The **La Brea Tar Pits** are within the Hancock Park inside a few city blocks of Los Angeles, California. I visited there Saturday, 10 May 2025. The following is a Google Earth satellite (or aerial photo) view of the entire site.

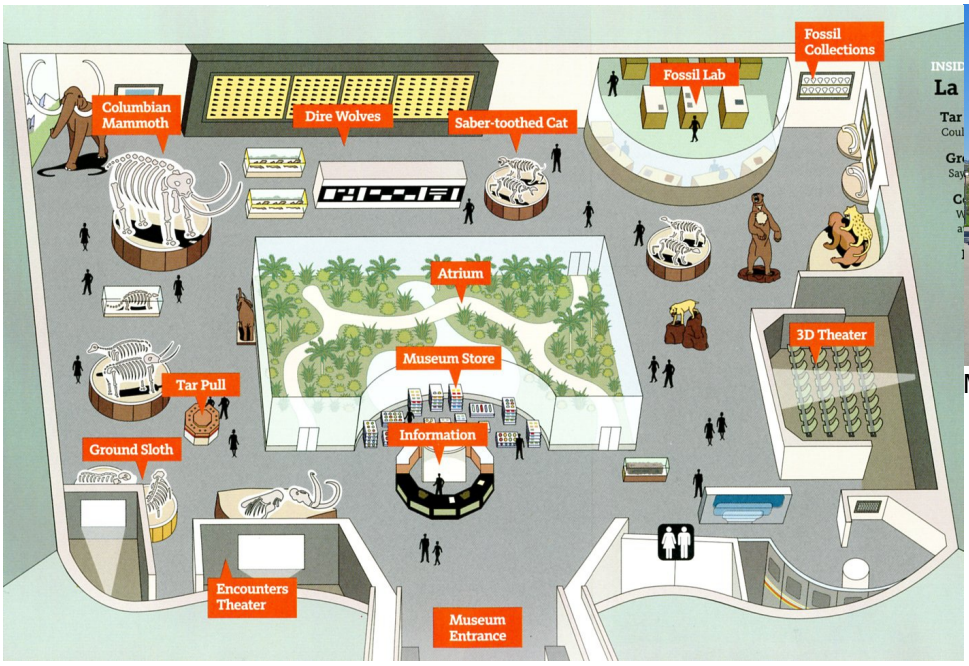
The green park with its tar pits is open to the public without charge. The parking lot and the rectangular Museum charge fees. A new curved building, elevated above an adjacent street was still being constructed as another educational attraction. A Museum handout features the maps on this and a following page of the Park and Museum.

New building being constructed.

Pits 3, 4, 61/67

Large blocks of tar awaiting dissection

In the southeast corner is a large lake of liquid asphalt with bubbling methane.




Museum entrance

The excavated blocks of tar and fossils show a tight packing of random bones from random species. So far thousands of specimens have been recovered from hundreds of species. Large animals are mostly carnivores (wolves and cats) with a few large herbivores. Only a Columbian Mammoth was largely intact.

Block from Pit 81 (1914) partly excavated. Upper bones as if asphalt was gone. The skeletons on display elsewhere were assembled from bones of many different individuals. (Except Columbian Mammoth)

Fossil western horse

Saber-tooth Cats (very common)

Some of the thousands of Dire Wolf skulls.

