

Historical Survey of Developments  
at  
Lava Beds National Monument

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## I. Introduction

The purpose of this small Historic Resources Study is to evaluate the historical and/or architectural significance of all U.S. Forest Service and National Park Service developments in Lava Beds National Monument, Modoc County, California. It does not deal at all with the historic structures and sites related to the Modoc Indian War, for they were the subject of a Historic Resources Study prepared by Research Historian Erwin Thompson and published by the National Park Service, Denver Service Center in 1967.

## II. Scope and Methodology

The scope of this study is all standing buildings and structures in Lava Beds National Monument. It does not, except incidentally, attempt to deal with sites.

The methodology applied was threefold:

1. Physical and photographic survey involving personal examination by the author of all buildings and structures, accomplished by driving all the roads in the Monument and hiking to the top of Schonchin Butte to evaluate the one building not accessible by road.
2. Thorough examination of current Lava Beds NM inventory cards of real property for all buildings and structures.
3. Thorough reading of:
  - a. Superintendent's Monthly Narrative Reports, 1933-1956, for categories labeled "New Construction", "Improvements", "Maintenance", and "Miscellaneous."
  - b. Superintendent's Annual Reports, 1933-1956, same categories as above.
  - c. Civilian Conservation Corps Monthly Reports, September 1937 through September 1941 (all that are available).

The findings of the above research provide the historical and historical architectural survey requirements of Executive Order 11593 for all resources in Lava Beds National Monument not covered in Erwin Thompson's study of the Modoc War.

## III. Evaluation of Buildings and Structures

Lava Beds National Monument was a little-developed, remote area of rocky wilderness until the social programs of the New Deal provided

manpower and funds for development. Development focused at first heavily on roads and trails, campgrounds, and finally staff facilities. A U.S. Forest Service ranger station and garage were among the earliest "permanent" structures, built in 1932, but these are followed by the "headquarters" development at Indian Wells during the late 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps camp of temporary "prefabricated" or "portable" buildings, primarily, on the site of Gillem's Camp of the Modoc War near the northwest corner of the Monument, and finally by the Schonchin Butte fire lookout. Two more "prefabricated" buildings were built between 1950 and 1953, followed by a variety of Mission 66 program construction, and in 1973 by a mobile office trailer.

The following is a building-by-building evaluation of the buildings and structures which have not been demolished or destroyed in the intervening years against the Criteria of Eligibility for the National Register of Historic Places.

1. Administration Building - Building No. 1

This building was erected by the United States Forest Service in 1932 as a ranger station (residence), and it consisted of four rooms, accompanied by one and a half bathrooms. A gable-roofed wood frame structure, its single story encompassed 1,237 cubic feet of space. While this building and its accompanying garage were the earliest permanent buildings in Lava Beds National Monument, it does not possess significance today when measured against National Register Criteria of Eligibility because it lacks integrity, having no particular architectural significance and having been remodeled by the Civilian Conservation Corps in 1937 and 1939 and by the National Park Service in 1950 and 1956. In the process it was converted from a residence into a park administration building, which purpose it still serves.

2. Interpreter's Office, Library, Darkroom - Building No. 2

Erected by the U.S. Forest Service in 1932 to serve as a garage for the residents of Building No. 1, this structure was remodeled in 1950 by the National Park Service into a small museum. A single story gable-roofed wood frame structure, its original single room encompassed about 300 cubic feet. The National Park Service remodeled it again in 1952. In recent years, it was converted from a museum into its present uses, when a mobile office trailer was acquired in 1973 to serve as the museum. Like Building No. 1, this small building has so changed in function as to lack integrity, and has completely changed in appearance as well.

3. Superintendent's Residence - Building 3

Construction of a new residence for the Assistant Chief Ranger near the old Indian Wells Ranger Station, which served as the Chief Ranger's Residence, was commenced by the Civilian Conservation

Corps crews headquartered at "Camp Lava Beds" in August 1937. The building was essentially a wood-frame structure, and the frame was up and the roof sheathed by the end of the month. But the lower part of the building was to be veneered in lava rock, and even that was being set in place before the end of the month. The rock was not structural--it was merely for the rustic architectural effect.

After such rapid progress, construction slowed, especially when it came to the "finish" work, and in November work halted entirely due to lack of material--but by that time at least the stonework was complete. The next mention of work on the structure was in February 1938, when the plumbing was installed, except for faucets and other fixtures, and most of the carpentry was completed. By the end of the month it was ready to be painted.

