Lava Beds

Lava Beds National Monument
California

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Lava Beds National Monument protects a variety of well-preserved geologic features, including lava tube caves *(above left)* and Gillem Bluff in the distance.
NPS / NICO RAMIREZ

500,000 Years Ago The Earth Opened

Cracking and sputtering, it released liquid rock and rivers of fire across the landscape. Intermittent eruptions over thousands of years layered the land, leaving intricate caves, cones, craters, and black, jagged blankets of lava. The Modoc called this "the land of burnt-out fires." Tule Lake and Lava Beds were then, and are today, the center of their world.

This can be a forbidding place, a world foreign to outsiders. The Modoc and their ancestors lived in this rugged land for over 10,000 years. Following the rhythms of nature, they moved freely across their homeland until they were forcibly removed.

The blazing of the Applegate Trail through the heart of Modoc territory was the beginning of the end for the traditional Modoc way of life. Increasing numbers of white settlers claimed ancestral Modoc land, conflicts escalated, and both sides resorted to violent attacks. By the 1860s settlers demanded area tribes be moved to the Klamath Reservation in Oregon. The Modoc reluctantly signed a treaty, but consistently requested a reservation in their homeland. Poor conditions and disagreements with other tribes on the reservation convinced some Modoc to return home. Broken promises, bitter resentments, and distrust made negotiations impossible.

The Modoc War began on November 29, 1872, when troops from Fort Klamath tried to force the resisting Modoc back to the reservation. They fled to the natural fortress of the lava beds, to what is today called "Captain Jacks Stronghold." In April 1873 peace talks began. Toby Riddle, *(right)* a Modoc woman married to white settler Frank Riddle, served as an interpreter between the Modoc and the army. Kientpoos (Captain Jack) wanted his people to be allowed to stay in their homeland. He also wanted peace. Modoc society ruled by consensus. Remembering the 1852 slaughter of 30 members of their tribe, a majority voted to eliminate the peace commissioners. On April 11, 1873, peace commissioners Gen. Edward Canby and Rev. Eleazar Thomas were killed. Gen. William T. Sherman soon called for the "utter extermination" of the Modoc.

For six months 1,000 troops and volunteers fought to capture fewer than 60 Modoc warriors and their families. Those who resisted were exiled to the Quapaw Agency in Oklahoma.



SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

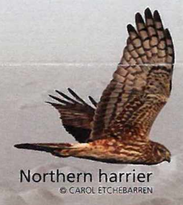


Captain Jacks Stronghold
NPS / LEGENDS OF AMERICA

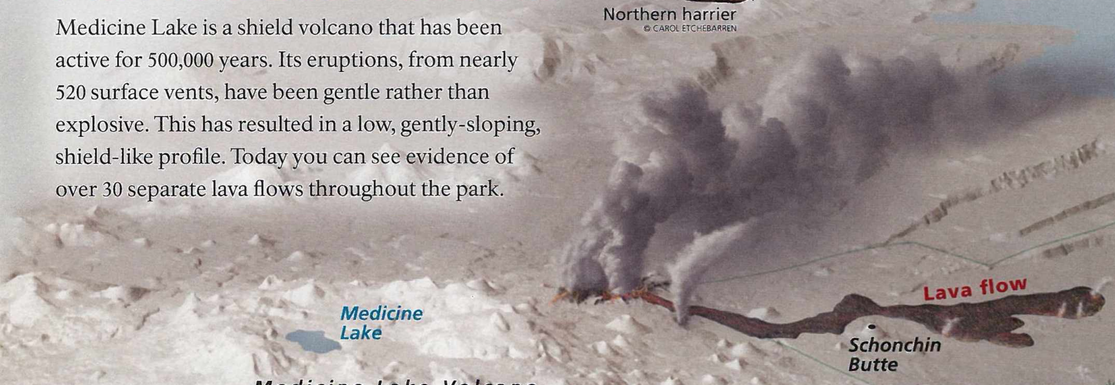
Modoc leader Kientpoos *(above right)*, called Captain Jack by settlers, refused to accept the poor conditions on the reservation. He felt by returning to their homeland and traditional ways his people could have a good life. Kientpoos surrendered on June 1 and was later hanged with three others.

