

## *Painted Hills State Park*

Painted Hills State Park is located north of Ochoco Highway 26, along the banks of Bridge Creek about nine miles northwest of the town of Mitchell in Wheeler County.

The entire park-owned land, 13.2 acres, was purchased on June 23, 1947, from L. T. and Golda Howard, title holders, and R. R. and Dorothy Every, contract purchasers, at a cost of \$66.

In connection with the park land transfer, the grantors who owned approximately 2,800 acres of land surrounding the park, granted and vested in the general public a right and privilege to go upon, visit, examine and enjoy the Painted Hills and the area surrounding the same and the privilege to explore the fossil deposits and other geological formations, but no fossils or other objects of interest, scientific or otherwise, may be removed for commercial purposes.

The Painted Hills area is a locality of exceptional scientific importance and one of great popular appeal. Fossils of tree leaves and plants that grew millions of years ago, considered to be of the Eocene period, are found here in the Clarno formation.

Ralph W. Chaney of the University of California, Department of Paleontology, on August 26, 1939, had this to say in a letter to the State Parks Superintendent: "I know of no place in the world where the contrast between the present and the past is more fully emphasized. From the junipers of today we may go back to the giant redwoods of the past by digging into the volcanic shale of the hilltop. Evidence of great volcanic activity may be seen on all sides, including the striking colors of the Painted Hills. A place so filled with the lore of Earth History should surely be set aside as a permanent possession of the State of Oregon."

John Merriam of Carnegie Institute of Washington, D. C., wrote the State Parks Superintendent on October 19, 1939, and said, "I have known the Painted Hills region near Bridge Creek for 40 years . . . In no other place do I know of a situation in which there is a finer expression of the change of climate and of life."

An interesting article about the area by Phil F. Brogan appeared in *The Oregonian* on January 27, 1946. It said in part: "Blood-red water raced through a western tributary of Wheeler county's Bridge creek recently when torrential rains swept the storm-sculptured lands near Mitchell. But ranchers of the valley were not alarmed. Occasionally the Bridge creek tributaries run green. Frequently they are brown. Blue water is not uncommon, and even yellow floods have been reported. Occasionally the flows of the streams of many hues blend, then surge down the winding canyon to a junction with the turbulent John Day river. The colored waters originate in the Painted Hills, one of Oregon's most unique formations . . .

"The Painted Hills are predominantly red, and erosion has shaped the area into huge domes. These beds are soft, and even moderately heavy rains start the mud moving in streams. Bands of yellow cross some of the Painted Hills.

"Facing the red hills, with their bands of yellow, are the pinnacled bluffs of the middle John Day series, in which are sealed away the stony remains of rhinos and oreodons, three-toed horses and ancestral camels, giant pigs and great cats. The Painted Hills change in color with wet and dry seasons, and they alter their hues under sunshine and clouds. Scientists from far parts of the world have visited the area. Few Oregonians have ever heard of the locality."

From the foregoing description it is easily understood why the area was named Painted Hills.

Improvements include tables, benches, stoves and an entrance road. The 13.2-acre tract was fenced. It has been difficult to maintain facilities in the park as floods and stock grazing in the area do much damage.

Attendance during 1962 totaled 5,703 day visitors. No count was made in 1963.

Thomas Condon-John Day Fossil Beds State Park is located on both sides of the South Fork of John Day River and John Day Highway 19, at mile posts 109, 115, 117 and 119, between mile posts 120 and 125, and two small areas opposite mile posts 127 and 135 in Grant and Wheeler Counties.

The first area obtained was a gift of 1.50 acres from Eastern Oregon Land Company on January 31, 1930. This tract is located three miles east of the town of Dayville, at mile post 135. It contains ancient Indian pictographs. Acquisition of this tract marks the beginning of the preservation of the larger area recommended by Professor J. P. Buwalds of California Institute of Technology and for many years on the staff of University of Oregon, and Dr. John Merriam, President of Carnegie Institute, Washington, D. C., containing such notable areas as Picture Gorge, Turtle Cove, Sheep Rock, Cathedral Rock and the Mascall formation.

