



Prairie sunflowers face the sun rising beyond Sunset Crater Volcano. They are among the many flowers that bloom during the summer rainy season in and around the park.



This painting by Hopi artist Michael Kabotie Lomawiyesa depicts some of his beliefs about the Sunset Crater Volcano eruption. Find it in the visitor center with other art and stories that share Indigenous beliefs about the eruption.



Clouds glow like fire at day's end over the San Francisco Peaks. They erupted about 500,000 years ago—far earlier than Sunset Crater Volcano. Wildflowers thrive in soil carried by rain and melting snow from distant peaks.

CHANGE AND BALANCE

Welcome to the youngest volcano in the San Francisco Volcanic Field—Sunset Crater Volcano. About 1,000 years old, it erupted in a land where people have lived for over 10,000 years. The volcano changed the lives of the ancestral Puebloans and the lives of the animals and plants of this high-desert country. The ground began to shake around 1085 CE (common era). As the shaking grew stronger and more frequent, people knew they had one choice: Leave.

Some people sought safety at Walnut Canyon and other nearby communities. They could see ash clouds but were safe from fiery rocks raining down and lava flowing across the land. People's lives continued to change even after Sunset Crater Volcano quieted. These and other stories are told here and at Wupatki and Walnut Canyon national monuments.

At Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument, you can explore how life found a new balance after the eruption—and again over 900 years later. In April 2022 a sudden fire roared through here, fueled by drought and high winds that are hallmarks of global climate change. Whose lives were changed this time? What's coming back? Look for bright green seedlings. Listen for birds tapping burnt bark. Walk trails through old lava where wildflowers still emerge each spring. Take the time to wonder: What will happen next in this land of constant change?

Tenacious Life

Plants began to colonize this new landscape even as lava cooled. Penstemon developed into a new species that grows only here. Ponderosa pine seedlings appeared. Animals slowly came back. Some, like the pronghorn, you may recognize from other arid lands. Others, like the red-tailed hawk and Steller's jay, can live in many places. The Abert's squirrel, however, needs particular forests.



Steller's jay
© MARTIN DOLLENKAMP



Sunset Crater penstemon
© INATURALIST7 / TREAY



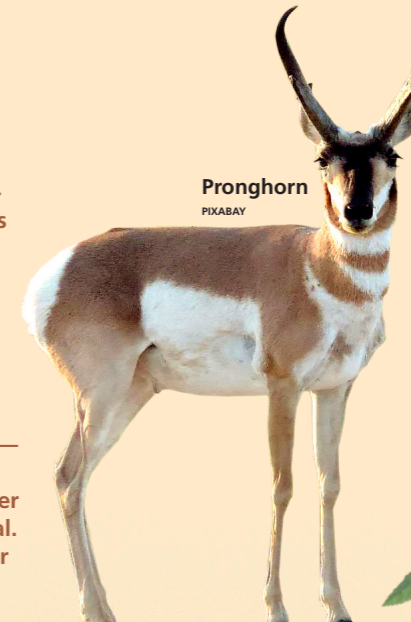
Ponderosa pine
DETAILS—© W. MICHEL KITELY;
LANDSCAPE—USDA FOREST SERVICE / RAY FILLION

Hypogeous fungus
© AMADEJ TRNKOCZY

Abert's squirrel
© MATT ANDERSON

The Abert's squirrel depends on ponderosa pines for food and shelter. It also eats a fungus that helps keep tree roots moist. The squirrel's digging spreads fungi spores. And so fungi keep growing; the tree stays alive; and the squirrel has food and shelter.

This tenacious trio can live through fires of this dry land—if they are low and slow. But the 2022 Tunnel Fire was faster and more intense than normal. What does the future hold for these three species?



Pronghorn
© PIXABAY



Desert globemallow
© TOM KENT



Red-tailed hawk
© MICHAEL COHEN



Gray fox
© PAULE HERIATAS

6 million years ago
San Francisco Volcanic Field becomes active near what is now Williams, Arizona.

2–3 million years ago
Eruptions begin northwest of here.

600,000–400,000 years ago
A towering volcano erupts many times. Its remains are San Francisco Mountain (also called the San Francisco Peaks).

10,000 years ago
People are in this area, moving with the seasons to follow plants and animals.

500–700 Common Era
People begin settling the land east of San Francisco Mountain. In Wupatki Basin, they trade food and goods with travelers. Others farm land near Walnut Canyon and to the north where Sunset Crater Volcano eventually forms.

Around 1085
Long-settled communities flee as Sunset Crater Volcano roars to life. For many months it spews cinders and ash. A few years later, lava flows from its north side to form what is known as the Bonito Lava Flow.

Early 1200s
People are farming and hunting near the volcano.

Mid- to Late 1200s
A long drought gets much worse. Some people begin to migrate again as they search for communities near water.

1300s
People continue moving around these lands for different reasons. They might be seeking better farming areas. Or they might be following traditional knowledge to new lands.

1400s–1700s
Settlers from Europe and the newly established United States begin claiming Indigenous land as their own. People from several continents and many cultures compete for the scant water and food of this dry land.

1800s
US geologist John Wesley Powell explores the region and gives Sunset Crater Volcano its English name.

Newcomers and visitors are looting Wupatki and Walnut Canyon and blazing trails up and inside Sunset Crater Volcano.

1900s
In 1930 President Herbert Hoover proclaims Sunset Crater Volcano a national monument.

Archeologists find dwellings beneath the volcano's ash. One dates back to 835 CE.

1960s–70s
US Apollo astronauts train for their lunar missions on the park's lava fields.

