

CAPTAIN JACK'S STRONGHOLD

Historic Trail

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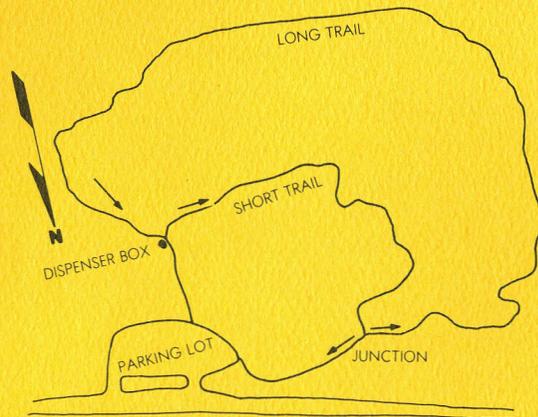


Lava Beds
National Monument



Published for the National Park Service
by the Lava Beds Natural History Association
2nd Edition—1978

Illustrations from: *The Illustrated London News*,
April, 1873, created by William S. Simpson



--IMPORTANT--

The Stronghold trail will take you through the rough lava that the Modoc Indians used as a place of defense from their enemies. It is a wild place much as it was when the Indians were here, so be careful and think about the following precautions before walking it.

- Use common sense.
- Wear sturdy shoes.
- Know where your children are and protect them.
- Watch out for loose rocks.
- Be aware of snakes; they are sometimes seen when least expected.
- Be aware of the hot, dry heat of summer, it can be very tiring.

INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years the Klamath Basin has been a home for men who came to live and enjoy the richness of the land. First the Ancients, who left only tracings on the rocks as a record of their time here. Then came other "Natives," perhaps descendants of the Ancients, or perhaps they too wandered here in search of a richer life. How many groups came and went, no one knows. What is known is that those who lived here in the 1840's began to object to the ever increasing stream of people from the east.

The new men were of a different race. They had complex tools, and many domestic animals. Many passed through but some stayed. By the 1860's they had ranches and settlements in and around the Basin. The "Modoc Indians" began to feel crowded and threatened. The "Whites" were annoyed by the persistent Indian presence and by their periodic "raids" and threats.

Government administrators persuaded the "people of the south lake," the Modocs, to leave their traditional lands and move north to live with their Indian neighbors, the Klamaths. Although the life styles of these two groups were similar, and they were in a real sense related, they could not live together in harmony. The Klamaths resented the Modocs

and badgered them. The Modocs felt like aliens and claimed they did not receive all of the supplies they were promised by the government. Unable to find relief, the Modocs left the Klamath Reservation and returned to their traditional land on the Lost River near the Oregon-California border. The Modoc leader, Kient-poops, or Captain Jack, tried to keep his people clear of trouble with the settlers, but it was not always possible.

Captain Jack wanted a reservation on the Lost River but the settlers pressured the army to move the Modocs back to the Klamath Reservation. The settlers prevailed, and on November 29, 1872, a detachment of the First Cavalry from Fort Klamath, Oregon, arrayed before the Modoc's camp, ordered Captain Jack's men to disarm and return to the Reservation. As the Indians were complying, words, then shots, were exchanged. When the combatants separated, one soldier was dead, seven were wounded and the Modocs were headed for the lava beds.

On the same morning that Captain Jack's band was confronted by the cavalry, a group of "volunteers" attacked the camp of another band of Modocs under a sub-chief known as Hooker Jim. In the fight several Modocs were killed and during their retreat around the north side of Tule Lake the Indians

took revenge by killing 12 male settlers on isolated ranches in their path. When Hooker Jim arrived at the Stronghold, Captain Jack was dismayed at the killing spree but took these Modocs into the sanctuary. The Indians waited and the army gathered its strength.

On January 17, 1873, a two-pronged attack was launched on the stronghold from the east and west. A coordinated effort was impossible because of the rough terrain and a dense fog which surrounded the area. The first attack failed with the Army suffering 37 casualties. The Indians lost no one.

