



Foundation Document Overview

Lava Beds National Monument

California



Contact Information

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Park Description

President Calvin Coolidge established Lava Beds National Monument by presidential proclamation on November 21, 1925 (Presidential Proclamation 1755, 44 Stat 2591). The monument was initially managed as part of Modoc National Forest. The National Park Service assumed responsibility for its management in 1933 as directed by Executive Order No. 6166, which transferred responsibility for management of Lava Beds and other national monuments to the National Park Service. A second presidential proclamation in 1951 transferred lands at Petroglyph Point to Lava Beds National Monument from the Bureau of Land Management. This detached unit is approximately 2 miles east of the main body of the monument.

The 46,692-acre monument is in northeastern California, approximately 155 miles northeast of Redding, California, and 45 miles southeast of Klamath Falls, Oregon. Ninety-four percent of the monument lies within Siskiyou County, while the rest is in Modoc County. The monument is bordered by Modoc National Forest, Klamath National Forest, Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge, Bureau of Reclamation and Bureau of Land Management land, as well as private lands.

Primary access to Lava Beds National Monument is from the north, over paved Siskiyou and Modoc County roads, which connect with California State Routes 161 and 139. Both roads are open year-round. From the south, access is via two Modoc National Forest roads that, in turn, connect to the state highway system. Of these two roads, the Medicine Lake Road is partly paved and is closed from late fall to late spring due to heavy winter snow. The other Modoc National Forest road (Forest Service Route 10) is paved but in poor condition and may also be closed during heavy winter snows.

The region in and around the monument is unique and diverse. It lies near the junction of the Modoc Plateau, Cascade Mountains, and Basin and Range geologic provinces and reflects those influences in its landscapes and ecosystems. The monument encompasses a small portion of the Medicine Lake shield volcano, a 900-square-mile highland associated with the Cascades mountain range. Over the last half-million years, volcanic eruptions of this volcano have created a rugged landscape dotted with diverse volcanic features.

Numerous lava tube caves, American Indian rock art sites, historic battlefields and campsites, natural scenery, dramatic night sky viewing, and a high desert wilderness experience are the main attractions at Lava Beds National Monument. Volcanic phenomena are major interpretive features in the monument. Lava tube caves, in particular, draw many visitors, and substantial efforts are made by the monument's staff to facilitate the safe and nondestructive visitor exploration of these caves and other volcanic features. The northern margin of the monument is generally defined by the limits of recent lava flows and the corresponding historic shoreline of Tule Lake. While Tule Lake has been significantly altered by reclamation activities beginning in 1905, it continues to function as an important stop on the Pacific Flyway for migratory birds, drawing a variety of bird species to the monument.

The monument contains a range of vegetation communities, including ponderosa pine forest, juniper woodland, and sagebrush/bunchgrass steppe. Portions of the monument's northern boundary border the Tule Lake sump wetland margin. These areas provide habitat for a wide range of animal species including mammals, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and arthropods such as above-ground insects and cave invertebrates. The monument provides habitat for at least 14 bat species, including the Townsend's big-eared bat, which is listed as a California Species of Special Concern. Although the bat's population is declining in most areas, survey data indicate its numbers remain stable in the monument.



Park Description



Human occupation of the Klamath and Tule Lake Basins is estimated to extend back over 11,500 years and the monument itself contains archeological evidence of human occupation extending back roughly 10,000 years. Tule Lake's pre-1900s shoreline and nearby areas provided permanent village and seasonal encampment sites for the Modoc tribe and their ancestors, whose subsistence was dependent on hunting and gathering of both lake-associated and upland animal and plant species.