Medicine Lake Volcano

Medicine Lake is a shield volcano that has been active for 500,000 years. Its eruptions, from nearly 520 surface vents, have been gentle rather than explosive. This has resulted in a low, gently-sloping, shield-like profile. Today you can see evidence of over 30 separate lava flows throughout the park.



Northern harrier
© CAROL ETCHEBARREN



Multiple eruptions from surface vents created most of the lava tube caves in the park.

Starting in 1910 most of Tule Lake was drained by the Bureau of Reclamation to create farmland for homesteaders.



Mule deer were a staple in the Modoc diet. Men used dogs, fire, and the topography of the lava flows to aid in the hunt.
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / DCRISR

From Lava Tubes to Caves

Eruptions occurring 30–40,000 years ago formed over 700 lava tube caves found in the park. Lava tubes form when streams of hot, flowing lava start to cool. The center of the stream stays hot and continues to flow as the outside begins to cool and harden. The hot lava drains out, leaving a pipe-like cave. Multiple eruptions can stack caves on top of one another, creating multilevel caves. When a lava tube ceiling collapses, it opens access to the cave below.



Lava tube in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park, 1972
USGS / HOLCOMB

Land of Burnt-out Fires

The Modoc life and culture was perfectly tuned to this environment and the richness of the resources it provided. They lived in semi-permanent winter villages along Lost River and Tule Lake. Each year as winter turned to spring, they began a seasonal round of fishing, hunting, and gathering.

Ragged and rough, the terrain of the lava flows could be dangerous, but to the Modoc it was a sacred landscape. It provided bounty in the hunt and challenged those seeking power and knowledge through vision quests.



Melissa blue butterfly
© ROB SANTRY



Leanira checkerspot butterfly
© ROB SANTRY

Usually not seen in the high desert, ferns can be found in cave entrances.

Wocus (yellow pond-lily) seed was an important source of nutrition for the Modoc.



Wyoming Indian paintbrush
NPS



American pika
©FLICKR / ADITITHESTARGAZER



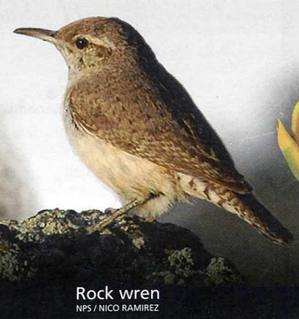
Scabland fleabane
NPS / JESSE BARDEN



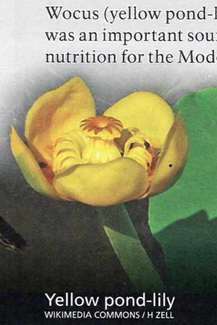
Fragile fern
NPS / KATRINA SMITH



Western blue flax
NPS



Rock wren
NPS / NICO RAMIREZ



Yellow pond-lily
WIKIMEDIA COMMONS / H ZELL



Threadleaf phacelia
NPS

Make the Most of Your Visit to Lava Beds

Established in 1925, Lava Beds National Monument protects and interprets this volcanic land, its early human occupation, and the Modoc defense of their homeland. Learn about activities and trails at the visitor center.

Some roads outside the park are closed during the winter and early spring. Call 530-667-8113 to check road closures.

The visitor center bookstore has snacks, ice, flashlights, helmets, videos, batteries, books, and souvenirs.

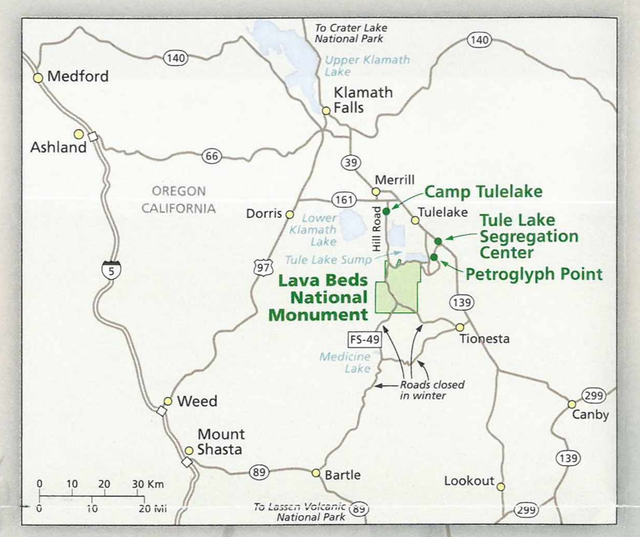
Gas, firewood, restaurants, and showers are available in nearby communities of Tionesta, CA; Tulelake, CA; and Merrill, OR (20–40 minutes from the visitor center).