It became obvious to the army more troops would be required to dislodge the Modocs and reinforcements were called for. Meanwhile, both sides expressed a willingness to talk and a peace commission consisting of five white men, under General E.R.S. Canby, was organized. Captain Jack's cousin, Toby Riddle who was married to a white man, acted as interpreter.

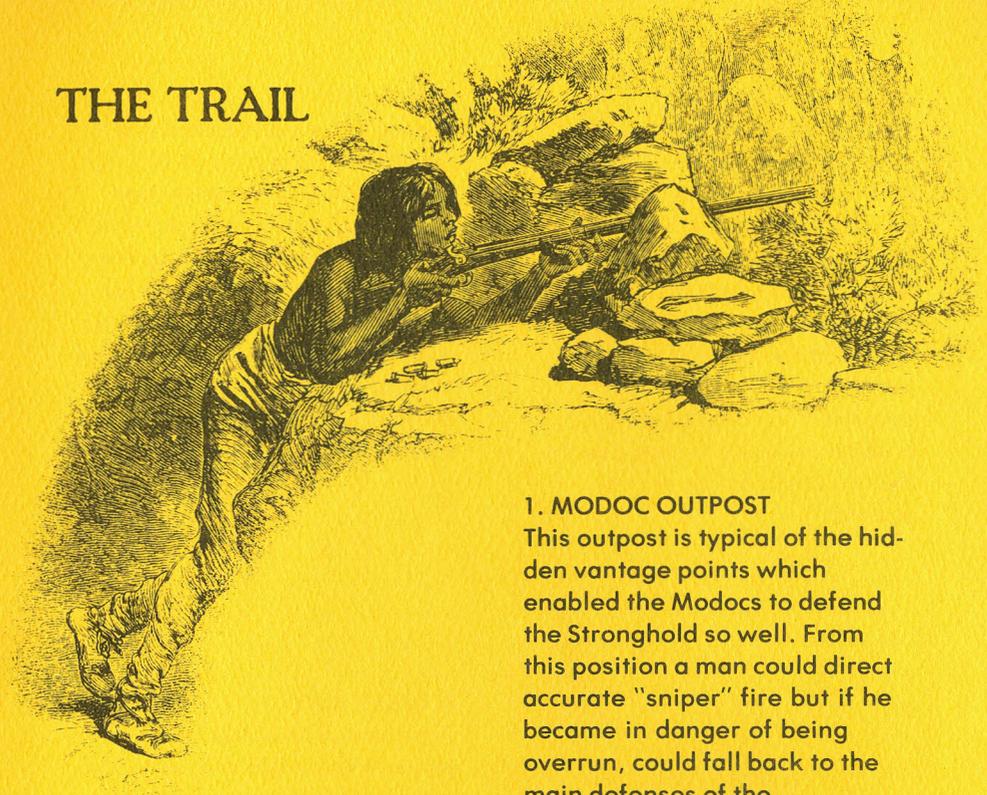
Little progress was made. The Army was unwilling to promise the Indians their own reservation. Captain Jack refused to give up Hooker Jim and the others who were responsible for killing the settlers.

As the talks dragged on, the Army forces continued to grow in size and strength. Some of the Indians became concerned that

their chief might agree to the Army's demands. During a war council in the Stronghold, Hooker Jim and his followers ridiculed Captain Jack into swearing he would kill General Canby. At the next meeting of the Indians and the peace commission, General Canby and a Reverend Thomas were killed. Three days later, on April 15, 1873, the Army again attacked, supported by fire from four Coehorn mortars and two mountain howitzers. After two days of hard fighting, the Indians' situation became serious. They were cut off from water, and were being harrassed by a mortar shell bursting nearby every 15 minutes during the night.

Under cover of darkness, the Modocs withdrew to the south along a secret route through the rough terrain, and were again loose in the lava beds. Pursuit by the Army brought more fighting and bloodshed, but the outcome was no longer in doubt. Half-starved, encumbered by the women and children, and divided by conflict over leadership, the Indians were finally captured in small bands. The Modocs never got their reservation and their identity as a tribe became lost. But for nearly five months the Stronghold fortress enabled an Indian fighting force of less than 60 men to hold off an entire army of over 600. By walking this trail you will see how it was possible.