An application to purchase 1,600 acres of federally-owned land at a cost of \$1.25 per acre was made in 1930. Only 1,361.68 acres of this land was obtained from the Bureau of Land Management on May 20, 1931. Other federal lands purchased under the Recreational Act of 1926, as amended at the time of acquisition, are as follows:

|        |       |               |
|--------|-------|---------------|
| 240    | acres | May, 1931     |
| 200    | "     | January, 1939 |
| 40     | "     | June, 1939    |
| 640.44 | "     | June, 1956    |
| 40     | "     | May, 1962     |

A gift of 3.8 acres from W. R. Mascall, a local rancher, in September, 1935, is located some distance from the highway at mile post 127. This gift included a car parking area, an overlook and a road leading to it. The road leading to this overlook, containing 2.1 acres, was deeded to Grant County in 1956 in order to provide access to farms located some distance south of the highway. It is to be maintained by the county. The viewpoint and parking area were left intact. The high viewpoint overlooks a valley extending south from the John Day River and the higher lands to the west and north.

Another small isolated tract, containing three acres, located on both sides of the road at mile post 109, was purchased from Michael E. and Rachel M. Griffin in June, 1945.

Six additional purchases between 1935 and 1962, ranging in size from 4.59 acres to 878.91 acres, increased the park land to 3,543.56 acres at the close of 1963.

Acquisition of this park land was to preserve an area which has yielded so abundantly of animal and plant remains, an area of delicately tinted cliffs and massive peaks deeply cut by gorges and canyons, an area rich in scenic and historic features and an area which has attracted scientists from afar.

There is evidence that Reverend Thomas Condon, a missionary who moved from Forest Grove to The Dalles in 1862, was the first to introduce the John Day Fossil Beds to the earth scientists of the nation, and through them to the world, although he did not personally visit the area until 1865 or 1866. Reverend Thomas Condon's biography, written by his daughter, Mrs. Ellen Condon McCornack, establishes a definite date of the finding of invertebrate fossils on a tributary of Crooked River. It states in part as follows: "A letter by Captain John M. Drake, in command of a troop of cavalry temporarily encamped on a tributary of the . . . river, to Reverend Condon, dated July 19, 1864, states: 'While away from camp in pursuit of some Snake Indians some soldiers made a discovery that I take to be of interest geologically. On my return I found our camp converted into a vast geological cabinet; everybody had been gathering "rocks" from a point some thirty miles distant.' These specimens collected by Captain Drake's command in 1864, are noted as probably the first fossils Mr. Condon received from east of The Dalles."

The park was named for this distinguished geologist and scientist, Thomas Condon, who is credited with making known the discovery of these important fossil beds located along the John Day River. These beds, estimated to be 30 million years old, yield remains of extinct animals from horses of sheep size, to mastodons.

Grass, sagebrush and a scattering of juniper trees cover the valley lands in the park and extend, in many places, onto the rolling hillsides. The local ranchers graze stock throughout the lands. The steep, multi-colored walls of the picturesque canyons are without vegetation.

To the scientist, the value of the ancient specimens unearthed at Turtle Cove is beyond measure. To the geologist, the various land formations found throughout the park are just as valuable; but to the tourist, untrained in either field, the multicolored strata formations found at Picture Gorge, Sheep Rock, Turtle Cove, Cathedral Rock and many other parts of the park are striking natural features and attract the attention of any visitor. The ancient Indian pictographs in Picture Gorge also arouse the interest of many.

Developments include a car parking area and viewpoint on the stream side of the highway approximately two miles north of the junction of Ochoco Highway 26 and John Day Highway 19. A textboard, giving information relating to the fossils to be found in the area, is located at the car parking area. The Geological Society of the Oregon Country erected a plaque on this area to the memory of Thomas Condon, "a geologist, teacher, author and clergyman."

Other improvements by the state include an entrance road, car parking area and limited camping facilities at Turtle Cove and near Foree Ranch. An entrance road and car parking area at Mascall overlook have been constructed.

No count of visitors to the park has been made.

Permits as follows affect this park:

| Number | Date    | Name                                   | Expiration |
|--------|---------|----------------------------------------|------------|
| 30257  | 8-9-61  | Alexander T. & Nellie Munro—trails     | Indefinite |
| 30940  | 5-18-60 | Walter J. & Bessie Foree—entrance road | Permanent  |

**Painted Hills State Park**

Sign

## PAINTED HILLS STATE PARK

THE COLORFUL FORMATIONS OF THIS AREA WERE LAID DOWN MILLIONS OF YEARS AGO DURING THE TIME IN WHICH THE VOLCANOES OF THE RISING CASCADE RANGE TO THE WEST WERE SHOWERING WIND-CARRIED PUMICE AND ASH ONTO CENTRAL OREGON.