By the early 1870s, as European settlement moved westward, conflicts between cultures escalated, culminating locally in the Modoc Indian War of 1872–1873. During this conflict, members from a band of Modoc took refuge within what is now called “Captain Jack’s Stronghold.” The rugged lava flows provided protection in the form of trenches and rock outcroppings that provided effective fortification and cover from mortar fire, as well as small residential shelters from U.S. Army assaults. After their defeat in the Modoc War, some of the Modoc were forcibly removed to Oklahoma, but many remained in northern California and southern Oregon among tribal neighbors such as the Klamath and Northern Paiute. American Indian tribes currently associated with Lava Beds National Monument and the surrounding areas include the Modoc Tribe of Oklahoma and The Klamath Tribes (Klamath, Modoc, and Yahooskin). The preservation of sites at Lava Beds National Monument offers a continued connection to the history and culture of these groups, and provides a touchstone for contemporary Modoc people and tribes with ties to the area.

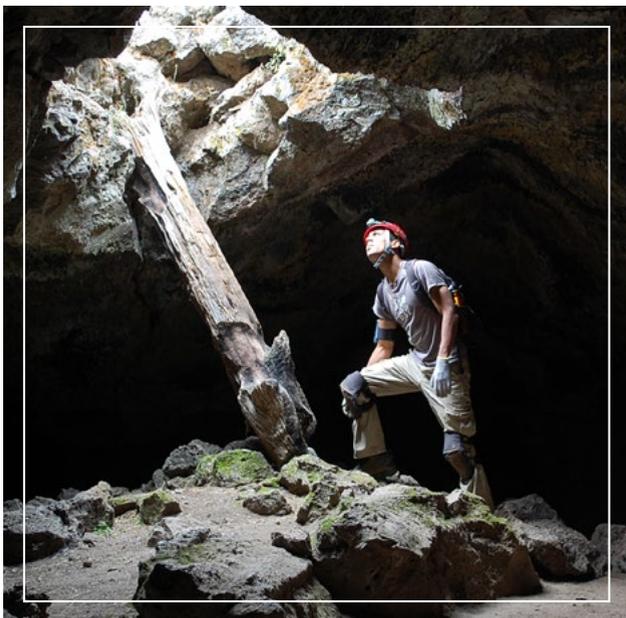
A host of intriguing characters populate the early modern history of Lava Beds, including J. D. Howard, a cave explorer who assisted in the effort to obtain federal protection of the lava beds; homesteading families who ran sheep and an underground ice skating business; and moonshiners who set up stills in the remote caves during Prohibition. Like most NPS sites operating during the Great Depression, the newly established Lava Beds National Monument benefited from the work of a Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) crew. Between 1935 and 1942, hundreds of “CCC boys” constructed the original infrastructure of the monument, much of which visitors can still enjoy today. In the late 1950s and through the 1960s the infrastructure of Lava Beds National Monument was further expanded during the NPS Mission 66 initiative. This modern construction program paved the roads of the monument and built the majority of the infrastructure used by visitors and staff today.

On October 13, 1972, the Schonchin and Black Lava Flow units, totaling 28,460 acres within the monument, were designated wilderness by Congress under Public Law 92-493. The resulting Lava Beds Wilderness Area currently represents 61% of the monument’s total land area. The sense of solitude, natural quiet, scenic views, and dark night skies associated with the wilderness areas are highly valued by visitors.

Purpose



*LAVA BEDS NATIONAL MONUMENT
protects and interprets volcanic and
natural features of scientific interest
associated with the Medicine Lake
Volcano, and evidence of prehistoric
and historic human settlement, use,
and conflict.*