THE TRAIL



1. MODOC OUTPOST

This outpost is typical of the hidden vantage points which enabled the Modocs to defend the Stronghold so well. From this position a man could direct accurate "sniper" fire but if he became in danger of being overrun, could fall back to the main defenses of the Stronghold. "The Modocs were scarcely exposed at all to our persistent attacks... One of our men was wounded twice during the day, but he did not see an Indian at all," lamented Colonel Frank Wheaton after the Stronghold's first battle.

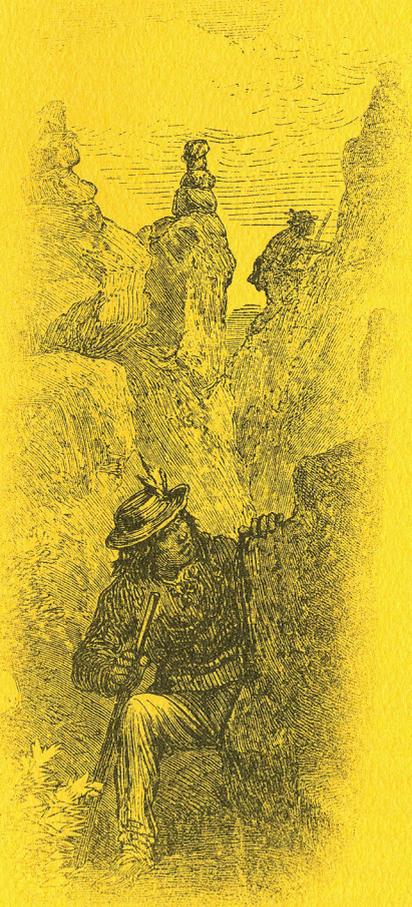
2. MAIN DEFENSE LINE

In front of you begins the inner perimeter of defense. The clefts in the lava are like crevasses in a glacier—formed as the solidified crust of the flow was dragged forward by movement of the still molten lava beneath. These fissures make the one half square mile Stronghold area a fortress. Attack from any direction was very difficult.

From a distance the terrain looks deceptively even and easily negotiable. The attacking soldiers soon found, however, that the deep crevices and jagged boulders were terrible obstacles to negotiate under fire.

3. FIRING POSITION

This position anchored the southeast perimeter of the Modoc defensive line. It offered an excellent view and field of fire against troops advancing on this sector. During the first attack a thick fog covered the field. Coordinating troop movements was all but impossible and consolidating the Indians could not be accomplished.



4. SHELTER

Forced to spend the harshest months of the winter of 1872-73 in the Stronghold the Modocs suffered great hardships. With little fuel available among the rocks, most had to be used for cooking. Warming fires became a relative luxury. The small cave on your left was no doubt used by Indians guarding this defensive sector.

5. SALLY WAY

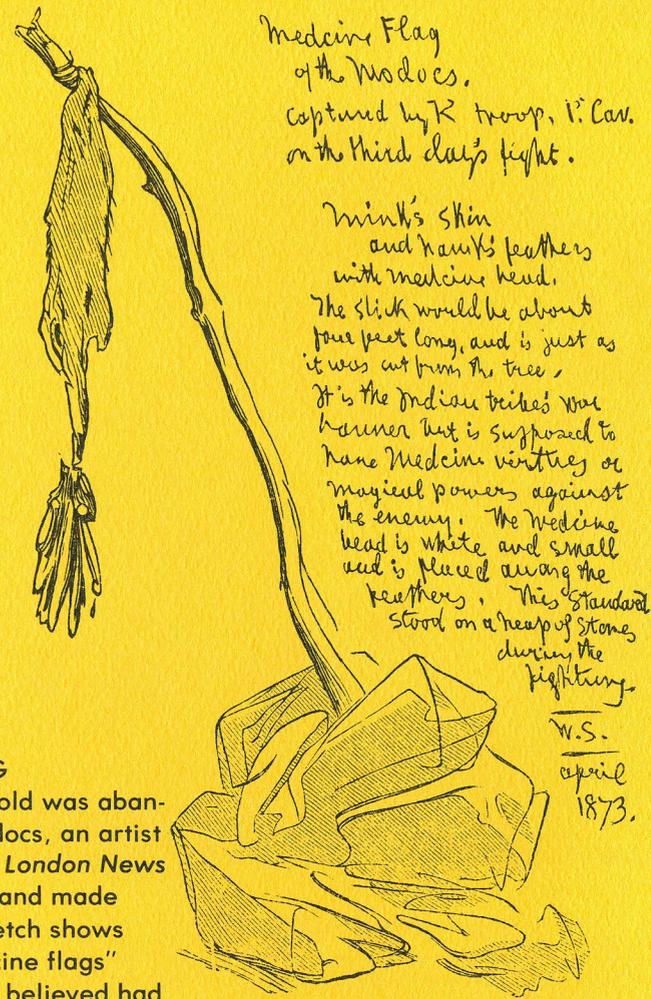
Positions such as this one projecting at right angles to the main defense line permitted defenders to concentrate flanking fire on anyone approaching the main position.