By the end of April the residence was nearing completion, but had been prematurely occupied which caused additional work. The building was completed in May, but no sooner was that accomplished than it was decided to add a water tank and a toilet, and then a bedroom. This new work was finally finished in September, and the CCC men were at work on the landscaping. The building was a single story, gable-roofed structure with 1,335 square feet, on a masonry foundation. It had rustic lava rock sheathing beneath the windows, and a shingle roof.

The original 1938 addition to the project followed so closely on the initial construction as to be a part of the original structure, and was entirely sympathetic to the original design. Not quite so sympathetic, yet not entirely intrusive, was the addition of a garage, wood storage, utility room and broom closet constructed in 1958 and 1959.

Thus the Assistant Chief Ranger Residence, which upon conversion of the old Forest Service Chief Ranger Residence, into office space was changed into the Monument Superintendent's Residence, has associative historical significance with the Civilian Conservation Corps program as one of its products, and although somewhat impaired on the east side by the 1958 addition, a local level of architectural significance for its rustic design.

4. Residences - Buildings Nos. 5 and 6

As reflected in the Superintendent's Monthly Narrative Reports, the history of these buildings is as follows:

-- February 1947 (dated February 28, 1947)

"P.C.P. forms for the erection of two prefabricated houses to be located at Monument headquarters were prepared and submitted to the Regional Office."

-- September 1950 (dated October 1, 1950)

"Excellent progress is being made on the erection of the prefabricated cottages. One is enclosed ready for the interior finish and the frame work well along on the second."

-- October 1950 (dated November 1, 1950)

"Satisfactory progress was made on the erection of the two prefabricated cottages."

-- November 1950 (dated December 1, 1950)

"New Construction

One of the prefabricated cottages is ready for the plumbing and wiring. The second is ready for the flooring and partitions."

-- December 1950 (dated January 5, 1951)

"Maintenance

The floor and partitions in the remaining prefabricated cottage was /sic/ completed during the month."

-- January 1951 through March 1951

No mention

-- April 1951 (dated May 1, 1951)

"Construction

The interior of one of the prefabricated cottages was finished and all that remains is the installation of plumbing and lights.

-- May 1951 (dated June 2, 1951)

"Construction

The wiring and plumbing for the prefabricated cottage has been completed."

-- June 1951

No mention

-- July 1951 (dated July 31, 1951)

"Maintenance

One of the prefabricated cottages was completed during the month.

-- August 1951 through December 1951

No mention

-- January 1952 (dated January 31, 1952)

"Maintenance

The work of completing the second prefabricated cottage was resumed this month."

-- February 1952 (dated February 29, 1952)

"Maintenance

The weather prevented the accomplishment of any outside work. The crew devoted some time to interior work in one of the prefabricated cottages still uncompleted."

-- March 1952 through October 1952

No mention

-- November 1952 (dated December 1, 1952)

"Maintenance

Some work was done on the water line to the prefabricated houses."

-- December 1952 through February 1953

No mention

-- March 1953

"Maintenance

The carpenter work at the prefabricated house was finished early this month."

-- April 1953

No mention

-- May 1953 (dated June 1, 1953)

"Maintenance

The plumbing of the second prefabricated house was completed during the month."

-- June 1953 through October 1953

No mention

-- November 1953 (dated December 1, 1953)

"Maintenance

An inspection of the water system to prefabricated buildings 5 and 6 was made by Mr. Rowe.

-- December 1953 onward

No mention

The old Monument building records were replaced in 1959 with a new building record card. USDI NPS Form 10-559, printed November 1958. The original building file folders for Lava Beds apparently were discarded, but presumably the data entered on the new style cards was derived from the old file folders. Furthermore, these new file cards were prepared only eight years after the construction of the two buildings, so while the data is not primary source in nature, and while such cards do occasionally contain errors, the data is nevertheless in line with the contemporary narrative reports. For the two buildings in question the appropriate Forms 10-559 report:

Building 5 - Residence

"Constructed by the National Park Service in 1950. Single story, four rooms and bath. 602 square feet of floor space. Prefabricated frame and fibreboard construction with composition roof. Has water, sewer and electric connections, with lavatory, sink and toilet. Condition good. Cost \$1,900."

Building 6 - Residence

"Constructed by the National Park Service in 1951. Single story with four rooms and bath. Prefabricated fibreboard construction with composition roof. Water, electric and sewer connections with lavatory, sink and toilet. Condition good. Cost \$1,900."

Thus all the written evidence suggests that Buildings 5 and 6 were built new in 1950 and 1951, "prefabricated" of wood frame and celotex panels, rather than with the usual board siding built up piece by piece. The length of time it took to complete the buildings suggests that they were not knocked down structures, buildings that had been partially disassembled, moved, and re-assembled.

