

Lava Beds

National Monument

National Park Service

Things to See and Do on Your Own

Caves

An exciting adventure is waiting for everyone, all sizes, shapes and ages, in the lava tube caves. It's an "adventure" because you have the unique experience of exploring the caves by yourself. Lanterns, on loan, are available at the Visitor Center. The caves come in varying degrees of difficulty, ranging from a lighted cave, Mushpot, in the center of the parking lot, to the mile-long Catacombs, with long stretches of duck walking or crawling. Drop in at the Visitor Center. A ranger will be happy to recommend a cave or caves that would be just perfect for you, your family, or friends. Don't leave Lava Beds without trying one of these gems.

Schonchin Butte

Nature's garden is one way you can describe Schonchin Butte. Throughout the late spring and summer, wildflowers can be found in abundance. Climb the trail in early June to see the beautiful cycladenia, yellow violet, and Anderson's larkspur. In years of abundant snowfall and rain the spotted mountain bells may be blooming. Look for them near the second bench provided for your rest stops. Collomia, desert mint, Douglas catchfly, purple sage, and desert buckwheat are only a few of the beauties to be enjoyed later in the summer. Do take the trail for a glorious walk.

Another way to describe Schonchin Butte is it's the site of the Fire Lookout. It is staffed from June through September. The lookout on duty is constantly looking for smoke or fire in the monument and the surrounding national forests. When a fire is spotted its location is reported to the fire dispatcher in Alturas who notifies the appropriate fire station. If the lookout isn't busy recording weather or other duties, you may be invited in to see the operation. If there are children in your party they may become Junior Fire Lookouts. The lookout will explain the requirements and give them a Junior Fire Lookout badge when the requirements are met. All in all, this is another exciting reason for climbing Schonchin Butte.

Butte is a geological word for any landform that sticks up abruptly, but cinder cone is a more descriptive geological way of describing this landmark of the monument. Erupting more than 30,000 years ago, it spewed ash and cinders into the air much like a can of soda when shaken. A lava spatter rampart is at the very top. From the lookout panoramic views of the Medicine Lake volcano, Mt. Shasta, Mt. McLoughlin, the Clear Lake Hills and the Warner Mountains can be viewed and photographed. On a really clear day, you can even see the south rim of Crater Lake. Below the butte, lava flows and collapses are easy to pick out in the landscape. This alone is reason enough to make the climb.

Come on, do it! It will be memorable!

Hidden Valley and Mammoth Crater

Been dreaming about walking under tall pine trees with the wind whispering through the branches or a nice shady spot on a warm sunny day? Then Hidden Valley is the place for you. A trail meanders down the valley wall and around the valley floor under the ponderosa pines. Listen for the hammering of the yellow-bellied sapsucker and other woodpeckers or the high-pitched squeak of the squirrels. If your timing is right you may see whitestemmed gentian or a dwarf skullcap poking their blooms up next to the trail. Later in the summer fireweed brightens the trail along the valley wall with its spiked pink blossoms. Quiet solitude is another asset of Hidden Valley, a place to relax and use your five senses to their fullest.

When you've filled your soul with the joys of Hidden Valley, cross the road and follow the trail up to the rim of Mammoth Crater. Lava flowed from this crater about 30,000 years ago, creating most of the lava tube caves in the monument. Read the interpretive sign at the rim, then follow the trail to the overlook below. Here you can get a

better view of the enormous size of the crater. If you are quiet, you may get a glimpse of a pika, scrambling among the rocks near you. Soaring over the crater may be a prairie falcon or violet-green swallows. Look for white splashes, signs of a nest, on the walls. Occasionally, a raven or a turkey vulture may be seen overhead. A close look along the trail may reveal dwarf monkey flowers, gay penstemon, or the pale lavender blooms of squaw carpet. Green leaf manzanita blooms early with tiny pink bell-shaped flowers that turn into apple-like fruit later (manzanita in Spanish means little apple).

These gems are only three miles from the Visitor Center. It is well worth the drive up the graded gravel road--a must to make your visit complete.

Fleener Chimneys

Fleener Chimneys is another feature worth seeing, even if you aren't terribly interested in geology. This spatter cone was created by globs of molten lava piling on top of each other. A hole is left in the center giving it a chimney-like effect. How deep is the hole? FIFTY FEET! Now you don't have to throw rocks in to find out. We are just now getting the chimneys cleaned out from past indiscretions. Varying textures and colors in the rocks will delight photographers. The chimneys are the source of the tremendous aa flow called The Devil's Homestead. The eruption occurred between 2,000 and 8,000 years ago.