6. MEDICINE FLAG

After the Stronghold was abandoned by the Modocs, an artist for the *Illustrated London News* entered the area and made sketches. This sketch shows one of the "medicine flags" which the Indians believed had special magical powers. It is believed that a medicine flag hung from the high point which you see silhouetted against the sky 15 meters (48 feet) to the northeast. The fort beside the trail at this stop was constructed by the soldiers after the Army occupied the Stronghold.

The principal Modoc shaman, Curley Headed Doctor, also braided a rope made of tules, painted it red, and placed it before the defensive positions.

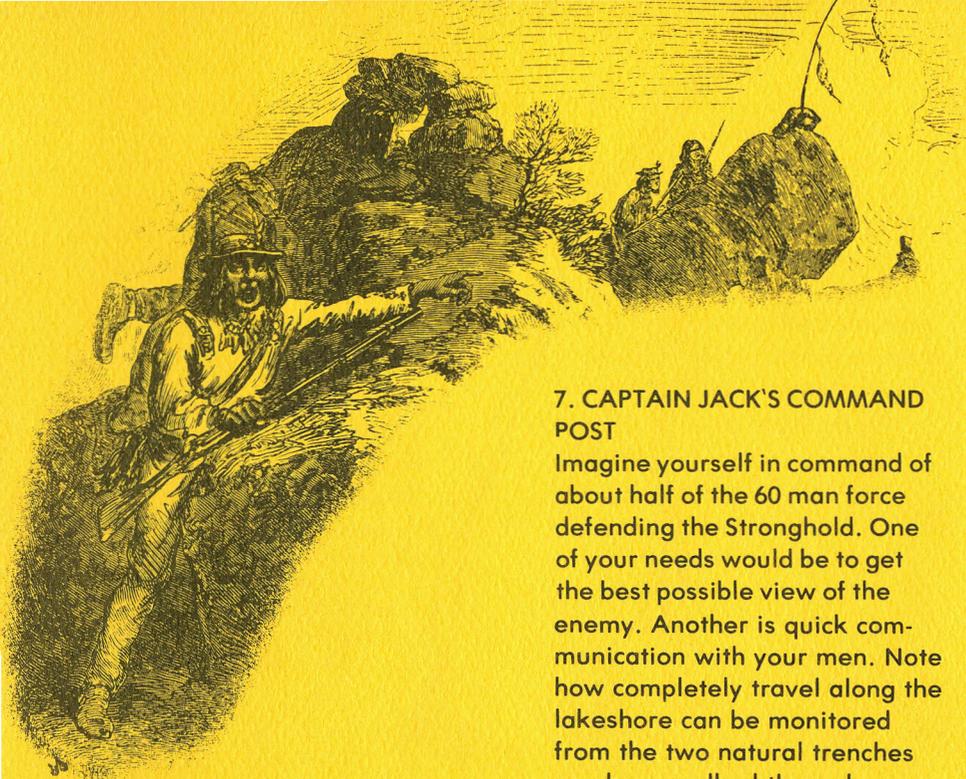
Medicine Flag
of the Modocs,
captured by R. troop, 1st Cav.
on the third day's fight.



