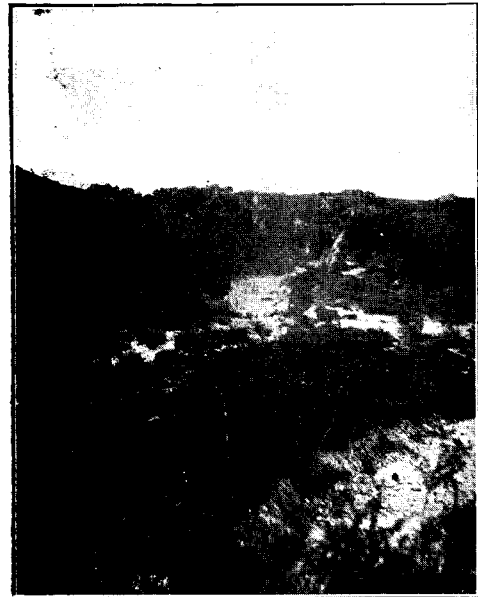
oods, so that it can only be used for the cheaper class of residences and industrial purposes. The trees and vegetation will ultimately be destroyed as their present rapid disappearance evidences and the Arroyo will become an ugly ravine, filled with unsightly developments, rendering a large section of the city unattractive to both visitors and citizens.

8. Wherever such parkways have been built in other cities, the increased valuation has been greatly in excess of the cost of the assessment. In Kansas City the increased valuation in the butting property on the parkway boulevards alone has been more than the entire cost of the whole park, parkway, boulevard, any playground system of the city.

9. The topography of the valley in which the parkway will be, is highly suitable for parkway purposes. Some of the finest parkways in America are located in just such topography.

### Conclusion.

The few pictures shown herewith are used to indicate the diversity of the natural beauty of the Arroyo Seco. Nothing could be more distinctly Californian, nowhere could greater variety of scenery be found. The alternation of shaded stretches of trickling stream, of quiet pool or open shimmering gravel sun-leaked through the leaves of scattered sycamores is as unique as it is beautiful. Imagine this changing scene viewed from a quiet winding drive, from which one may look out under the protecting shade across the open varied scenery of the "Dry River" valley, bathed in the brilliance of the California sunshine. This is the possibility of the Arroyo Seco, leading from the heart of the busy cities to the wildness of a national forest reserve, a great California parkway.



The Arroyo just South of Devil's Gate, near the Northern boundary of Pasadena.