Lacking any evidence to the contrary, the logical conclusion is that the buildings in question had no connection with the War Relocation Authority Japanese internment camp at Newell, and that they have no historical or architectural significance whatsoever.

5. Garage and Shop - Building 7

This frame structure on concrete footings with a poured concrete floor was built by CCC Crews in 1939 and encompasses 2100 square feet. It has been somewhat altered over the years and is not considered to possess any significant architectural qualities. It is a comparatively marginal building but will be included as a part of a discontinuous historic district nomination because of its CCC Association.

6. Service Station - Building 10

This rustic service station is similar to one in Pinnacles National Monument, and has great architectural charm. Construction was started on this "gas and oil house" in April 1939, with a CCC crew excavating for installation of a 550 gallon underground tank. All the materials needed were already either on hand or had been contracted for, and the Superintendent anticipated rapid construction progress. The tank was installed in May, but then work was temporarily discontinued in order to push work at the checking station at the Northwest Entrance Station. It was apparently not until October that work at the service station site resumed, with leveling of the ground and trenching for water and gas pipes. Actual construction of the building began in November. Rock was hauled in with which to veneer the walls, forms were erected for the concrete, and some of the masonry work was done. Work on the concrete proceeded slowly in December, as they could pour only as much as they would be able to protect from freezing. Work then apparently ceased until March, when the CCC boys finished the stone work up to the eaves and framing of the shallow-pitched gable-roof. In April they finished all but about ten percent of the work on the roof, completed the wiring and plumbing, plastered the ceiling, and poured the concrete floor and terrace. The final work was done in May--a total of 142 man days that month--and the head of the CCC project, Frank S. Wadak, said that "it is in my estimation the best looking gas and oil house in any park or monument area." Indeed, it is today the best and least-altered example of rustic architecture applied to an automotive service station in all the parks in the Western Region of the National Park Service.



7. Pump House - Indian Wells - Building 11

Construction of this pump house apparently began in September 1940, with preparation of the framing and gathering of materials. In October the concrete floor was poured, the framing was finished, two layers of tar paper were in place on the roof, and a derrick had been assembled to hoist the rock used for veneer. No wiring had yet been done. During the next two winter months the only work accomplished was the gathering of lava boulders, after which work ceased in December. In March 1941, a CCC crew commenced work on the masonry. In April the crew logged 109 man-days in which they placed 396 cubic yards of masonry, and more of the same sort of work was done in May, after which work again ceased.

Construction resumed on July 28, 1941, at which time the remaining work included a quarter of the masonry veneer, placement of roofing felt and copper flashing, and construction of stone steps to the door of the building. The last CCC Monthly Report still in Lava Beds National Monument files was for August 1941, and it listed the stonework as completed to the roof line on three sides, and the flashing set on the front. The building was probably completed in the next month or two.

8. Pit Toilets - Buildings Nos. 13, 14, 15, 16

These four frame structures with shingle roofs, each with 12 square feet of interior space, were built in 1950, two at the Indian Wells (headquarters area) Ranger Station, and two at the campground. They have no historical or architectural significance whatsoever.

9. Comfort Station - Building 17

Built in 1950 at the Indian Well campground, this single story three-room structure built of wood frame construction with a plywood interior and asbestos slate tile roof has no historical or architectural significance.

10. Fire Lookout on Schonchin Butte - Building 30

The only fire lookout in Lava Beds National Monument, with an excellent view covering the whole Monument and a great expanse of Modoc National Forest to the south as well as Bureau of Land Management lands on the other three sides, was built primarily in 1940.

Construction appears to have begun on CCC Project LB-101 in May 1940 with the accumulation of materials and cutting and fitting the materials prior to shipping them to the top of the peak, actually misnamed, for it is in fact the cinder cone of a volcano, a part of the group of cinder cones on the northern slope of the

vast Medicine Lake shield volcano, rather than a butte. At the same time, a horse trail to the summit, over 400 feet from its base, was nearly 90 percent complete. In June, some changes were made in the turns on the trail, while workmen were clearing and leveling the site of the lookout, right on the basaltic dome or "plug" of lava which in cooling effectively capped the volcano, and others at the shop worked on cutting and fitting materials. In July, CCC laborers erected poles and began to string wire on a telephone line to the summit, and others had nearly finished a short roadway from the Lava Beds main road to the foot of the horse trail. That same month, cement, water, tools, and lumber, the latter nearly all "prefabricated" (cut to proper size) in the shop, had been hauled to the site. In August a CCC crew was still stringing telephone wire, and 80 percent of the materials were at the summit, where workmen had the rock work well underway and rough framing of the structure assembled in place for erection. In September the wire was strung to the summit, although not completed into the building; the rock work of the building, and the rough framing, were completed, but heavy winds were delaying the work. In October the lookout was completed except for interior cabinet work on the west side, lightning conductors not yet erected, and the stone steps and terraces. The cabinet work, interior and exterior painting, installation of plate glass, and installation of hardware all were completed in November 1940. The building was basically complete.

