Located just a few blocks south of here, the Baldwin Hills contain the largest contiguous oil field production land left in the urban Los Angeles Basin. The land is a veritable museum of a Los Angeles landscape in the 1920s, when the city was still largely open land, and was at the peak of oil production, supplying a quarter of the world’s oil.

Inglewood Oil Field
The Baldwin Hills lie atop the Inglewood Oil Field, one of the most productive oil fields in the region. The field was discovered in 1924, and since that time it has produced almost 400 million barrels of oil. When it was first developed, most of the surface above the field was owned by just 5 companies, so it was developed in a more orderly fashion than some of the chaotic fields, like Signal Hill and Huntington Beach. It reached peak production in just a year, and has continued to produce large amounts of oil ever since.

Operated for many years by Stocker Resources, the field changed hands when Plains Exploration and Production (PXP) bought Stocker a few years ago. PXP, based in Houston, now operates a number of fields in the Los Angeles area. The company keeps around 430 of the 1,200 wells in the hills pumping, extracting more than three million barrels of oil annually, giving the Inglewood Field the rank of 79 on the “Top 100 most productive fields in USA” list in 2007 (only 10 other California oil fields on the list).

The privately owned and fenced productive area of the oil field is the largest “undeveloped” area in urban Los Angeles County. It is a hole in the urban fabric: the largest open space west of the Puente Hills and south of the Santa Monica Mountains. Its future is destined to be one of the major land use battles in Los Angeles. Proposals include a 1,400 acre Great Park, integrating the existing parklands at Kenneth Hahn State Park, with a land bridge across La Cienega Boulevard, to the 950 acres of a restored, natural-esque, post-oil landscape, with trails, recreation, and wildlife habitats. In the meantime, for the foreseeable future, and supported by the rising value of oil, the Baldwin Hills will continue generating over $200 million per year in oil and gas revenue for its owners, and will remain a wild, historic, natural, industrial landscape surrounded by an ocean of concrete and asphalt.