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## The Ascension to Hell

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# POETINIS: DRINK IN THE TRUTH

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*Turnbull Canyon has long been rumored to be home to occult meetings, ghostly haunts, the scene of brutal murders and tragic accidents. How is it that this seemingly peaceful hiking trail has earned a reputation as a place of mischief and evil? Does this canyon truly keep dark secrets? Or are the tales of Hell's Gate, a mysterious plane crash and KKK meetings just ghost stories? Our team delved into Turnbull Canyon, present and past, determined to plumb its depths and get to the truth, however far down it might drag us.* \*

## **The Ascension to Hell**





A view past the "Gates of Hell"





While the sun's rays steadily creep behind the sycamore trees and the gentle breeze promises serenity, hidden deep within the many rises and ravines that separate Whittier from Hacienda Heights is the sinister history of Turnbull Canyon, a macabre past filled with rumors of an insane asylum, ghostly sightings and a tragic plane crash.

Even if you do not believe in ghost stories, the residents of Whittier have reason to be concerned about what goes on up the many trails in Turnbull Canyon. Sure the persistent rumor of a macabre insane asylum remains in the realm of legend, but the murder of Gloria Gaxiola and the plane crash of 1952 are all too real, causing some residents to wonder why this canyon seems to be like a landlocked Bermuda Triangle, a magnet for unexpected tragedies and chill-seeking adventurers? Some residents are even convinced that the area is tainted by a malevolent energy. Even with its bloody history, though, there is something about Turnbull Canyon that continues to entice those seeking either respite from urban sprawl in its green spaces or escape from youthful boredom in its haunted history.

## Tribal History



The road to hell, unpaved with not-so-good intentions?



Looking through the numerous websites on the myths and hauntings of Turnbull Canyon, one of the most popular theories for all the horrific events (such as the plane crash, several murders and car accidents) that take place in the canyon is that Native Americans' spirits are still angry about having their land taken away. Although these claims cannot be proven, there was a history of tension between the white interlopers and the indigenous people when it came to the canyon.

In the mid-1840s, there were many conflicts over the ownership of land in California which at the time belonged to Mexico and which the U.S. was trying to annex. Early in 1845, William Workman became captain of a cadre of Americans and Europeans serving with Governor Pio Pico in his fight against Governor Manuel Micheltorena in the battle at Cahuenga Pass during the Mexican-American War.

Following the battles against Micheltorena, Pio Pico was appointed governor of Alta California. Pico awarded William Workman 49,000 acres of land, which included what people now know as Turnbull Canyon. Workman did not get along well with the Gabrielino Indians who were the original inhabitants of the land. Even though Gabrielinos would later work for him, it is said that they would raid his property from time to time.

The Gabrielinos were understandably pissed off because prior to Workman's arrival, their land was invaded by Spanish conquistadors. Father Junipero Serra, a founder of some of the California missions, recounted in a letter the brutality of the Spanish soldiers to the Viceroy of Mexico. "When the Indian men sought to defend the women, the soldiers killed several with musket balls," Serra wrote.

Given this history, some people have concluded that the spirits of the Gabrielinos haunt the canyon, along with the ghost of William Workman. According to [hauntedlosangeles.blog.spot.com](http://hauntedlosangeles.blog.spot.com) some claim to hear war drums up in the canyon.



Whittier College alumni Hugo Guzman grew up in Whittier and believes in the many tales of the canyon. He even spoke of an odd experience he had while walking around the canyon. “A friend and I once climbed down the ravine and we had to hike through bramble to get out,” Guzman said. “There was something following us. We never saw it, but we could hear it and feel it’s presence. So, yeah, I can believe that there are some pissed off spirits up there.”

Other Whittier residents say that all the fright hype about the canyon is just a bunch of bologna. “I have heard all stories about the canyon and I still don’t think it is haunted or anything,” former Whittier resident and experienced hiker Amanda Garcia said. “I’ve been up in the canyon several times and have never had any odd experiences.”

Alek Martinez believes that everything that has happened in Turnbull is just coincidence. “It is just unreasonable that people try to make it out to be a place of evil,” Martinez said. “Yes, bad things happened up there, but bad things happen all the time, everywhere.”

## Horror Tale for the Ages





hen speaking to Whittier residents about the myths and incidents surrounding Turnbull Canyon, few of them knew of how the canyon was named after murdered Scottish immigrant Robert Turnbull.