Subsequent projects involving the lookout appeared in reports during the next few months. High winds in February 1941 tore off roofing on the south and east, which had to be repaired. In May 1941 flooring work was begun on the lookout. In June a fire finder stand was constructed, being completed in July. Landscaping was also completed in July.

Upon its completion, the Superintendent noted (in his annual report for 1940 (dated January 3, 1941):

"The lookout building at the top of the butte is modern in every respect. The area covered from this point is greater than any lookout in Northern California and /it/ will be of great value, not only to the Monument ranger force but to all the neighboring agencies. It will also prove to be a feature for the Monument visitors because the views from the top of the butte are wonderful."

It is one of three surviving "rustic" fire lookouts in the National Park Service, Western Region, and little altered.

One change made after its construction was a cement floor for the basement installed in 1942. That date traced in some concrete

work had led some to believe the building was built in 1942, which is not the case--it was built two years earlier. It should be noted, however, that the Lava Beds CCC Camp survived seven months into World War II--it was not closed down until July 1942.

As a product of the CCC program for Lava Beds National Monument, the Schonchin Butte Fire Lookout is considered of local historical significance, and because of its "rustic" architectural design, which differs considerably from that of the other two surviving "rustic" fire lookouts in the Western Region (one in Lassen National Park and one in Yosemite) in the way it relates to its site, the Schonchin Butte Lookout is considered to have local architectural significance.

It is noted that there have been proposals to remove the building and replace it with a metal tower, partly because of repeated problems with roofing blowing off in high winds and consequent maintenance expense, although prospective inhabitants of the tower do not desire the change because they do not like the idea of being in a metal tower during lightning strikes and thunderstorms. This objection aside, the building should not be replaced because it is an excellent example of "rustic" architecture applied to a lookout building, and especially an excellent example of siting of such a structure, in the way it was fit into a basaltic volcanic plug at the northern edge of the shallow Schonchin Butte crater.

11. Pit Toilets - Buildings Nos. 31, 32, 33, 34

These structures were 12 square foot pit toilets located, respectively, at Schonchin Butte, Skull Cave, a second at Skull Cave, and Merrill Cave, but since modernized or scrapped. None had or have either historical or architectural significance.

12. Pump House - Building 55

Built by the CCC according to Drawing LB-2163A at a cost of \$900, this is a stone-veneered "rustic" building, and the only truly "permanent" building, erected at the northwest entrance to the Monument at the old CCC Camp Lava Beds, which incidentally was on the site of Gillem's Army Camp during the Modoc War. It was built in 1935 and may have been the first rustic building erected by the CCC at Lava Beds.

13. Pit Toilets - Buildings 58, 59, 60, 61

Built by the CCC in 1935 of single room frame construction, the first two were at the Northwest Entrance, the latter pair at Fleener's Chimneys. None of these structures today have historical or architectural significance.

14. Storage Building - Building No. 63

Located in the Indian Wells utility area, this concrete block single story structure was built by Ausland and Dodson, contractors, under National Park Service supervision, in 1955. The building has concrete floors and contains 3,716 square feet of space. The building is recent, and has neither historical nor architectural significance.

15. Residences - Buildings 66, 67, 68

Located at the Indian Wells headquarters area, these three bedroom, one and a half bath wood frame buildings with utility rooms and garages attached were begun September 2, 1960, by Contractor Gilbert Ballantyne of Klamath Falls, Oregon, and completed February 6, 1961. They are recent buildings in the Mission 66 construction program, and have no historical or architectural significance.

16. Apartments - Buildings 71, 77

Part of the Mission 66 construction program, these were four unit apartments of 2,250 square feet each, with each unit containing its own kitchen and bath, electric heater, hot water heater, stove, and refrigerator, but with a community washing machine in the utility room. No. 71 was built in 1960 and 1961 by Gilbert Ballantyne of Klamath Falls, Oregon, and No. 77 was built in 1965 and 1966 by the A. E. Fitzgerald Construction Company of Klamath Falls. Neither of these recent buildings has historical or architectural significance.