The site has a lovely picnic area shaded by western juniper trees. The picnic tables were constructed by members of the CCC; the logs were obtained at Oregon Caves and the rocks were gathered locally. A wheelchair accessible toilet is available there also.

Lovely wildflowers, such as Indian paintbrush, phacelia, and mariposa lilies can be seen in the area throughout the season. Coyotes, pronghorn, and deer have also been spotted crossing the road at various times. Fleener Chimneys is an interesting place that definitely merits your attention.

Thomas-Wright Battlefield

The Thomas-Wright trail has everything--geology, wildflowers, wildlife, and history. As you start down the trail, observe the high desert landscape with sagebrush and other perennials of rabbitbrush, mountain mahogany, bittercherry, and fern bush dotting the area. A short side trip to the right will take you to Black Crater, another interesting spatter cone. Back at the main trail you'll follow along the edge of the lava flow from Black Crater. Picture the flow being pushed from behind and large chunks breaking off and welding together as the flow hardened.

If it is a hot day, sit on the bench in the shade of the western juniper. Examine its roots and the staghorn lichen covering its branches. The spatter cone nearby is part of the Ross Chimney flow. A short distance down the trail is the only signed tree mold in the monument. Many wildflowers show their splashes of color along the trail throughout the summer. Mariposa lilies, asters, fleabane, chaenactis, and stephanomaria are only a few. Walking a little further, reveals a great panoramic view of the entire monument. Lizards, grasshoppers, caterpillars, coyote scat, deer, and pronghorn tracks can be spotted if you look closely.

At last the Thomas-Wright Battlefield is reached. A unique and unusual battle took place here. Read the interpretive signs. Try to put yourself in the battle--soldier or Modoc, how do you think you might act? Return to the parking lot by the same trail. What a great experience you've just had! Give it some thought.

Gillems Camp

Imagine what it must have been like to be stationed at Gillems Camp. It was called Camp Tule Lake then. It was occupied from April 1 through June 1, some of the coldest months of the year. The strong winter winds and cold temperatures must have made the wool uniforms and floorless tents seem inadequate. Meals of hardtack, bacon, beans, and coffee surely became monotonous and the few hot meals probably cooled rapidly in the out of doors. With these adverse physical conditions, the troops also had to deal with the threat of death during every patrol and battle and the monotony of waiting while negotiations with the Modocs were taking place. Walk through the camp, visit the cemetery, and try to imagine what it was like to be there in 1873.

For further adventure, take a walk to the top of the bluff along the trail that mules used to bring in army supplies. The view from the top will explain why the soldiers were betting the capture of the Modocs would take little time. The flat-looking ground below failed to reveal the cracks and crannies of the lava flows, excellent fortifications and hiding places for the Modocs. Will it still look that way to you? You'll never know unless you venture up the trail.

Canbys Cross

Off and on during the seasons, the full moon is reflected off a white cross with the inscription in black, GEN CANBY U.S.A. WAS MURDERED HERE BY THE MODOCS APRIL 11, 1873. This cross is a reproduction. The original, now on exhibit in the Visitor Center, was raised in 1882 by Lieutenant John S. Parke in tribute to the man who had served his country honorably from 1839-1873. Canby had brought peaceful settlement to several conflicts that he had encountered earlier in his military career. During the Modoc War he was ordered by General Sherman to try for peace by negotiation.

Three other commissioners were to work with him. Eventually, the Modocs, in a desperate attempt to end the war, attacked them during a peace meeting. They believed, as was their custom, that if the soldiers' leaders were killed the soldiers would go away. In killing Canby, they lost the one man who might have solved their problems fairly and brought about a just peace settlement.

Canby was the only general officer killed during the Indian Wars. The clash of two cultures that couldn't understand each other led to his death. As you view the cross, day or night, try to understand the viewpoint of both. Maybe we can still learn something from our own history.

Captain Jacks Stronghold

A walk through Captain Jacks Stronghold is a unique experience just waiting to happen. The spirit of the Modoc People can still be found there. Think of the courage it took for them to endure the winter of 1872-73 after their village and winter food supplies had been burned by the army. Please walk the trail with respect and with an open heart. Enter the medicine circle reverently, as you would enter your own church. Let the spirits of the winds, the rocks, and the animals speak to you of past events, as they have always spoken to the indigenous peoples. Listen for their silent voices. The traditional culture of an entire people was lost here, yet a modern culture of their descendants still survives. Don't be surprised if you find prayer ribbons or sage offerings hanging on the prayer tree near the junction of the two trails. Feel free to offer your own. The spirituality of the Modoc Stronghold permeates the whole region and captures the hearts of many visitors, calling them back year after year. Will you be among them? (You can borrow a trail guide from the dispenser, but please remember to return it when you're finished. You can buy it for 25 cents.)