Wink's skin
and hawk's feathers
with medicine head.
The stick would be about
four feet long, and is just as
it was cut from the tree.
It is the Indian tribes' war
hammer but is supposed to
have medicine virtues or
magical powers against
the enemy. The medicine
head is white and small
and is placed among the
feathers. This standard
stood on a heap of stones
during the fighting.

W.S.
April
1873.

The Indians believed the soldiers could not pass the rope and the medicine flag rendered the soldier's bullets harmless. Throughout the first battle the charms seemed to support the claims, for the soldiers retreated and no Indian was killed, but in the second battle a Modoc was killed when he picked up a mortar ball that exploded in his face.



7. CAPTAIN JACK'S COMMAND POST

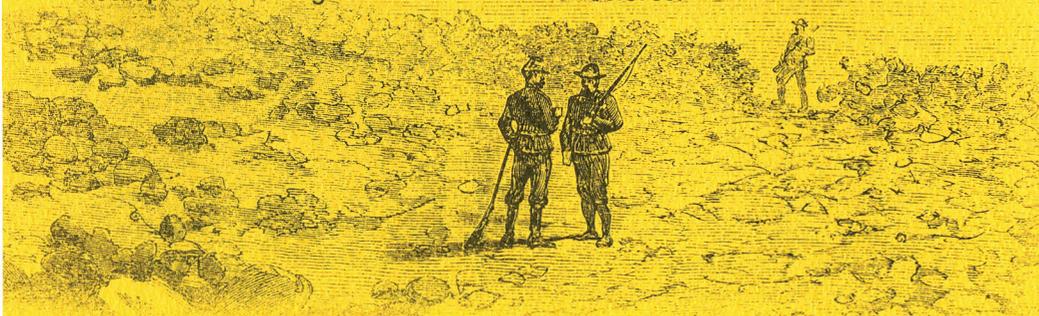
Imagine yourself in command of about half of the 60 man force defending the Stronghold. One of your needs would be to get the best possible view of the enemy. Another is quick communication with your men. Note how completely travel along the lakeshore can be monitored from the two natural trenches you have walked through. Captain Jack commanded this eastern sector of the Stronghold and Schonchin John the western side.



8. ROCK WALLS

Where natural features did not exist, the Modocs continued their defense line by means of low stone walls that wind snake-like through this part of the Stronghold. When the Army occupied the Stronghold after

the second battle, they built additional rock walls and "forts." In general, the Indian-built defenses can be identified by their low profile. The soldiers built higher, more elaborate structures.



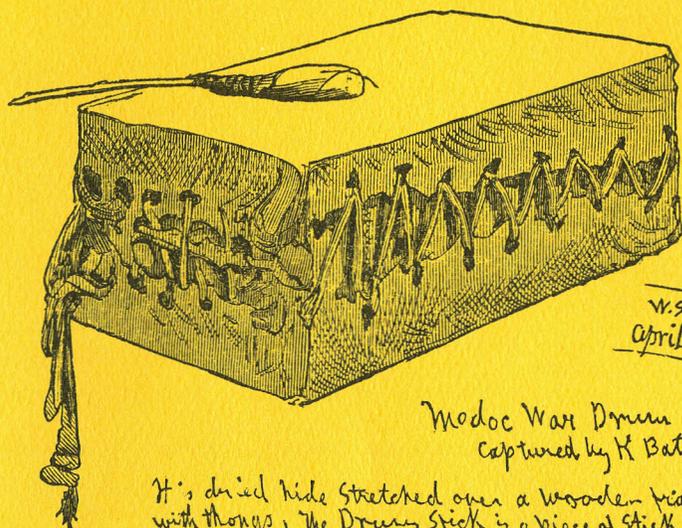
9. CAPTAIN JACK'S CAVE

Overhanging ledges and shallow caves exposed by collapsed lava tubes offered the only protection available to many Modoc families during the siege. This small cave sheltered Captain Jack, his two wives and their children from cold winds, rain and snow.

Woven tule mats and blankets helped keep out the wind and soften rock edges, but the winter must have been very hard on the families of the fighting men.