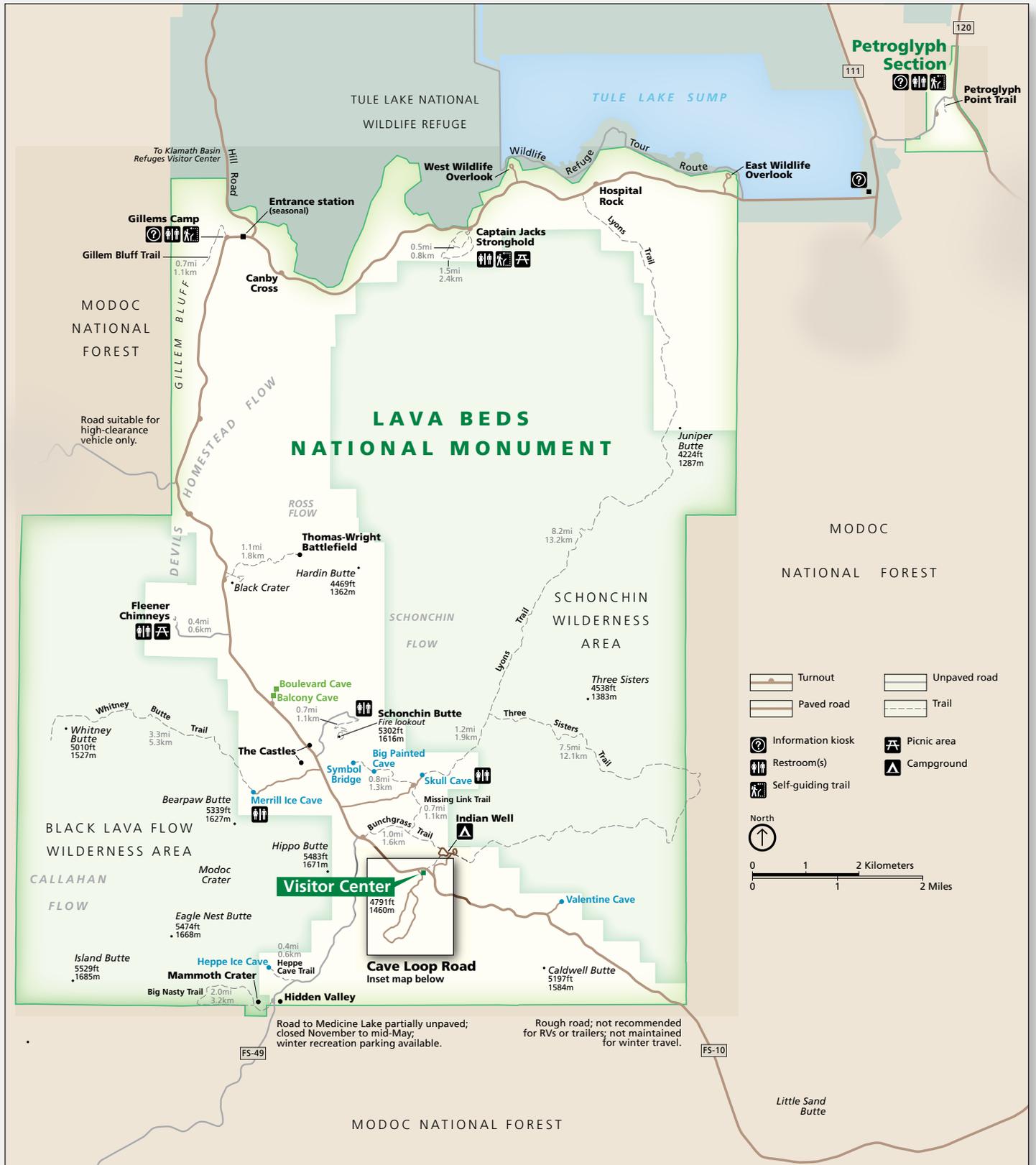


Significance

Significance statements express why Lava Beds National Monument resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Lava Beds National Monument protects and interprets the largest concentration of lava tube caves in the continental United States, along with unique cave environments and cave-dependent species.
- Lava Beds National Monument contains outstanding, diverse, abundant, and well preserved lava flows, cinder cones, spatter cones, maar volcanoes, and other volcanic features associated with the Medicine Lake shield volcano.
- Lava Beds National Monument protects and interprets objects, sites, and the rugged volcanic setting associated with the 1872–73 Modoc War.
- Lava Beds National Monument contains archeological evidence of human occupation extending back in time to the early Holocene (10,000 years to present), exceptional rock art consisting of regionally distinctive petroglyphs and pictographs, and a setting of continued significance to Modoc people as a part of their traditional homeland.
- The unique volcanic landscape of the Great Basin and Cascade ecosystems within Lava Beds National Monument provides an exceptional wilderness experience.
- Natural processes and native plant and animal species representative of the transition zone for Great Basin and Cascade ecosystems are protected and managed within Lava Beds National Monument.