17. Comfort Station - Building 76

This wood frame comfort station with concrete slab floor was built by the Fitzgerald Construction Company of Klamath Falls, Oregon, with construction commencing on September 25, 1963, and the building completed on July 2, 1964. The recent building has neither historical nor architectural significance.

18. Service Buildings - Buildings Nos. 128, 129

These two structures are metal prefabricated buildings of recent date. The first one was 12 by 15 feet and was purchased from the Bennington Steel Building Company of Klamath Falls, Oregon, in 1961. The second is 12 by 18 feet with a 7 by 9 foot overhead swinging door, and it was purchased in 1967. Neither has any historical or architectural significance.

19. Comfort Station - Building 131

This wood frame comfort station, roughly 16 feet square, was begun in 1972 and completed in 1973. The building has neither

architectural nor historical significance.

20. Information (Visitors) Center - Building 132

This building consists of two joined 10 by 45-foot mobile trailer units of an office type purchased from Porta Space, Inc., of Colorado, and received on October 26, 1973. The building has since been given a rustic veneer to enable it to blend with the other structures at headquarters, but it is really a recent building with neither historical nor architectural significance.

21. Rustic Picnic Table/Bench Structures

In 1937 and 1938 the CCC Crew at Camp Lava Beds built a number of rustic table/bench combinations in Lava Beds National Monument. The supports for these structures were boulders of native rock, while the flat surfaces of both the tables and benches were split cedar logs obtained from Oregon Caves. Six of these structures were built at Fleener's Chimneys and at least a dozen at the campground at Indian Wells near the headquarters of the Monument. While non-significant modern picnic tables have been added to the originals, most of the originals remain, and are an excellent example of the application of rustic architecture to minor structures. These are recommended for inclusion in a discontinuous historic district nomination to the National Register of Historic Places.

IV. Recommendations

An evaluation of the buildings and structures at Lava Beds National Monument points toward eligibility for the National Register for a number of these properties, and they should be combined into a discontinuous historic district focusing on their relationship to the CCC program for Lava Beds historically, and on their architectural qualities. The district should include:

1. Superintendent's Residence - Building 1
2. Garage and Shop - Building 7
3. Service Station - Building 10
4. Pump House, Indian Well - Building 11
5. Fire Lookout, Schonchin Butte - Building 30
6. Pump House, Gillem's Camp - Building 55
7. Rustic CCC-built picnic tables at Fleener's Chimneys and the Indian Well Campground

However, it should be noted that one of those buildings, the Pump House at Gillem's Camp, is an intrusion on a historic district of greater significance dating from an earlier period--specifically the site of Gillem's Camp of the Modoc War of 1872-1873. For that reason, the building should, when no longer needed, be recorded for HABS and then, through the Section 106 process, should be removed and its site naturalized.

With respect to the Modoc War sites, a Forest Service/National Park Service policy of fire suppression which has been followed for more than a half century at Lava Beds National Monument had led to the intrusion of non-native species and significantly altered the vegetation of these areas. These lands should be managed for their historic values primarily, and therefore the return of fire to the ecology would be beneficial to the historic values by restoring the historic appearance and historic vegetation. Consequently a policy of prescribed burning together with toleration of wildfire in those historic districts is recommended--this applies to Gillem's Camp, the Canby Cross area, Hospital Rock, Captain Jack's Stronghold, the Thomas/Wright Battlefield, and the intervening country generally.

The area covered by the various Modoc War-related National Register nominations, as well as intervening ground, contains many small rubble walls of lava rock, either built by Modoc Indians for defense, built by U.S. Army troops for defense, or built by Modoc Indians and later raised by soldiers. A privately prepared map documents these features for the area of Captain Jack's stronghold only, and is not tied to either latitude/longitude or UTM coordinates. It is recommended that this map be tied to such coordinates, and that the Monument explore contracting with the firm which prepared the Stronghold map, or any other suitable firm, to prepare such mapping for the entire northern area of the Monument to document precisely the location of all man-raised rock wall features. This work should be done photogrammetrically if possible.

Finally, examination of collections in historical societies in Klamath Falls and Lakeview, Oregon, and Alturas, California, revealed, in the latter, an old map which suggests that an emigrant road of the 1850s crossed the Monument's lands east to west between Schonchin Butte and Hardin Butte before turning northwest over Gillem's Cliffs. Further research should be done to document the history of this road, it should be located on the ground and mapped, it should be nominated to the National Register, and care should be taken to protect surviving traces, features, and archeological specimens from adverse impact from any development. (This is NOT the Tichnor Road, built about 1871, but a much earlier road located further north.)