The rounded rock knoll in front

of the entrance has become known as "the rostrum" because it served as the speaker's stand during the councils of war. It was at the rostrum that the followers of Hooker Jim threw a woman's shawl over Captain Jack's shoulders and a woman's woven tule headdress on his head, calling him a coward for not wanting to participate in a plan to assassinate General Canby. In order to remain in control, although he knew it meant his doom, Jack agreed to kill the General. So it was then, that on this spot, the fate of Captain Jack and his people was sealed.



Modoc War Drum
Captured by K Battery Artillery

It's dried hide stretched over a wooden piece, and tightened with thongs. The Drumstick is a piece of stick with what seems to have been an old stocking tied on the end. This drum was beat all during the fighting at Capt. Jack's Stronghold.

10. DANCE RING

Although white men had long ago abandoned dancing as a serious part of religious expression, the Modocs continued to include dance in their shamanistic rituals.

During the Modoc War, the Indians participated in rituals intended to strengthen their defense. Peter Schonchin, son of Schonchin John, years later spoke of one such ritual. After the placement of the braided tulle rope, which the shaman claimed would protect the Stronghold, "The people believed him and danced with him all night, singing all the while."

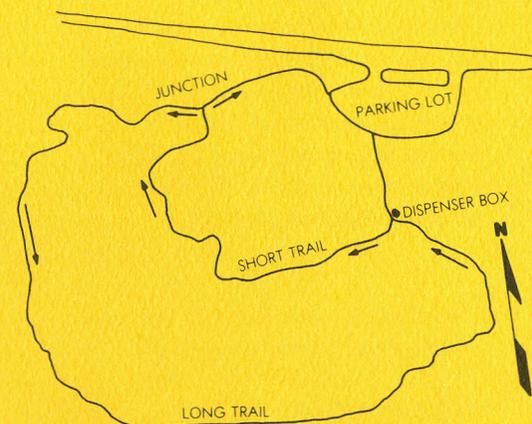
11. SCHONCHIN JOHN'S CAVE

Schonchin John, second in command to Captain Jack, occupied this cave. Like most of the other caves, the floor of this one is littered with blocks of rock that have fallen from its roof. The ceilings of these caves are still unstable. A few loose blocks may have fallen since the caves were occupied in 1873.

12. TRAIL JUNCTION

The trail leading to the right returns you to the parking area in ¼ mile.

The trail to the left follows the Modocs' main defense line on the western perimeter. If you take this 30 minute walk you will pass some outstanding natural fortifications as well as Army forts which were built during their occupation of the Stronghold.



13. SCHONCHIN'S COMMAND POST

Schonchin John directed the defense of the western side of the Stronghold from this position. In the first battle, army units met stiff resistance here. The thick fog, deep ravines, and heavy accurate fire from the defenders caused the attack to fail.

During the second assault, units from Gillem's Camp were able to edge along the lake shore, to about where the road is now, and finally join with other troops moving in from the east. By



holding their positions along the lake, the soldiers cut the Indians off from their source of water. It is thought that this was an important factor leading to the eventual abandonment of the fortress.