Accessibility We strive to make facilities and programs accessible to all. Please call, ask at the visitor center, or go to our website for more information.

For firearms regulations check the park website or ask a park ranger.

Follow us on Facebook and Twitter, and Instagram.

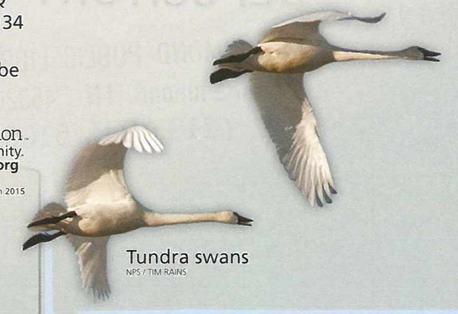
Lava Beds National Monument is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. Learn more at www.nps.gov.

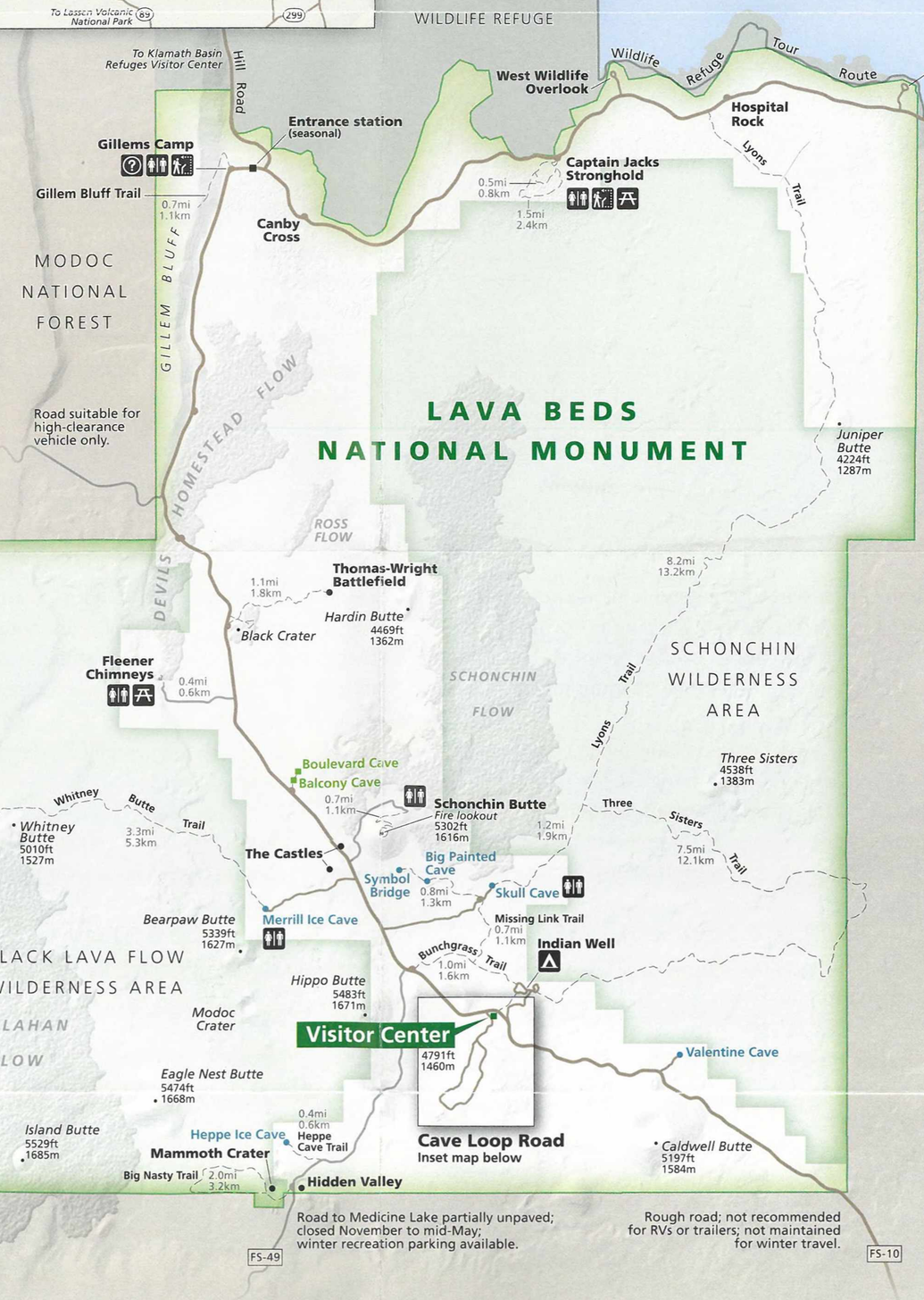


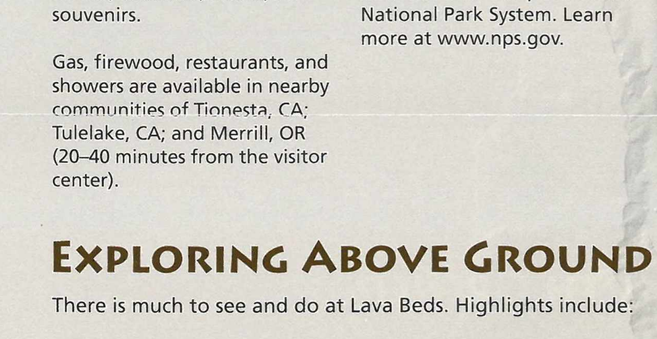
More Information
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www.nps.gov/labe

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

☆GPO:2015—388-437/30550 New in 2015
Printed on recycled paper.


Tundra swans
NPS / TIM RAINS




Smoothstem blazingstar © RON WOLF
Schonchin Butte Trail © RAY BOUKNIGHT


© RON WOLF

Most of the petroglyphs in the park, like those below, are found at Petroglyph Point. Their meaning remains a mystery.

Exploring Above Ground

There is much to see and do at Lava Beds. Highlights include:

Mammoth Crater Impressive 36,000 year old vents that created lava tube caves in the area.

Symbol Bridge/Big Painted Cave Marvel at prehistoric pictographs and artwork.

Schonchin Butte Hike the trail to the fire lookout built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Fleener Chimneys View volcanic vents and spatter cones created by globs of lava.

Thomas-Wright Battlefield Visit the site of a decisive Modoc victory over the US Army.

Gillems Camp/Gillem Bluff Hike to a great view of this volcanic landscape.

