

Lava Beds

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior

Lava Beds National Monument



Things to See and Do on Your Own



Something for Everyone

Many visitors to Lava Beds are excited to discover there is much more to do here than they thought! There is plenty see and do for a day or even a week— explore a cave, hike a trail, photograph wildlife, climb a spatter cone, contemplate a battlefield, peer into a crater, or view Native American rock art.

The sites in this bulletin are arranged by their distance from the Visitor Center, and represent only a few highlights of what Lava Beds has to offer. If you are particularly interested in one aspect of Lava Beds such as Modoc War sites, geologic features, rock art, caves, or wilderness hiking, please ask for additional brochures. Trail guides are available at Gillems Camp, Captain Jacks Stronghold, and Petroglyph Point. You'll also find interpretive signs at these and many other sites throughout the Monument, and inside Mushpot Cave.

Caves

Hundreds of lava tube caves beckon exploration at Lava Beds. They vary greatly in difficulty, length, and complexity. Over two dozen caves have developed entrances and trails, and are shown on the Monument's map. Most are open throughout the year to explore on your own.

If you plan to explore caves, please stop by the Visitor Center to get a cave permit, cave brochure and talk with a ranger to ensure you are prepared.

Free guided cave tours are also offered daily in

Hidden Valley and Mammoth Crater

A short trail meanders along the rim of Hidden Valley under Ponderosa pines. Enjoy the rare shade this area provides in summertime, and observe the impressive results of lava that flowed through from Mammoth Crater. The short trail to Mammoth Crater begins across the road at the parking area and leads up to the rim. Imagine lava flowing in multiple episodes from this

massive crater about 30,000 years ago. It created all the lava tube caves in the Cave Loop area, and many more farther north. To explore the rocky, forested landscape of Lava Beds' southern end further, continue around the Big Nasty Trail or hike the nearby trail to Heppe Cave.

Symbol Bridge and Big Painted Cave

This easy 0.8 mi (1.3 km) trail leads to Symbol Bridge with a short spur trail to Big Painted Cave. Both cave entrances contain black and white Modoc-style pictographs on boulders and walls. Although many pictographs are weathered and faint, you will still marvel at the artwork here. Please stay on the trail and do not

touch the pictographs, as oils from your skin will cause further deterioration. Visit this site with respect, as it still holds cultural significance for some Native Americans.

Schonchin Butte

A hike up the steep 0.7 mi (1.1 km) trail to the historic Schonchin Butte Fire Lookout is well worth the effort! Imagine the labor of the Civilian Conservation Corps crew that not only carried up by hand all the materials needed to build the lookout, but first had to build the trail itself. Enjoy the breeze and scenery any time of

year from the lookout's balcony, where interpretive panels identify landmarks in all four directions. In summer, a firefighter may be on duty to tell you about their work and administer a Junior Fire Lookout program for kids.

Fleener Chimneys

A short side road takes you to the fascinating Fleener Chimneys. This spatter cone is the source of the rough Devils Homestead *a'a* flow. It was created as erupting globs of molten lava piled up on each other like sticky oatmeal, leaving a 50 ft (15 m) deep chimney behind in the center. Picnic tables at this site are shaded by

junipers. The tables were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps more than sixty years ago! The massive logs were obtained at Oregon Caves National Monument, and the rocks gathered locally. An accessible restroom is also available here.

Thomas-Wright Battlefield and Black Crater

This 1.1 mi (1.8 km) trail leads to the site of a Modoc ambush on an Army reconnaissance mission during the Modoc War. Interpretive signs at the beginning and end of the trail explain the battle and its aftermath. The main trail follows the edge of the lava flow from Black Crater. A short side trail just past the trailhead also leads onto Black Crater itself, a large spatter cone. Look for tree

molds, made when a living tree was burned away by fresh lava and left the imprint of its bark inside. If you are interested in exploring more geologic features, be sure to stop at pullouts in the Devils Homestead lava flow, just north on the main road.

Gillems Camp and Sheepy Ridge

From April through June 1873, Army soldiers were stationed here during the Modoc War. Walk the easy guided trail around this area and discover why ancient Modocs, the Army, the Civilian Conservation Corps, and National Park Service rangers alike cherished its location on the shores of old Tule Lake. You can also hike to the top of Gillem Bluff (known as Sheepy Ridge to the Modocs and settlers) along the route the Army used to bring supplies to Gillems Camp. The view from

the top provides a great perspective of Lava Beds' volcanic landscape. Generations of Modocs once netted waterfowl here as they flew low over the ridge, and a fence still stands from the attempted reintroduction of bighorn sheep in the 1980s. You can also look down on Canby Cross, the site where a Modoc War peace meeting ended in tragedy. Visit the cross at the next stop heading east.

Captain Jacks Stronghold

As you walk the 1.5 mi (2.4 km) trail through the trenches of the Stronghold, think of the courage it took for a small band of Modoc people to endure the winter of 1872-1873 here. Try as well to imagine the fear Army soldiers must have felt launching an assault on this virtual fortress of lava. Hospital Rock, one of the sites from which the Army attacked, is also visible from high points within the Stronghold. It can be visited along the road just to the east. It took the Army five

months to drive the Modoc from the Stronghold, and soon after from their entire homeland. Still, a modern culture of Modoc descendants survives, especially in Oregon and Oklahoma. You may see prayer ribbons and sage offerings hanging on the medicine pole near the junction of the two trails, signifying the continuing importance of this special place.

Wildlife Overlooks

Stop at the East and West Wildlife Overlooks to view migratory and resident birds on the waters of Tule Lake in any season. Waterfowl are especially abundant here in the spring and fall as they pass through on their journey along the Pacific Flyway. Imagine the sights and sounds of up to six million birds here before the early 1900s when lake drainage for agriculture began. You may encounter many other species of mammals,

terrestrial birds, and reptiles throughout the Monument, especially if you journey away from roads and developed areas early or late in the day. Drive the nearby Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge's Wildlife Tour Route along the edge of modern-day Tule Lake for a more in-depth birding experience.

Petroglyph Point

This formation was created when volcanic tuff erupted from the floor of ancient Tule Lake to form an island. Waves undercut the cliff, and early people paddled out in boats to carve images into the soft rock. There is more Native American rock art here than anywhere else in

California, and Modoc stories are still told about this unique and important formation. Weather has enlarged crevices that prairie falcons, great horned owls, and even Canada geese use as nesting sites.