THE VOLCANIC SEDIMENTS ARE BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN DEPOSITED IN WATER, AT LEAST IN PART, AND DURING A TIME OF MILD HUMID CLIMATE, THE LAYERS OF VARYING MATERIAL GRADUALLY DECOMPOSED TO FORM THESE COLORED BANDS AS THE ASH WAS ALTERED TO CLAY.

THE STRATA EXPOSED IN THE PAINTED HILLS REGION ARE REFERRED TO AS CLARNO AND JOHN DAY FORMATIONS. THE FOSSIL LEAF IMPRESSIONS OF REDWOOD, CINNAMON, FIG, ALDER, AND OTHER TREES AND PLANTS FOUND IN THIS VICINITY HAVE GIVEN CLUES AS TO THE FORMER DAMP WARM CLIMATE OF THE AREA IN THE TIME BEFORE THE RISE OF THE CASCADE MOUNTAINS.

**Thomas Condon-John Day Fossil Beds State Park**

Sign

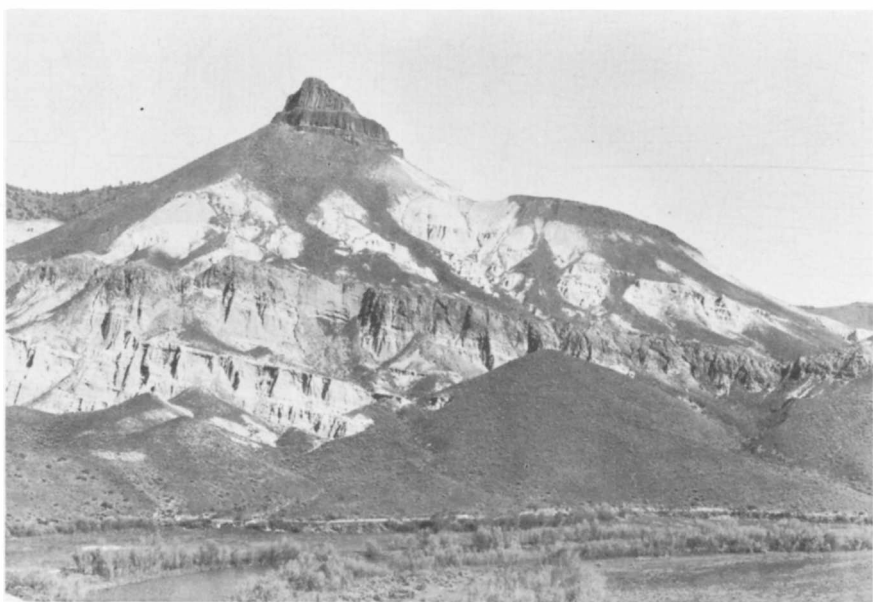
## OREGON GEOLOGY

## JOHN DAY FOSSIL BEDS

This formation takes its name from the river named for John Day of the Astor overland party of 1811.

FAMOUS THE WORLD OVER FOR THEIR WEALTH OF FOSSIL BONES, THE COLORFUL JOHN DAY BEDS WERE LAID DOWN IN LATE OLIGOCENE TIMES WHEN VOLCANIC ASH CHOKED STREAMS AND FILLED LAKE BASINS. ANIMALS OF BOTH FORESTS AND PLAINS WERE ENTOMBED. IT WAS A VARIED FAUNA INCLUDING BEAR DOGS AND GIANT CATS. RHINOS LIVED ON RIVER BANKS. TINY CAMELS AND THREE-TOED HORSES WERE ABUNDANT. THEIR BONES ARE BURIED HERE, AND WHEN BROUGHT TO LIGHT BY EROSION ILLUSTRATE ONE CHAPTER OF THE STORY OF OREGON'S ANCIENT PAST.

*Painted Hills State Park—Showing alternate layers of colored material.*



*Thomas Condon-John Day Fossil Beds State Park—Sheep Rock.*