



Lava Beds Trails



Hiking at Lava Beds Lava Beds has 13 hiking trails. The most popular trails are short, but lead to some of the historic sites as well as to geological features within the monument. Pets and bicycles are not permitted on any of the trails, nondeveloped areas, wilderness areas, or caves. All trails cross or enter the backcountry, and the long trails are mostly in designated wilderness areas. All rules for wilderness hiking and camping apply. The trails in this bulletin are arranged by distance of trailhead from the visitor center. Please be sure to carry plenty of water regardless of the trail length. Watch for rattlesnakes during the summer. Wear sunscreen and a hat.

The Short Trails

Bunchgrass Trail

Starts across from Site B-7 in the campground. Follows along the northeast side of Crescent Butte to the park road. Approximately 1 mile (1.6 km) long.

Missing Link Trail

This trail links the Three Sisters Trail to the Bunchgrass Trail, creating a 10 mile (16km) loop. The Missing Link Trail begins on the Bunchgrass Trail about 0.5 mile (0.8 km) from the campground B-Loop. Hike on the Missing Link Trail for 0.7 mile (1.1 km) to reach Skull Cave road. The trail ends across from the trailhead for Symbol Bridge. Hike another 0.1 mile (0.16km) on the road to Skull Cave to reach the trailhead for Lyons/Three Sisters Trail.

Heppe Ice Cave

Heppe Cave Trail can be found on the road to Mammoth Crater, 2.2 miles (3.5 km) from the main park road. This is a 0.4 mile (0.6 km) trail that begins under tall pine trees. As you reach the end of the trail you will see an enormous collapse. Follow the trail into Heppe Cave, which has a large opening at both ends.

Big Nasty Trail

A semi-loop trail, 2 miles (3.2 km) one way. Named after a brush-covered rough lava area just to the north, described as, "It is big and it is nasty!" Go to Mammoth Crater/Hidden Valley pullout. Trail starts at crater rim, left from the short trail to Mammoth Crater.

Schonchin Butte Trail

Climbs 0.9 mile (1.4 km) to the fire lookout and a panoramic view. Trail has a 500 foot elevation gain. You can visit the lookout on duty. Please stay on the designated trail and do not shortcut the switchbacks.

Symbol Bridge Trail

Winds 0.75 mile (1.2 km) past interesting lava tube collapses and other features. Many fine pictographs at the bridge and cave. Take Skull Cave road to the first parking area and trailhead. Across the road from the Symbol Bridge Trail, you will find the Missing Link Trail.

Black Crater and Thomas-Wright Battlefield Trail

Volcanism and history. Less than 0.3 mile (0.5 km) to the crater; 1.2 miles (1.8km) to the end of the trail and a view of the battlefield. Fine wildflower displays along the way in season.

Gillem Bluff

This trail climbs to the top of Gillem Bluff, 0.7 mile (1.1 km), for a view of Gillems Camp and the surrounding landscape; elevation gain of 550 feet (168 m).

Captain Jack's Stronghold Trail

Two self-guiding interpretive trails through the heart of the Modoc War. Inner loop 0.6 mile (1 km); outer loop 1.1 miles (1.8 km). Be prepared for rough terrain.

Petroglyph Point Trail

This trail begins on the northeast side of Petroglyph Point about 0.3 miles beyond the bulletin board. The trailhead parking lot is on top of a short rise across from the trail entrance. Hike to the top to enjoy an impressive view of the basin and the Medicine Lake Volcano.

Please do not hike to the edge of the cliff in order to avoid disturbing nesting birds such as prairie falcons, red-tailed hawks, and owls. Please do not attempt to hike to the top from the west side of Petroglyph Point. A social trail there has caused severe erosion and passes too close to nesting sites.

The Long Trails

Three Sisters Trail

Entered at the campground from A-Loop, this trail loops out into the wilderness and returns to the Skull Cave Road; 8.8 miles (14.2 km).

Lyons Trail

A former monument road, this trail crosses the wilderness area on a north-south axis between the Skull Cave parking area and Hospital Rock on the North Boundary Road; 9.8 miles (15.8 km).

Whitney Butte Trail From the Merrill Cave parking area to the west boundary of the monument, this trail crosses the wilderness in an east-west direction, curving around Whitney Butte. Enjoy an impressive view of Mt. Shasta and the Callahan lava flow; 3.3 miles (5.3 km).

Special Concerns in the Wilderness



On October 13, 1972, 27,970 acres (11,319 hectares) of the backcountry were designated wilderness. There are no springs, streams or lakes here. Hikers and campers must carry plenty of water. Be sure to wear a hat and sunscreen in the summer. Pets, hunting, bicycles, and motorized vehicles are not allowed in the wilderness areas.

No person may camp in a nondeveloped or wilderness area with a group of more than twelve individuals, including horses and pack animals.

Open fires are not allowed at any time in the backcountry. Gas stoves are permitted. Certain restrictions may apply during extreme fire conditions.

Camping in or within 50 yards (46 m) of caves or in the vicinity of chimneys is not permitted. Camping within 0.25 miles (0.4 km) of roads, trailheads and parking areas is also prohibited.

Check at the visitor center for current weather information. Carry first aid supplies and let someone know where you are going and when you plan to return. Off-trail hiking is not recommended as lava terrain is very rough.

Please remember to leave no trace. If you pack it in, pack it out. Leave what you find. All historic and prehistoric objects, plants, animals, and rocks are protected. Please store your food securely and do not share your lunch with any wild animals. Please stay on designated trails.

Horse Regulations

Horses and pack animals are only permitted on the Three Sisters, Lyons, and Whitney Butte trails.

Horsemen should carry plenty of water. Summer days are hot and there is no surface water at Lava Beds.

Leg protectors are recommended for horses and riders.

Ride at a slow pace; the terrain is rough.

Horses should be sprayed completely, especially on the legs, with a good fly and tick spray.

Wilderness rules apply to horse and rider.