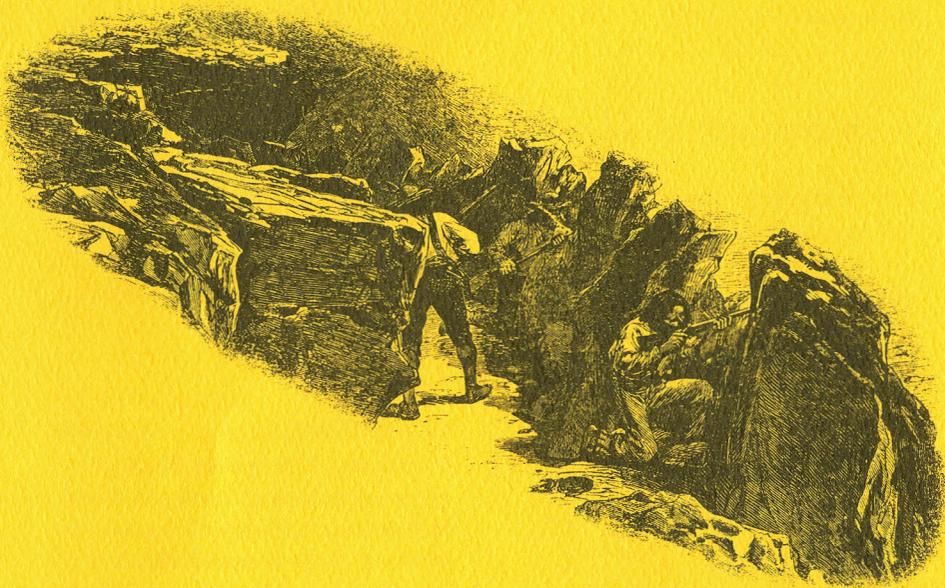
14. CATTLE CORRAL

During the Stronghold siege, stray cattle were found roaming in the lava to the south by the Modocs. They were quickly rounded up and brought to this location. Had this meat supply not been found, it is doubtful that the Indians could have held out as long as they did.

In this area and throughout the clearing beyond the point of rocks to your right, are bones scattered among the boulders. All of the larger bones were cracked open and the rich bone marrow consumed along with the meat.

15. THE WESTERN FRONT

The high, snow-covered peak usually visible to the southwest is Mt. Shasta. The rounded top mountain to the right of Mt. Shasta is Mount Dome. The long ridge running in a north-south direction is Gillem's Bluff.



16. FIRING POSITION

"The Modocs could pass along the long ridge of rock under perfect cover, with embrasures or holes from which they could fire with safety," wrote English artist William Simpson in an 1873 issue of *The Illustrated London News*.

Simpson was a special correspondent and artist. He

Troops advancing from Gillem's camp at the base of the bluff had to cover rough terrain in full view of the Modocs. Although they could get within rifle range they could not begin to press the attack with enough force to dislodge the Indians from these natural trenches.

had just crossed the Pacific from China and Japan landing in San Francisco when he learned of the Indian war in the lava beds. He hurried north to the fighting to make sketches to illustrate the scenes and incidents of the war. He then dispatched these to his editor in London. All but a few of the sketches in this booklet are from original copies of *The Illustrated London News*.

17. FIRING POSITION

"I have never before encountered an enemy occupying a position of such great natural strength," said Colonel Wheaton of the Stronghold. The position in front of where you are standing illustrates the point.

Extremely well protected and requiring few defenders, this area was impossible to storm. The Indians were able to shift men up and down their line, out of sight of the enemy, to compensate for any concentration of fire.

18. FIRING POSITION

This unusual observation and firing position was accessible from the large trench below, through the narrow crawl space, emerging here.

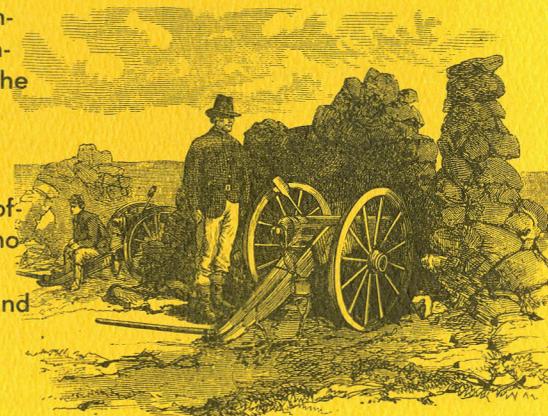
Years after the Modoc War, Jeff Riddle, the son of Captain Jack's cousin, Toby Riddle, wrote, "The Indians being at home in the lava beds, knew the natural fortifications. They had the advantage over their enemy... The Indians kept up a heavy fire on the charging forces."

Although Riddle was only ten years old at the time, he was often with his mother, Toby, who acted as an interpreter and mediator between the Army and the Modocs.

19. FORTS

After the Modocs vacated the Stronghold, the Army considered with some concern the possibility that they might attempt to return. To prevent this, an Army detachment was assigned to the area.

During their stay, the Army built a number of high-walled forts. Spaced across the plateau on the south side of the Stronghold, these stone structures compensated for the lack of natural trenches on the flat plateau. Several additional forts will be seen farther along the trail.