In the *Forgotten Tales* documentaries series, executive producer John Garside, discusses the historical background of Turnbull Canyon. In the episode, “How the Canyon Got Its Name”, Garside tells the story of Robert Turnbull who arrived in California in 1873,

where he lived until being murdered in 1888.

Robert Turnbull was a shepherd who moved to California seeking to make money in real estate. The first patch of land he bought was located in Los Angeles near the Macy Street Bridge, now known as the Cesar Chavez Bridge. Not long after moving to California, Turnbull gained a reputation as the town drunk. It is said that people who had known Turnbull and did business with him never saw him completely sober. His drunkenness would later be a leading factor in his murder.

Executive Producer John Garside's Documentary of Turnbull's Namesake

At around the same time Turnbull was making his way in real estate, the owners of the Temple-Workman Bank, William Workman and his son in law, F. P. F. Temple, were poorly managing their business. In 1875, the state's economy collapsed and the bank was unable to meet the demands of the townspeople. Unable to save their business, the bank was closed January of 1876. In May 1876, Richard Garvey told Workman that Elias J. "Lucky" Baldwin, a landowner investing in the Los Angeles area real-estate market, was going to foreclose on his property. A couple days later Workman grabbed

his revolver and took his own life.

Following the downfall of the Temple-Workman and the death of Workman, Turnbull was appointed to an advisory committee that consisted of the bank's largest creditors. The committee was to work toward getting the townspeople their money back, but whether they did or not is unclear. Being part of the advisory committee, Turnbull was able to buy land for cheap. That is when he decided to buy Turnbull Canyon, which cost him almost nothing. Turnbull liked the canyon because it was a great place for sheep whose wool made him great profit and it had an active stream.



Town drunk and Turnbull Canyon namesake

In 1885, two Quaker men, Aquila Pickering and Jonathon Bailey, were searching for land in California to start a new colony. They purchased land surrounding the canyon

and seeing that the canyon had the water resources they needed to start their new settlement, they approached Robert Turnbull and offered to buy the land. Knowing the value his land had, Turnbull refused to sell it.

The canyon is a place of darkness. I grew up in Whittier and it is just a spooky place in general, but that canyon, that canyon is just a really weird place. Every time I go there I feel something eerie.

For two years the Quakers continued to make Turnbull offers, and in June of 1887, they presented to Turnbull their final and highest offer of \$30,000. That was nearly half the money the Quakers invested in what is now known as Uptown Whittier area. Finally, Turnbull accepted their offer.

On Jan. 18, 1888 Robert Turnbull spent the evening as he had many others — drinking. On his way back home, he fell off his horse and was arrested for public drunkenness. The next morning after spending a night in jail, Turnbull returned home with a broken, bruised and bloodied face. He had been beaten but could not recall how.

As a result of his injuries, the next day Turnbull succumbed to a brain aneurysm that the coroner said was the result of a blow to the head. The aneurysm caused Turnbull to fall off the Macy Bridge into the Los Angeles River where his body was later discovered. Coroners concluded that Turnbull had been murdered.

When the Quakers got news that Turnbull had died they decided to name the canyon after him since he was kind enough to sell them that land.

“Of course the guy it was named after was murdered,” laughed Guzman when told the story of Robert Turnbull. “The canyon is a place of darkness. I grew up in Whittier and it is just a spooky place in general, but that canyon, that canyon is just a really weird place. Every time I go there I feel something eerie.”



# The Forgotten Crash of Flight 416



View overlooking the crash site from 2016



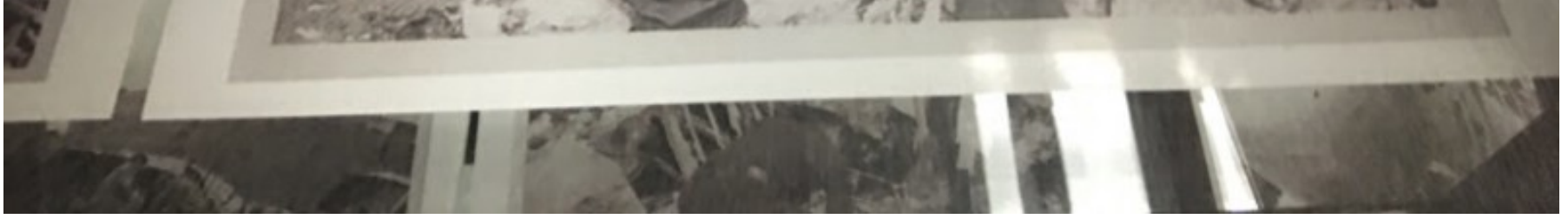
he sun gleams beyond the hillsides of Turnbull Canyon casting a warm glow on all that lays beneath it. The sycamore trees rustle gently with the soft wind and overlooking this peaceful view of the valley, one could never imagine the carnal destruction that had taken place there.