2000s
2020 census confirms over 73,000 people live in nearby Flagstaff.

In April 2022 the Tunnel Fire burns across the park. Scientists begin to study how animals and plants recover from fire in a time of climate change.

In 2022 the US Space Program starts planning the Artemis lunar mission. Will astronauts train here again?

Thirteen traditionally associated Tribes maintain deep ties to Sunset Crater Volcano.

A legend in a legendary land. This view looks northeast past Sunset Crater Volcano and other cinder cones to the Painted Desert beyond. The San Francisco Volcanic Field includes more volcanoes far to the west and northwest. Sunset Crater Volcano is the youngest of the 600 volcanoes in this massive volcanic field. It's unlikely that Sunset Crater Volcano will erupt again. However, the system is not extinct. A new volcano could erupt some day. Who will witness its birth?

© DANIEL JAMES ALPERT

SAN FRANCISCO VOLCANIC FIELD

SUNSET CRATER VOLCANO
About 1,000 years old



The contrast in the colors is so great that on viewing the mountain from a distance the red cinders seem to be on fire.

John Wesley Powell

The Volcano After Sunset

When asked about Sunset Crater and the volcanic field, an Indigenous elder explains,

We, the Havasupai, regard that area as the connection to the universe.

Take a walk after sunset to experience the park at night. The Lava Flow Trail and amphitheater are some of the best places to view the night sky in the region.

Cinder cones seem to embrace the Milky Way. Stars light up the trail. Listen for the wing beats of bats, the feet of night-dwellers skittering across rock. Inhale—is it just your imagination or does this high desert smell a bit different at night?

Here you are at around 7,000 feet elevation, in dry air, and over 10 miles from the lights of Flagstaff. These conditions allow the light from billions of stars to shine through Earth's atmosphere. This clear night sky has earned the monument designation as an International Dark Sky Park.

Can you imagine even more stars shining in this sky? With the exception of the time ash clouded the sky during the eruption of Sunset Crater

Volcano, ancestral Puebloan people probably saw more stars than we see today.

Even so, you are seeing a much clearer night sky than just 50 years ago. Since the 1970s air pollution has decreased as cars and other pollution sources have become cleaner. Perhaps what you see now is almost as bright and clear as what ancestral Puebloans saw 900 years ago.

USFS / DEBORAH LEE SOLTESZ

Fort McDowell Yavapai

Havasupai

Tonto Apache

Hualapai

Kaibab Band of Paiute

San Carlos Apache

Yavapai-Prescott

Hopi

White Mountain Apache

Navajo

Zuni

Yavapai-Apache

San Juan Southern Paiute



Hopi women grinding corn, circa 1906.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS / EDWARD S. CURTIS



Cinder phacelia, a scorpion-weed (top), and Newberry's twinpod (bottom) colonize rocky ground, building soil other plants need.
CINDER PHACELIA—© RON WOLF; TWINPOD—© TOM BEAN

The names above are of Tribal Nations who have associations with Sunset Crater Volcano that go back centuries. This is the place of their ancestors. Each has stories about the eruption that are similar and yet different. You can find some of these stories here but know that not all are shared.

Compare this place we call Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument with your own home place. What creates beauty where you live? What questions do you ask about the night sky? About weather? About forces beyond your control? These and more questions often arise in this place of rock and wonder that is as much about people as volcanoes.



VISITING THE PARK

The park and its trails are open all day, every day. Call or check the park website for visitor center hours and programs. Stop by for a film and exhibits. They provide details about the volcano, ecology, and people of this site.

This part of Arizona is on Mountain Standard Time year-round.

Cell service is unreliable or nonexistent.

What to See and Do

Take one of the short, accessible trails to overlooks and exhibits. • The self-guiding Lava Flow Trail takes you by a'a lava, squeeze-ups, and other volcanic features. • Plan a longer hike in the park or the surrounding Coconino National Forest. • Drive the Loop Road to Wupatki National Monument. One entrance fee covers both parks.

Camping

The US Forest Service operates two campgrounds usually open late May to early October. No hookups. Bonito has first-come, first-served and reservable sites. O'Leary is for large groups; reservations are

required. Go to www.recreation.gov for reservations and more information.

Be Safe and Protect the Park

Sunset Crater Volcano is closed to climbing to protect its fragile structure. • Off-trail travel is not permitted and can be dangerous. Lava is sharp, brittle, and unstable. Stay on trails to protect yourself and the fragile plants and animals that live here. • The Loop Road is narrow and winding and has soft shoulders. Stop only at paved pull-outs. • Road surfaces freeze quickly in winter. • Pets must be kept on a leash six feet or shorter. They are allowed only on the paved portion of Lava Flow Trail. Do not leave them in cars even for a few minutes; they can die of heatstroke. • Collecting wood is not allowed. • For firearms regulations check the park website. • Federal laws protect all plants, animals, geologic features, and archeological objects in the park.

Accessibility

We strive to make facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For more information go to the visitor center, ask a ranger, call, or check the park website and NPS App.

More Information

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument
928-526-0502
www.nps.gov/sucr

Follow us on social media.

Use the official NPS App to guide your visit. Select "save this park" to use offline.

Emergencies call 911

Sunset Crater Volcano, Wupatki, and Walnut Canyon national monuments are administered jointly.

Flagstaff Area National Monuments
6400 N. Hwy. 89
Flagstaff, AZ 86004
928-526-1157

Sunset Crater Volcano National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about national parks, visit www.nps.gov.

National Park Foundation
Join the park community.
www.nationalparks.org

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Havasupai basket
© ADORE GALLERY
SANTA FE