Captain Jacks Stronghold Explore where Modoc families took refuge as they fought for their homeland.

Wildlife Overlooks Stop and view waterfowl on Tule Lake.

Petroglyph Point Visit this former island with ancient carvings that is significant to native cultures.

Wilderness Congress has protected 28,460 acres of Lava Beds National Monument as wilderness under the 1964 Wilderness Act. Information about the National Wilderness Preservation System can be found at www.wilderness.net.

Exploring the Caves

Before entering a cave, you are required to obtain a permit at the visitor center or fee booth.

Many of the 700-plus caves have steep entry points, rocky trails, and, in some cases, very low ceilings. Over two dozen caves have developed entrances and trails. They vary in difficulty, length, and complexity. Start at the visitor center for screening, information, and to talk to a ranger about the caves.

Least Challenging
These caves have relatively high ceilings and smoother floors or trails. Safety gear is recommended.

Moderately Challenging
These caves may involve stooping through low sections and rough floors. Additional safety gear is recommended.

Most Challenging
These caves have sections that require crawling. Using all recommended safety gear will help protect you from injury.

CAVE SAFELY

Wear Protective Clothes Caves are about 55°F (13°C) year-round, however caves with ice are colder. Wear long sleeves, pants, and closed-toe footwear. Helmets, gloves and kneepads are recommended in moderately and most challenging caves.