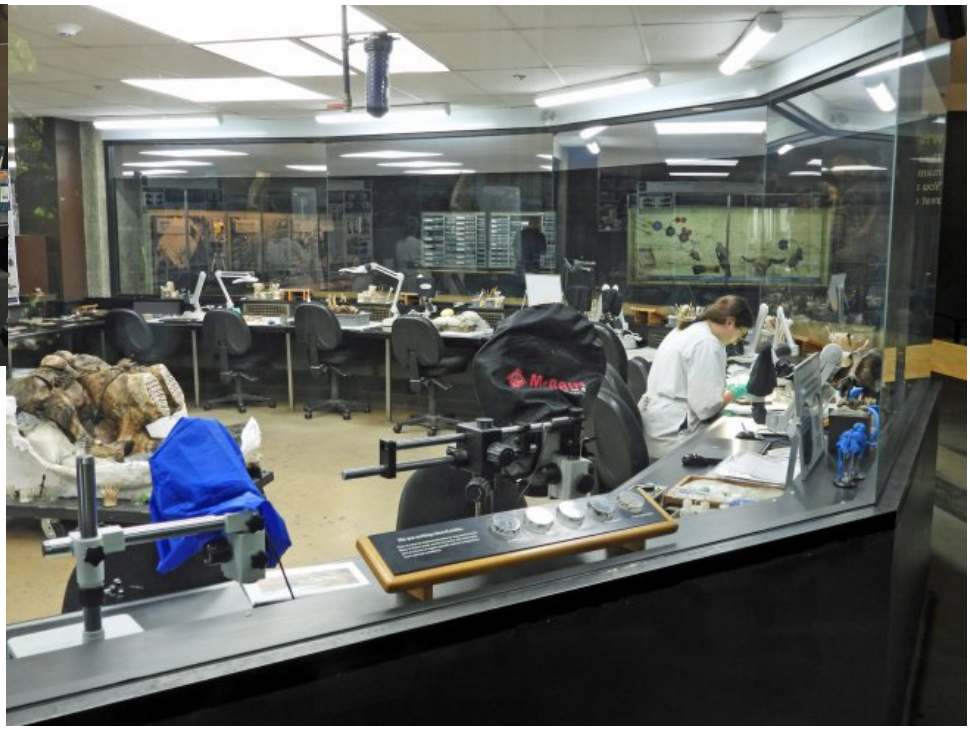
Dire Wolf skeletons (assembled from scattered parts)

Representative birds found as bones

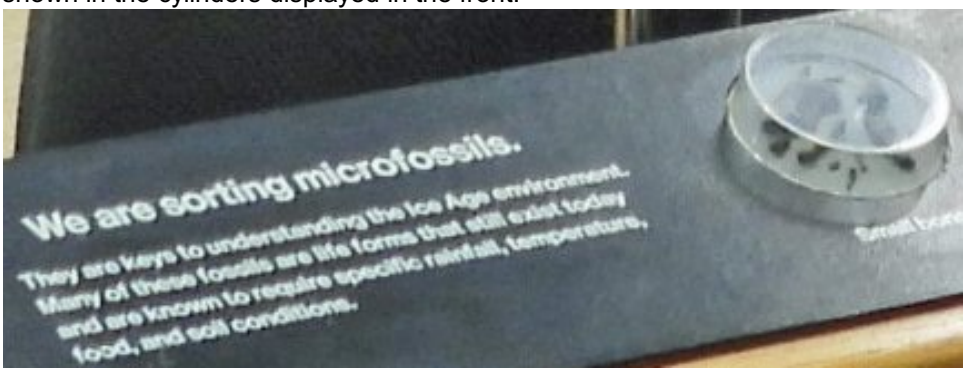
More birds found as bones

Only intact large animal: Mammoth

Finding microfossils of plants and animals, insects for climate analysis



The public can watch ongoing isolation of all types of fossils. Microfossil types are shown in the cylinders displayed in the front.




The tale that has persisted for a century is that over a long period of time towards the end of the Ice Age, animals walked into the tar and were trapped. Carnivores (wolves and cats) came to eat them and were also trapped.

However, more recent analyses show that the carcasses could not be dismantled and show the effects of being turbulently bumped together by such gentle conditions. The sands and gravels and clays in the layers around the pits are typical of river deposits.

A more consistent hypothesis is that during the post-Ice Age melts some catastrophic floods turbulently moved the bones and sediments into this deposit. Then oil and gas from a reservoir a thousand feet below rose through cracks and encased the piles of bones. The lighter oils and gas evaporated leaving the hardened asphalt behind. But it would still need to be explained why the pits contained mostly thousands of carnivores compared to much fewer herbivores.

Dr. Ed Holroyd, 6 August 2025