20. STYLES OF FIGHTING

The fighting styles of the Indians and the soldiers contrasted sharply. The Army depended on solidarity of fighting units and weight of numbers to carry their objective. The Indians traditionally fought as individuals and individual coups or conspicuous acts of bravery were nearly as important as the outcome of the engagement.

The tortuous landscape of the lava beds became an equalizing factor, forcing both sides to modify their methods. The Modocs had used the Stronghold before when fighting occurred with neighboring tribes, but they probably never faced opposition who came in such great numbers. Their "every man for himself" approach had to be altered to deal with the organized strategy of the Army. To their disadvantage, the Army found that its mounted cavalry was useless in the lava beds, so they fought dismounted as infantry.

The Army's howitzers were ineffective against the Modoc's rock citadel because of their low trajectory. In their place, the Army substituted four Coehorn mortars to lob exploding cannon balls into the Stronghold.

21. ESCAPE ROUTE

How could 160 Modoc men, women and children, along with their dogs and horses, withdraw from the Stronghold overnight without alerting the

troops bivouacked on either side? This question has puzzled both Army leaders and historians. Many have assumed that the Modocs "sneaked up" some "lava trench" or "gully", probably with the connivance and "help of the Warm Springs scouts." Airplane photographs and modern maps of the terrain, however, make it quite clear that the Modocs simply walked southward from their living quarters, keeping on the flat and easily-traversed surface of the lava plateau. Thus they avoided the rough and deeply crevassed ground at lower elevations. By dawn they could easily have reached a new supply of water in the ice caves, now called Captain Jack's ice cave and Frozen River cave, which lie 5-6 miles to the south.

You are standing at one point on this escape route. Look to the north: the Modoc's living quarters in the Stronghold are 240 meters (less than the length of a football field) from here. You can walk to them over this flat surface in one minute. Now look to the south and notice how easily you can avoid the heavily crevassed collapse basins on either side by staying on the plateau surface between them. The site of the Warm Springs encampment was more than a half mile off this route. The escape trail was well known to the Modocs; it is the same trail they used to drive stray and stolen cattle into the corral.

22. PAHOEHOE

Many flows of basalt lava have intricately wrinkled upper surfaces that resemble a patchwork of sections of coiled rope. Here on the turned up surface of a schollendome is a good example. Look above the wrinkled surface to the opposite side of the schollendome cleft and you will see the fretwork of a Modoc firing position silhouetted against the sky.

CHANGES SINCE 1873

A century ago the landscape around the Stronghold had a different appearance. All of the area to the north, which is now cultivated land, was covered by the 94,000 acre Tule Lake. Another striking difference was the plant life.

Most of the territory in the northern end of Lava Beds National Monument was covered by native bunch grasses and sage brush. In the years after the Modoc War heavy grazing by sheep depleted the native perennial grasses so badly that non-native species became dominant. The annual "cheat" grass, an import from Europe, is the most notable example. It quickly spread and crowded out much of the damaged bunchgrass.

Wildfire is also an important natural influence in the grassland community. Frequent natural fires helped to maintain the native plants in balance. When the national monument was established in 1925, fire suppression was an important

protective activity. Juniper trees began to grow where none could gain a foothold before. Native grasses, which are favored by fire could not regain control. Available fuel built up so that when a fire did occur, it was quite intense, and recovery of the vegetation required much more time.

The National Park Service now evaluates each natural occurring fire, and if it does not endanger life or property, may allow it to run its course. Eventually, the area may return to the way it appeared one hundred years ago.

23. ARMY ENCAMPMENT SITE

While the Army held the Stronghold, the main bivouac area was here. Look around and you can find many rock fortifications and a stone fireplace. Note the large juniper tree which is growing from within one of the rock enclosures. Obviously having begun to grow after the war, it is a good indicator of the size to which these trees can grow in 100 years.

The staff of Lava Beds National Monument encourages you to visit other sites nearby which figured in the Modoc War. Consult the map in your park folder for the locations. At the park visitor center located 15 miles south, the Lava Beds Natural History Association offers additional literature on the history and natural history of the monument. We hope you enjoy the remainder of your visit at Lava Beds.