Bring Enough Light Each person should carry at least one flashlight with extra batteries. Flashlights are loaned free of charge at the visitor center.

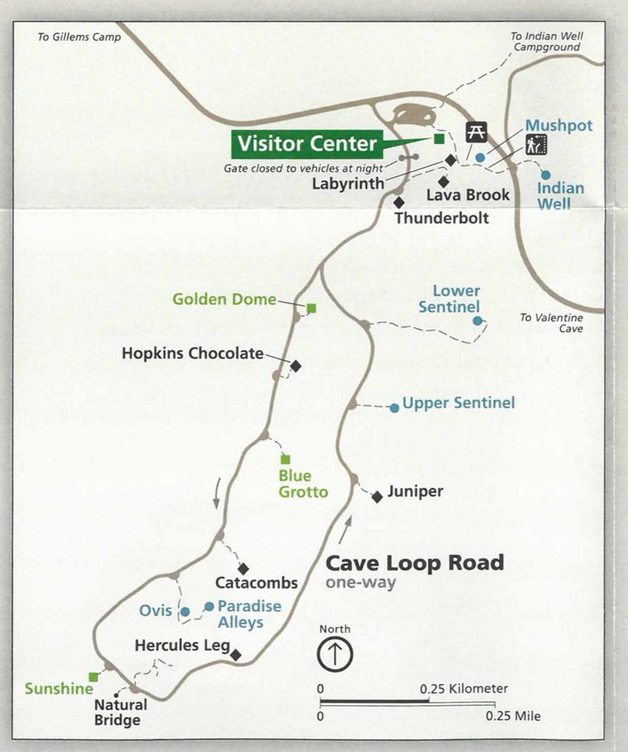
Protect Your Head Wear a helmet in all caves. Bump hats are sold at the visitor center.

Don't Go Alone Choose caves suitable for everyone in your group. Don't push beyond anyone's limits.

Know Your Route Be observant. Be aware of junctions and landmarks. A cave map book can be purchased at the visitor center. Tell someone where you are going.

CAVE SOFTLY

- Caves are amazing, fragile environments. Please take only pictures and leave only footprints. Leave no trace.
- Do not eat, drink, smoke, or leave trash.
- Cave slowly and carefully.
- Do not use caves as bathrooms.
- Stay on the trails.
- Do not touch cultural artifacts, paintings, cave formations, or gold and silver microbial mats.
- Use electric flashlights, not carbide or gas lamps.
- Do not disturb any cave life.
- Pets are not allowed in caves.



HELP PROTECT OUR BATS

Get a Permit If you plan on entering any cave in Lava Beds National Monument, stop by the visitor center or fee booth and obtain a permit.

Display your pass in your windshield to show you have been through the screening process and are helping protect the bats that live here.

If you have gear that has been used in caves or mines in the US, Canada, or Europe, please leave these items at home or in your car. If used, this gear must be properly decontaminated.

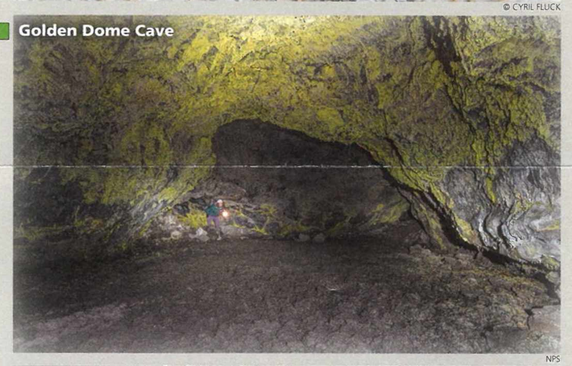

Townsend's big-eared bat
© MICHAEL DURHAM

White-Nose Syndrome
Since 2006, bats have been dying in unprecedented numbers in the eastern United States and Canada from white-nose syndrome, a fatal condition associated with exposure to fungus. Humans can spread the fungus between caves, mines, and other bat roost sites. Help us prevent the spread of this devastating disease.

Skull Cave


© CYRIL FLUCK

Golden Dome Cave


NPS

Catacombs


© KENNETH INGHAM