April 18, 1952, the Los Angeles International Airport control tower lost contact with Louis Powell, captain of Flight 416. The plane was expected at to land in Inglewood at the Los Angeles International Airport sometime around 3:30 a.m., but it never arrived.

Captain Powell last made contact with the tower at 3:33 a.m., saying that the plane was positioned over the city of La Habra. Several radio calls were made to Captain Powell and his crew, but a response never came.







Locals cleaning up the debris from the crash

At around 10 A.M. that same morning, a rancher named Hayden Jones was driving around his Whittier Heights ranch when he saw smoke rising from the hills. Concerned, he climbed up a hill to find flames and pieces of steel smashed into a hillside of the canyon.

Nearby residents awoke to the sound of the plane crash. According to police reports, some thought a bomb had exploded and others who suspected it was a plane were unsure because it seemed so unlikely that a plane would crash in the canyon.

Executive Producer John Garside's Documentary of the Crash of 1952

Today, many of the younger generations who have grown up in Whittier and have heard of this incident have written it off as a myth and are surprised to learn that the

plane crash, another Turnbull Canyon story featured on *Forgotten Tales*, actually happened.

The reason the plane crashed was because Captain Powell decided to fly 10 feet below the suggested altitude. It has been speculated that the reason Powell chose to fly at a lower altitude was due to the thick fog that made it difficult for him to see where he was flying. The plane crashed as its wing scraped a side of the narrow canyon and spun out of control.



1952 News Article regarding the plane crash

According to those that inspected the crash site, the plane burst into flames upon impact. Local ranchers did not see spot burning plane until 10 a.m. because fog had been concealing the billowing smoke.





Digging through the wreckage for clues

As authorities cleaned up after the crash, they found it difficult to pin down how many passengers had been on board. Had it not been for a document that had all on board recorded, they may have never known because some passengers had disintegrated in the flames. There were a total of 29 people on board Flight 416. All passengers were said to have died at the moment of impact. One of the passengers on board was a resident of Whittier named Harriet Parmelee.

Harriet Parmelee was 29 when she died in the plane crash. She was a flight attendant who was off duty at the time and boarded Flight 416 to get back home after staying with family in Michigan for her uncle Claude Parmelee's funeral.







Some of the debris from the wreckage located at the Whittier Museum

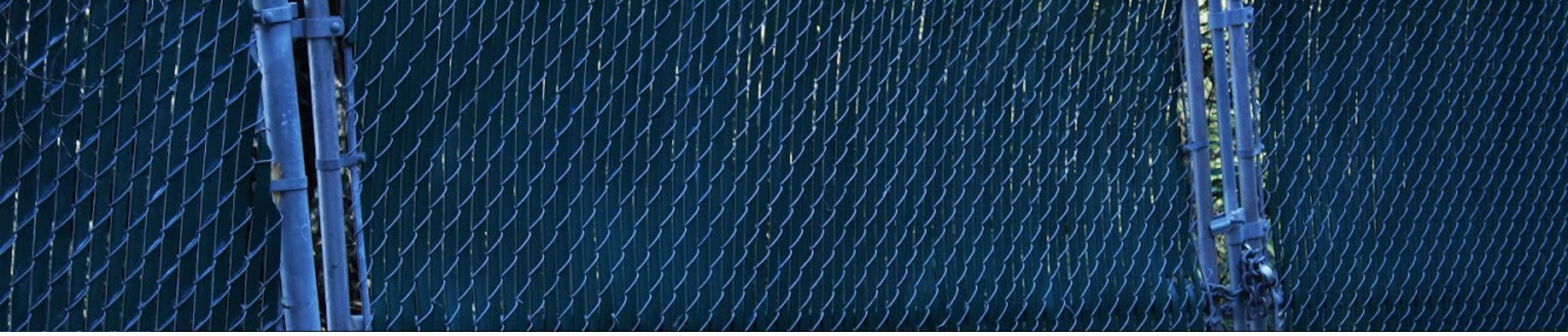
Claude Parmelee was in his sporting goods store at the time of his death. A gas leak had erupted into a massive explosion.