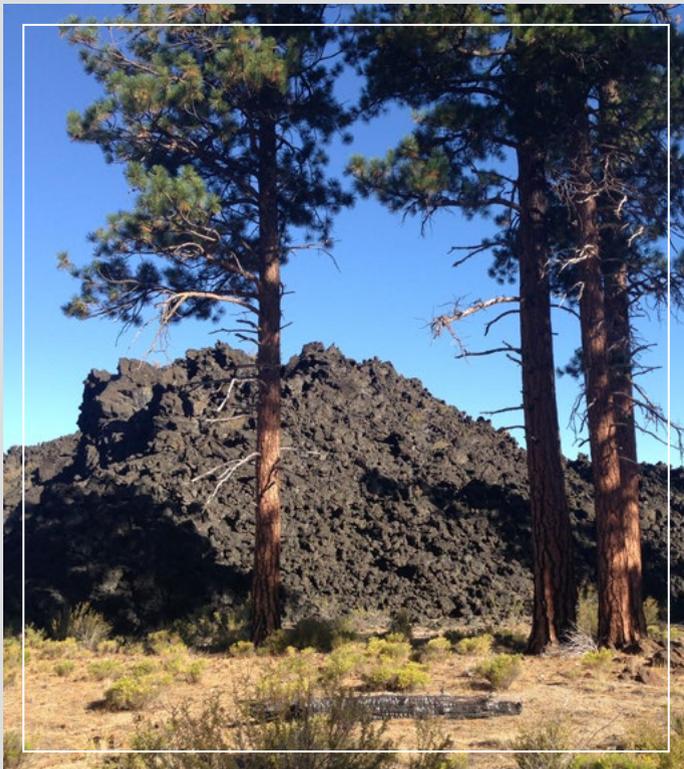
Park Map



Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **Lava Tube Cave Environment.** The monument currently has more than 750 documented caves, which have formed in the monument's basalt and andesite flows.
- **Volcanic Landscape.** The volcanic landscape of Lava Beds National Monument contains a diverse assemblage of "textbook" examples of extensive igneous formations.
- **Historic Landscape of the Modoc War 1872–73.** Lava Beds National Monument contains the natural setting, views, artifacts, and structures associated with the Modoc War. The rugged volcanic setting of the national monument provides context to both prewar events and events of the war such as battles, wartime living conditions, and the relative preparedness of the Modoc versus military troops. The war would not have progressed in the same way in a different landscape.



- **Archeological Resources.** Lava Beds National Monument contains archeological evidence of human occupation extending back in time to the early Holocene (10,000 years to present), exceptional rock art consisting of regionally distinctive petroglyphs and pictographs, artifacts, and a setting of continued significance to Modoc people as part of their traditional homeland.
- **Wilderness and Backcountry.** There are few locations in the West where one can experience unimpaired volcanic landscapes in a protected natural setting. Lava Beds National Monument's wilderness features exceptional dark night skies, clear views, peaceful solitude, and natural quiet. The rugged caves and surface terrain create opportunities for adventure and testing wilderness skills.
- **Native Ecosystems and Processes.** Lava Beds National Monument lies near the junction of the Modoc Plateau, Cascade Mountains, and Basin and Range geologic provinces and reflects those influences in its landscapes and ecosystems. The monument contains a number of vegetation transitions from grassland to mid-elevation shrub woodland to pine forest. A diverse array of plant and animal species are found in these habitats.
- **Public Understanding, Enjoyment, and Access to Significant Park Features.** Visitors to Lava Beds National Monument have the opportunity to experience solitude and to learn about and access unique resources such as caves, artifacts, historical landscapes, and rock art. Providing a general understanding and appreciation of these resources within their local and regional setting helps to ensure their long-term conservation.