Hospital Rock

While the betrayal at the negotiating tent (site of Canbys Cross today) was taking place another group of Modocs advanced with a white flag on Hospital Rock, the encampment of Major John Green and Major Edwin Mason. Lieutenant Sherwood, the Officer of the Day, went to meet with them. The Modocs opened fire on him and Lieutenant Boyle, wounding both officers. Sherwood later died from his wounds.

A walk to the top of Hospital Rock leads you to an interpretive sign explaining the significance of this area of the monument. It also affords you a beautiful spot to view and photograph Mt. Shasta. California poppies and Anderson larkspur add splashes of color along the trail with saltbush growing at the end. Northern harriers can sometimes be seen gliding over the adjacent fields looking for prey.

Delve into another aspect of the Modoc War and its surrounding landscape. You'll find it intriguing.

Heppe Ice Cave

Heppe Cave trail can be found on the road to Mammoth Crater. The trail begins under tall pine trees. Mountain mahogany, bitterbrush, yarrow, old man's beard, and buckwheats line the trail. Red-tailed hawks, ravens, and turkey vultures soar majestically overhead. Tiny insects, like cicadas, butterflies, and ants, are busy doing their special things. As you reach the top of the trail, you are amazed with the view of an enormous collapse. Heppe's Bridge is visible at the far end. Continuing along the trail, you pass Heppe's Chimney, a fine example of a hornito.

A natural rock garden is created here by the blooming of purple sage, pygmy monkey flowers, penstemons, and buckwheats.

Along the steep trail into Heppe's Cave, look for chipmunks and pikas. Gooseberries, white alumroot, lavender figwort, and beautiful ferns love the cool shaded area of the cave entrance. Lichens and minerals combine to make beautiful patterns on the cave walls. At the bottom of the trail may be found a pool of water atop a base of ice. The amount is dependent upon the winter temperatures and moisture. Continue across the cave, climb the far wall, and take a seat. The sweet scent of fernbush reaches you on a breeze. Listen to the silence, the beautiful silence. Bees are buzzing; violet-green swallows flit throughout the collapse catching insects on the wing. Watch the chipmunks scale the vertical walls. Ravens and swallows like to nest here. Other birds use the pond to drink and bathe. Fill your heart and mind with the sights and sounds of today. You can call back the experience many times in the future.

Symbol Bridge

Another trail of special interest is the one to Symbol Bridge. It is an easy trail with practically no change in elevation. In early June the wildflowers on display may be the blue of gentians or pale yellow of the death camas. Fleabanes, chaenactis, and mariposa lilies come later. By late summer, asters and rabbitbrush still bring color to the trail. Occasionally the mosquito-eating purple martin may be seen darting through the sky doing its job. A side trail leads to Big Painted Cave. At the entrance smooth blocks of basaltic lava next to the trail have been painted with Modoc symbols. Weathering has made them very faint so close inspection is required. If you find the pictographs, never touch them. The oils from your skin will cause further deterioration.

It is just a short walk further to the special place called Symbol Bridge. Stop a minute and gather your thoughts. Approach the bridge with a spirit of reverence and enter the area as you would a cathedral. Walk down under the bridge. Again you will see pictographs of earlier people. There are also signs of historical significance. Please do not touch them or deface them in any way. We do not know the meanings of these symbols, but we do know they are of spiritual significance to the indigenous people of this region.

Do the symbols speak to you? What do you think they mean? When you leave the bridge and return along the trail, do you feel a little better for having visited this place? Only you will know.

Petroglyph Point

You step into the past when you view the carvings in the cliff at Petroglyph Point. This formation was created when a cinder cone (like Schonchin Butte) erupted from the floor of ancient Tule Lake to form an island. Early people paddled out in boats to carve these pictures into the soft rock. Waves undercut the base of the cliff where the petroglyphs are carved. Wind, rain, and ice have enlarged gas bubbles and faults, creating many cracks and crannies. These natural nesting sites are filled with barn owls, cliff swallows, hawks, prairie falcons, and many other birds who find an abundant supply of food nearby. A brochure is available at the site to help you better understand the significance of the area. You will long remember your visit to this special place.