After having lost his daughter and brother in such a short time frame, Gayle Parmelee suffered from a broken heart that killed him two months after Harriet Parmelee's death. Both he and his daughter were laid to rest in Rose Hills Cemetery.

## The Hunt for Hell's Gates







Abandon hope all ye who enter here?



etween Skyline Drive and Descending Drive, the meandering path is said to lead to Hell's Gates. However, the path is not "paved with the skulls of unbaptized babies" nor

is it strewn with dried blood or Satanic markings as some rumors suggest.

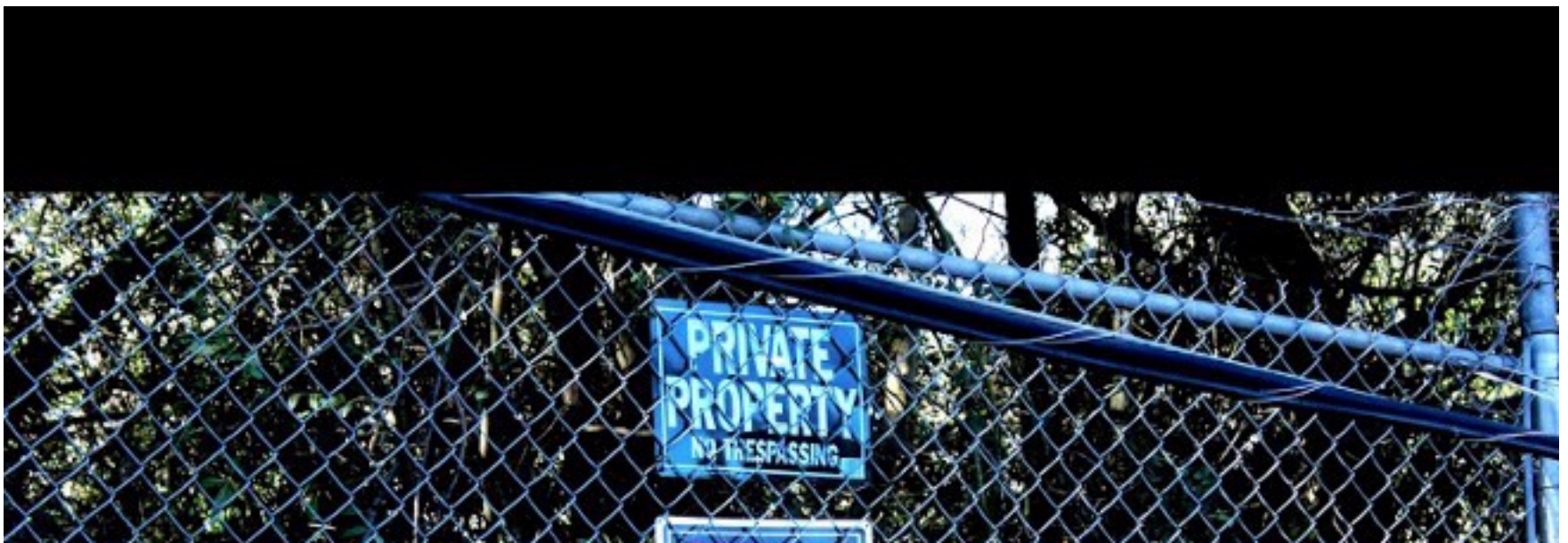
Those who hope to come across Satanists will find that the dusty trail leads to a gated fence topped with rusted barbed wire covered with signs saying “Private Property” and “Beware of Dog.” Signs that attempt to dispel those looking for adventure, but instead further entice reckless individuals to trespass and it is easy to see why.

The looming ramshackle gates provoke curiosity and the dense overgrowth makes it nearly impossible to see what lurks behind. Rusted chains loosely hold the gates shut. A broken warning sign swings petulantly with the breeze. There is no sign of a guard dog anywhere. Some believe the legendary insane asylum waited beyond these gates, a place where mental patients were mistreated until it burned down.

What lies on the other side? According to El Rancho High School student Anthony Martinez\*, not much. “Just mostly spiders, bottles and car parts in the surrounding gated bushes,” he said.

Martinez has visited Turnbull Canyon numerous times often goes at night. He has hiked the trails, heard the stories and even trespassed beyond Hell’s Gates. “It was a path that led up to [a] stop sign and someone’s backyard,” said Martinez.