Other Important Resources and Values

Lava Beds National Monument contains other resources and values that are not fundamental to the purpose of the park and may be unrelated to its significance, but are important to consider in planning processes. These are referred to as “other important resources and values” (OIRV). These resources and values have been selected because they are important in the operation and management of the park and warrant special consideration in park planning and management.

The following other important resources and values have been identified for Lava Beds National Monument:

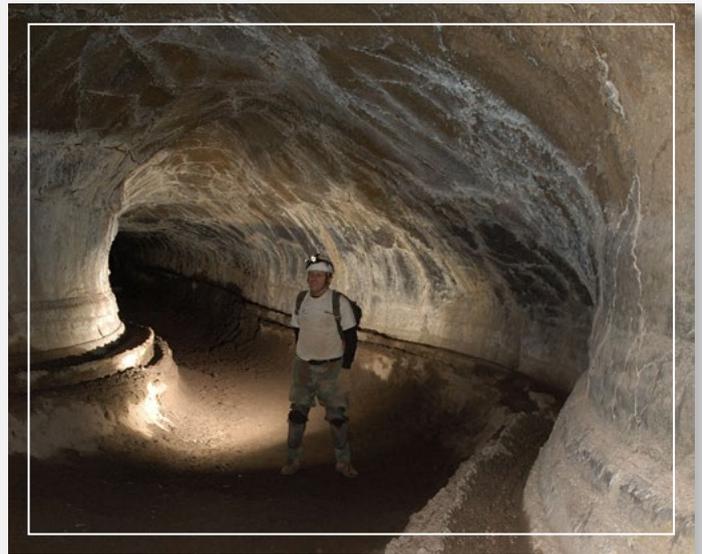
- **Collections.** The monument maintains a broad body of literature, manuscripts, oral histories, artifacts, and other associated records related to its natural and cultural resources. These collections, archives, and documents provide important insight and information about the monument’s significant resources and their scientific and interpretive value.
- **Early Use and Development from 1873.** Lava Beds National Monument contains sites and resources associated with homesteading and ranching, early cave exploration and use, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and park development.



Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from, and should reflect, park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- Lava Beds National Monument’s abundant lava tube caves offer outstanding opportunities for exploration and research in rare habitats.
- Lava Beds National Monument contains the majority of the battle sites of the Modoc War of 1872–1873, which tell the story of a conflict between two cultures that endured tragedy in order to defend or acquire land.
- Abundant archeological sites, exceptional petroglyphs and pictographs, and numerous sites of traditional significance provide a link between past residents and modern peoples throughout Lava Beds National Monument.



- Outstanding, diverse, abundant, and well-preserved volcanic features at Lava Beds National Monument illustrate the powerful geologic history of a small portion of the Medicine Lake shield volcano, where activity is likely to occur again.
- More than half of Lava Beds National Monument is protected as wilderness, providing a primitive recreation experience within a pristine environment in the unique volcanic landscape of the Great Basin and Cascade ecosystems.
- Native plants, animals, and processes are protected at Lava Beds National Monument, and provide important scientific and educational opportunities as surrounding landscapes continue to change.
- Between the end of the Modoc War and the establishment of the national monument in 1925, homesteaders, ranchers, cave explorers, and bootleggers persevered through harsh conditions in the lava beds and surrounding area to fulfill independent visions for their lives.
- Since the establishment of the national monument in 1925, the era of modern visitation and services has been facilitated by federal programs such as the Public Works Administration, a Civilian Conservation Corps camp, and the NPS Mission 66 initiative.