

Trial By Sidewalk: Walking L.A., Skid Row to Santa Monica

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

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Howdy.

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I'm in West Hollywood, I'm heading along to Skid Row this morning, where... I will walk from there, from Skid Row, across the city and finish in Santa Monica.

This is something I've wanted to do for a while. I've... what I've been here now for 15 years, back and forth. So I know this city very well and really the number one way I've gotten to know it is by walking. Primarily 'cause I was a brokeass bish when I first arrived, and that's the cheapest way to get around.

And then because I noticed that it is actually a really rich way of experiencing this city. You notice a lot more, you encounter a lot more people than you would in the sort of enclosed bubble of your car. And so it's now something I do with great pride and joy.

But one thing I've noticed in all the years of doing it is that the only type of person who typically walks around Los Angeles is, one, dog walkers. So that guy. And, two, homeless, the homeless people, who of course... only the latter do it through lack of choice and lack of funds and lack of means.

The challenges for the homeless

I've wanted to do something like this for a while, in order to take on myself and experience firsthand some of the physical labor that homeless people face every single day, just doing simple things.

So applying for jobs, how do they get there. And how do they move all their things. Using the bathroom. Rehydrating: very important in city as - [off sun flare] there you go - as sunny and hot as Los Angeles.

Another thing I'll take on is the lack of shade. I happen to be in a very leafy area of Los Angeles at the moment, but most of the path I will walk today is exposed sidewalk with few trees above it.

Advantages check

I should point out that I am considerably in better shape than most of the homeless would be. I'm a marathon runner, so this distance isn't particularly intimidating, but there will, as I say, be specific challenges that come with the topography of Los Angeles. And, yeah, I'm gonna have to figure [those] out as I go along.

The supplies

I have \$5 in my wallet, with which to buy nutrition as I go along. And I also have a slightly inept homemade sandwich with me. That's all. And two bottles of water. And obviously I'll be refilling those as I go along.

Enough pre-amble already

Here we go. Skid Row to Santa Monica.

Start point: Skid Row

The start point of my walk. This is Skid Row. I'm not gonna show you very much video from here. This is people's lives, folks who have fallen. And personally, if I had fallen to this, I would... I'm not sure I'd take kindly to some white chick with an iPhone poking a camera around. So I do feel a conflict between sharing the images of this with you - sometimes an image is the only thing that can convey the true extent of something - and yeah, like I say, respect for the people here who... these are people with stories and family. And I want to respect their privacy.

So I probably won't show very much, but here I am. This is an intersection that always kills me, because this happens to be Sixth Street and... and Wall. So this is Wall Street intersecting with Sixth here.

This is the other Wall Street of America. So we've got the Wall Street in New York City, where dreams are, you know, feel limitless and money flows. And then here we have a Wall Street in Los Angeles where I... I don't believe either of those things are true.

Fifth Street, DTLA

I'm hopping into the library behind me: the LAPL, one of the best libraries in the world in my opinion. To use the bathroom and grab some water from the fountain, in anticipation of there not necessarily being a bathroom or water source for at least a few miles ahead. So: LAPL.

Wilshire/Lucas

Howdy. So I'm bouncing along Wilshire about 10 blocks now west of DTLA. So still quite early in my walk here. And one thing I'm already thinking about is something I read once in a first person account by a homeless person. It was a gentleman and he explained how boring homelessness is. And that might seem... that might seem strange at first. The visceral challenges studded throughout the day for a homeless person. Like, where's the next meal coming from? Where am I sleeping tonight? How am I gonna get my phone charged up, which is a problem I'm gonna have to deal with soon.

Obviously there's those small dramas throughout the day, but in between long periods of what can feel like purposelessness. And, yeah, I'm thinking about that now as I walk along, because this is gonna be a hella long way, and I have no idea how I'm gonna pass the time beside just spending time with myself.

We often see the, you know, classic homeless caricature of somebody stooped over, talking to themselves. But, actually, given how boring homelessness is, it doesn't surprise me. Surely you'd end up talking to yourself. There's nothing else to do to kill the time.

MacArthur Park

I've always loved this statue. It's so American. It's, "Onwards!"

Vermont/6th

So I'm now heading up Vermont, so towards Santa Monica - Boulevard, that is, not the city - and Sunset. And, yeah, this is now K-Town. So Koreatown, a really interesting area that I lived in very early on, when I first started to split time between Europe and Los Angeles. K-Town was an early neighborhood for me. So this is something of a memory lane. Yay.

Vermont/1st

So really feeling the luck of shade now. This is Vermont still. I'm gonna head a little west to try and find some shade. But yeah, it's pretty brutal.

Vermont/Clinton

Ready? And... shade at last. But it's scaffolding, so not part of the city design. This is arbitrary. But, phew, at least some shade... finally.

Vermont/Santa Monica

Santa Monica Boulevard is right in front of me here and, to the west, the terminus is my final destination, the city of Santa Monica. However, I'm not in any way close yet, unless you zoom out a lot.