Nothing outside the gates suggests the foundations of an asylum with the exception of a protruding chimney-like structure that can only be seen in the distance. “There’s always a chance of something or someone hidden in the thick bushes,” said Martinez. “I didn’t explore though. I followed the loose trail, so I’ll never fully know I suppose.”







# The True and Chilling Murders





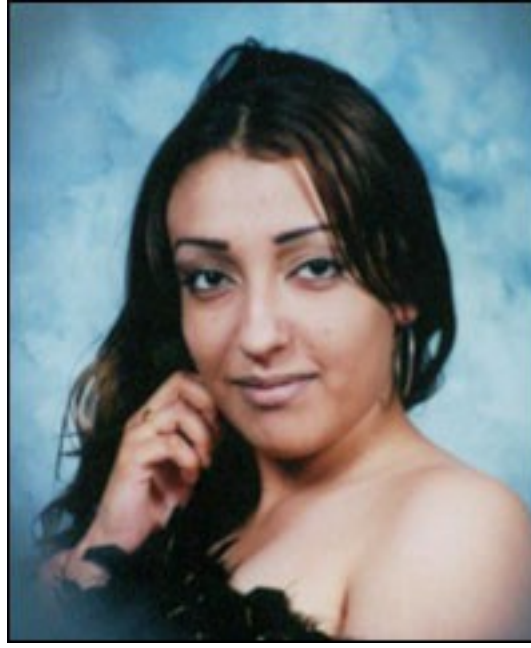
ct. 12, 2002, 17-year-old Gloria Linda Gaxiola was shot in the head on Turnbull Canyon Road before being dragged by a car four miles to Hacienda Heights.

Her body was found at the crossroads of Hacienda Boulevard and Colima Road. It is speculated that unbeknownst to her killers her foot had been stuck on a seat belt.

For five years the case made little-to-no progress until the arrival of a new witness whose help ultimately led to the arrests of three suspects. Abraham Acuna, Mathew Garcia and Victor Monge, three men she had known and been friends with, were convicted with first-degree murder for the brutal killing of Gaxiola.

They were afraid Gaxiola would testify against them for a robbery they'd committed and decided to kill her. Acuna, Garcia and Monge had all previously been involved with criminal activity and were eligible to face a lifetime in prison.

According to a *Whittier Daily News* article, Monge was convicted of robbery and attempted robbery respectively in 1995 and 1998. Acuna was also convicted of robbery in 1993 and of drug possession in 1998. Acuna was previously arrested in 1992 for suspicion in being involved in an attempted murder, although he was never convicted. Garcia was convicted for robbery in 2000.



Gloria Linda Gaxiola, RIP.

All were arrested in 2008 for the murder of Gaxiola with Monge sentenced to 85 years in prison, Garcia to 80 and Acuna to 55.

The following year, on Tuesday August 4, 2009, Christine Martinez was stabbed and slashed with needled and left to die. Vincent Mendoza, 21, Edward Meraz, 24, and Jose Ayala, 27, were booked on suspicion of attempted murder and kidnapping. According to a Whittier Daily News article Martinez “sustained a 4-inch laceration across her neck and numerous abrasions and head contusions.”

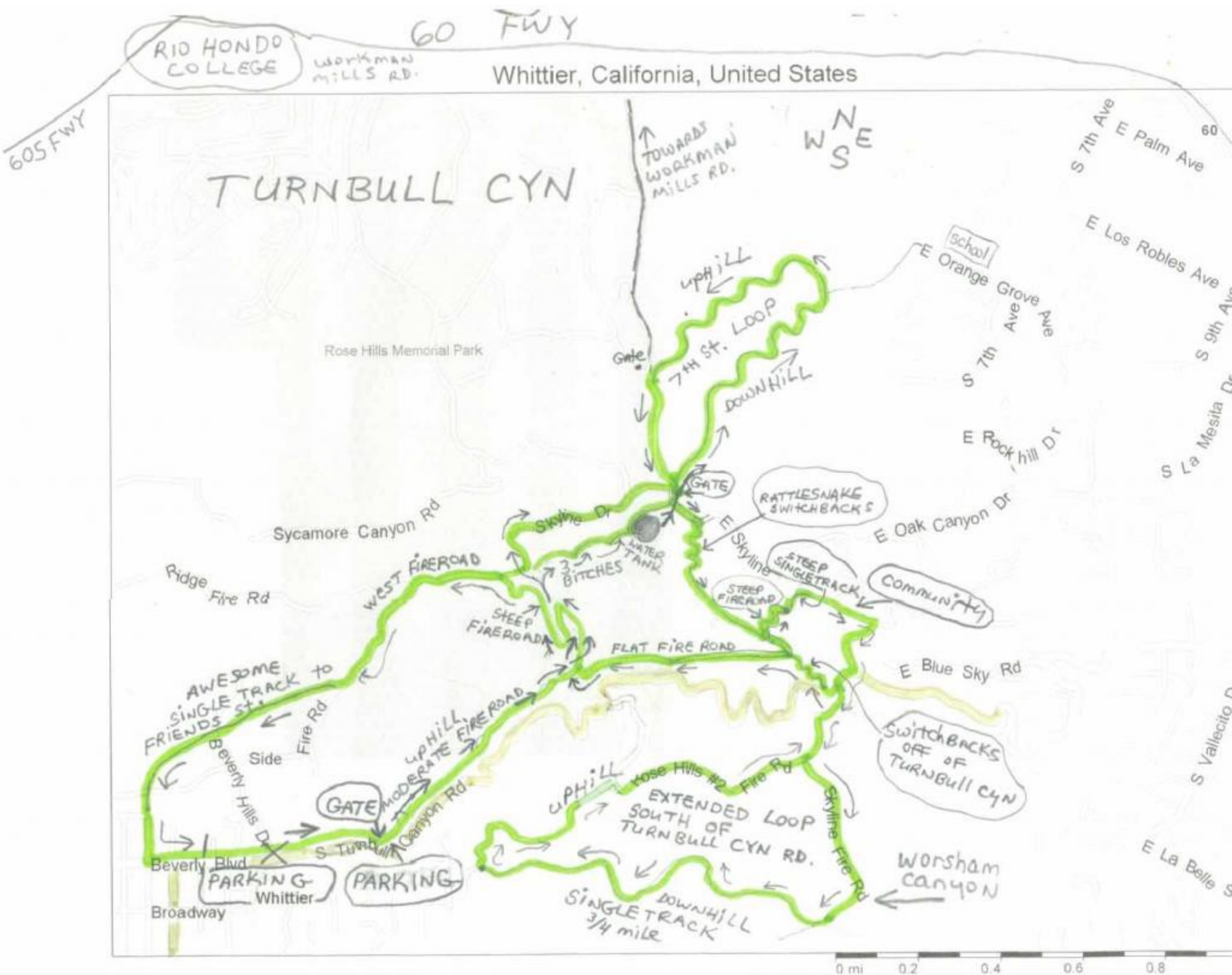
Martinez knew her attackers and told investigators she thought they were her friends. Martinez had been traveling with Meraz and two other men, Jose Ayala and Vincent Mendoza. Martinez managed to climb out of the ravine and sought help at the home of 90-year-old Arlene Boatright.

Meraz and Mendoza were found guilty of kidnapping, assault with a deadly weapon, attempted murder and conspiracy to commit murder. Ayala received a 39 year sentence.

On March 03, 2011, an unidentified woman’s body was found hidden in one of Turnbull Canyon’s ravines. Parts of her body were missing. According to the Whittier Daily News she was found “ten feet deep in an embankment” with her left arm missing and her body heavily decomposed. Her identity has yet to be discovered.



# Conclusion



A Map of Turnbull Canyon

As horrible as these real-life events were, other tales could neither be confirmed or debunked. We searched for the alleged “hanging tree,” from which some have said a man can be seen hanging, but he disappears when you look twice. Some say it is the ghost of a man who had hung himself and that he only can be seen at the time of his death. \*

We did not find the supposed gravity hill or any haunted burial site. We did not



encounter any occult activities. We did, however, find someone who had seen members of the Ku Klux Klan. “I’ve seen the KKK once at the top of the road, and they just harassed us by yelling, telling us to leave. They had tree large trucks, and one carried a giant American flag on the back,” said Whittier resident Vanessa Gonzalez.

As the sun slips lazily behind the hills, the creeping darkness falling over the valley pulsates with a dark energy that feeds off the excitement and fear of those who visit Turnbull Canyon, whether it be the miscreants who gather in the dark or thrill-seeking teenagers hoping to find still undiscovered secrets in canyons and ravines.

\*Some names have been changed.



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Also check out [“Turnbull’s Fracking Problem”](#) for more recent canyon controversy.

\*

Thanks to Joe Donnelly (hide) and Gaby Cedeno.

History

Crime

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