Vermont/Fountain

So this is Fountain. Just a quick note on this. I used to very happily cycle all the way along Fountain. It goes from a little bit east of here, all the way to La Cienega in West Hollywood. And, yeah, it's a designated cycle route, which means that they paint bicycles on the road and then leave you to it. And there are now lanes as well they've marked for cyclists. But, yeah, cycling in LA is a whole other thing. I'm not presently cycling around, but maybe someday I will in fact get my spokes out again. But it was... those were happy times for me. So: Fountain.

Vermont/Sunset

So here I am at Sunset Boulevard. So I'll be heading west - that-a-way - from here. And, yeah, a bit more shade here and a bit more walkable. So doing well, let's keep going.

Sunset/New Hampshire

Alright, just had a bathroom break at Starbucks here on Sunset. Had to ask for the restroom code, which had changed in the, like, 48 hours since I was last here, meeting a friend for coffee. But, yeah, I got it easy and was able to do my thing in the bathroom. But I'm just wondering if I wasn't wearing this, like, \$150 shirt and, uh, the face that looks like someone... who's just walked out of 'Little House On The Prairie', if it would've been quite

so easy for me. So, you know, if I were a homeless person, lugging all my belongings, probably with a pungent aroma, on account of not having been able to take a shower for a while, I wonder if it would've been quite the same experience.

Sunset/Winona

So to save time, I'm devouring my, as I mentioned, ineptly constructed homemade sandwich as I go along. Let it be known that a peanut butter sandwich is basically the height of my culinary skills. I like to think I can do it well. Spread evenly, you know, just the right amount. Those things matter. But yeah, that is pretty much the height of what I can do in the kitchen. Hey, I can walk instead. My skills are walking. And eating.

Sunset/Tamarind

This is Hollywood proper, so where all the tourists come to stare at stars embedded in the sidewalk and pay inordinately for punny license plates. Yeah, so... I'll get through it. Anyway...

Sunset/Wilcox

Just had to take a brief interlude to power up my phone a little bit. It hit, like, 3%, and that's no good. I need it to stay with me through the end of this grueling adventure. And so I ducked into Staples, that renowned power supplier, and found, like, a random socket and just sat there like a muppet for 15 minutes, until I was up to 19% again. Which is, you know, dicey, but I can get by. Yeah, I felt like a real homeless person for a moment there. So yeah, power in my phone is gonna be a challenge. I'm gonna have to keep doing the so-called "Staples Maneuver" and finding an unsuspecting power socket as I go along.

Sunset/Martel

So I need to add something to the list of folks who walk in L.A. This guy. Now walks in L.A. I believe they're now autonomous. So it's just us v. the robots from this point on.

Santa Monica/Olive

So now I've come down to Santa Monica [Boulevard], which has brought me into the heart of West Hollywood, my favorite part of the city and the part that I would call home when I'm here. So I'm heading west now, mainly along Santa Monica until I hit the city of the

same name. I have about as far to go as I've come, so I need to step it out now and stop dawdling.

Santa Monica/Doheny

Okay. So I'm now in Beverly Hills. This is one of my favorite places to run. A flat run, at least.

Santa Monica/Rexford

I have a battery situation. I'm at 7%, so I'm just gonna duck into the Beverly Hills Library, which is another great library I'm very fond of. Fun fact about this library: it's probably the only library that I personally know of where you can take out a crime novel on one side and then file a crime report on the other. It has a police station right by it, in fact it's on the same campus, with a connecting bridge between the two, as though they almost expect you to take out a crime novel on one side and then file a crime report on the other. Hmm, interesting. Anyway, I'm gonna get my battery situation sorted and then carry on.

Santa Monica/Moreno

At this point I'm feeling it a little bit. I'm kind of more aware of my butt than I ordinarily am. My muscles are kindly letting me know I have a butt. So, yeah. But it's good to know, right? I want that feedback.

Santa Monica/Pandora

I just passed Beverly Glen and, yeah, I'm really hoping to make it to the ocean before nightfall. I kind of really wanna see the ocean just as the sun goes down. That was the plan. I think I can do it.

Santa Monica/Manning

Alright, so I'm still on Santa Monica [Boulevard], but I just wanted to shout out to... another... another LA Landmark, aside from guys with engines like that to remind you they have a tiny dick. Here is a big dick. This is the Mormon temple. This is on Santa Monica and Manning. It doesn't look that impressive just when it's behind me, but actually it's very much a kind of... it really stands out on the skyline. So that's the Mormon temple right there.

Federal, en route to Wilshire

So I have left Ohio behind me. I'm now on Federal, and this will connect me to Wilshire. And from there it's straight down Wilshire to Santa Monica, baby. So I'm very close now. I would say one hour max left of walking. Awesome.

Wilshire/26th

So I just passed 26th on Wilshire, which means I have 26 more blocks to cover before the sun goes down. Yeah... okay.

Wilshire/Ocean

Well, I made it. I didn't quite hit my goal of getting here before sundown. As you can see, the sun is actually set. It set about 15 minutes ago. But, yeah, here I am in Santa Monica. It's, uh, six something, six thirty, I think. And, yeah, I've been walking since ten a.m. So it was a long one. Grueling, for sure, but also beautiful and affirming and... yeah, I love this city, warts and all, and everything that I've experienced today has only accentuated that feeling. So thank you, Los Angeles. It's been a blast.

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