The Lava Beds
By Irene M. Currin
When I came to the Klamath Country in 1947, I had lived on the edge of the Sahara, gone swimming in the Mediterranean Sea, and lived in some rugged foothills of the Alps; but I had never seen anything volcanic before. When I had my first look at the lava flow you cross on the entrance road to the Lava Beds, I had to get close enough to touch it. I thought it might still be warm!

In the years that followed we explored the area, and it really gave me an interest in geology, which has continued for the rest of my life. My husband grew up here and, of course, had explored the caves, but when we came here after the war, we took Judd Howard with us on several trips to the area and learned a great deal about the formation of the chimneys, flows and tubes. The Stronghold was especially interesting because of its relationship to the Modoc War. Mr. Howard told us a story about the petroglyphs: he had taken pictures of them and was looking at them at home, when a visitor (a man of Scandinavian descent) said they looked like an ancient script of some of his forebears. I don't know if anyone ever traces this, but it is an interesting idea.

Mr. Judd Howard was very interested in the area and in preserving it. I'm glad he's being recognized for his efforts. I remember he once scolded me for picking up a rock with the intention of taking it home!

I did visit the area with the Klamath Historical Society this last summer and I had two other trips this year. One was with a group to see the Fern Cave—a fascinating cave. The last one was to catch George Freeland's guided tour. I think he gave Judd Howard a fitting tribute.
Lava Beds National Monument  
By Verland Huff

My first trip into the Lava Beds was in the summer of 1928 at the age of six. We entered on the east side of Tule Lake and passed along the hard surface in front of the petroglyphs. The American flag was very visible. Over the years, it faded and was not visible after the late 40's or early 50's. No trace of it exists today. Many of the explanations of how the flag was painted on the east side, existing today, may possibly pertain to the vanished flag on the west side.

My mother and Mrs. John Lisky were in the group and we stopped at Canby's Cross. The rocks that held the cross upright were scattered and the cross was flat on the ground. Mrs. Lisky said this was done by vandals.

As my sons became Boy Scouts, I was active with them. The Lava Beds is a good place to go to in winter. A pamphlet was published in 1932 listing all the caves. My scouts set out to find every one.

The C.C.C. explored and developed a lot of caves. They made stairways and wooded ladders and removed a lot of rocks. The wooden ladders and stairways deteriorated and Mission 66 money was pumped in and a loop was made. This bypassed a lot of spectacular caves. Many of the far out caves are still marked with the porcelain signs.

Petroglyph Point  
June 27, 1993 Historical Society  
Fieldtrip to Lava Beds, photograph  
Courtesy of Anne Ezell.
LAVA BEDS
By Wayne and Lois Ann Scott

I was in Klamath Falls in the summer of 1939 visiting my girlfriend, Lois Ann Soule. While there we took a trip to the Lava Beds. He brother, Andrew Soule, a KUHS student accompanied us.

Lois Ann had been there before with her father, Dr. A. A. Soule, when she was a small girl. She remembers going to a large cave with ice in it. Dr. Soule was not only a "rock hound" but was very interested in the history of the pioneers who crossed the plains in covered wagons. His parents had crossed the plains in the Gold Rush days and had settled in Little Shasta Valley of Northern California.

Dr. Soule spent many weekends exploring the old Oregon Trail. He would load his old pickup truck with camping gear and head out. He and Judd Howard became friends and the two of them spend many weekends going wherever they felt the desire to visit. One of those places often was the Lava Beds.

The trip Lois Ann and I took turned out to be a real adventure. After visiting several of the larger caves, we had lunch and decided to do some exploring on our own. We found a small opening that intrigued us and was large enough for us to crawl through. This looked exciting to us.

We lighted an old kerosene lantern that we had brought along for this purpose. The light from the old lantern was very dim compared to the lights they now use. However, in the darkness of the cave it sufficed to show us the way along the lava tube that we were in.

We would go a ways and the tube would seem to end. Upon searching we would find another small opening that would lead us into another lava tube. Sometimes the opening was barely big enough for us to crawl through. The thoughts that we had were would we be able to find our back or what if the lantern would give out!

At times as we traveled along the lava tube we would spot daylight from above. At these places the lava tube would have caved in leaving an opening to the outside. We would climb up and look out before continuing along in the lava tube. I felt much like a gopher must feel. I would stick my head out, take a quick look, and return to my burrow.

This went on for all afternoon. About 5:00 p.m., we found an overhead opening and again we crawled up for a look around. To our surprise we found ourselves at the foot of the ridge from where we had started. From here we hiked some three miles back to the car.

I have no idea where we were when we explored that lava tube. I have been back since but have not been able to locate the exact spot. I do have many memories of that afternoon crawling on our bellies much of the time in pitch darkness or the faint light of the old lantern. It was one of the highlights of my life.
Some trivia that might be of interest: Don Fisher, a teacher at Klamath Union High School, worked as a Ranger at the Lava Beds during his summer vacation. The other is that Judd Howard, often a visitor at the Soule home, was a quiet and unassuming man. Although I met him several times I have no lasting impression of him as being anything but an ordinary sort of a guy. I also have a cap and ball pistol, 5 shot, very rusty with both butt plates missing. The pistol was found in a pile of rocks 40 yards N.E. of Captain Jack's Stronghold on August 15, 1923. I have a sworn affidavit to the above information.

I liked it, especially the history. On that trip we did not go into the caves or meet J. D. Howard. We did visit the petroglyphs and the sites of the Modoc War. On this visit pheasants were abundant.

My last visit to the Lava Beds was two years ago. We took out of state visitors. This time we visited the caves. We loved the lava tubes. We found it very interesting. The history is fascinating; each event has its own fascination.

I have visited the Lava Beds probably at least five times in the past 18 years. The trails are well marked. The rangers are knowledgeable and friendly. However, the pheasants have mostly disappeared.

Lava Beds by Motorcycle

By Pearl Nason

My first (when I was 16) and many of my later visits to the Lava Beds National Monument were with our motorcycle group. I liked it very much. We camped there and had many fun times touring the caves and just looking around. Many things have changed since that first visit. The caves that were open years ago are changed.

Once on our way back, the group was going along the road and went through a swarm of yellow jackets. We all wore leathers, but one nasty yellow jacket went down my blouse and going down the road there was the fastest strip down you could see. I rode the motorcycle to the edge of the road into a field and was not stung once.
Our motorcycle group liked to tour the caves with lanterns. It made the caves more eerie and exciting. Many picnics were held down in the lava beds. We had lots of fun running around in the lava, seeing the deer, birds and whatever there was to see. The Lava Beds seems to be more in the past rather than the future.

My last visit to the Lava Beds was in the summer of 1999. I took my grandson, Chad, to see them. He is from Florida. We always took our visitors from and East and Canada to see the caves. We had many over the years that rode motorcycles from far away and this was one of our places we took them. Time spent there seemed to be enjoyed by all.

Lava Beds
By Bob Elliott

In the 1920's, E. L. Hopkins (Hopkins Chocolate Cave) was a shepherder in the Lava Beds area. He would in his spare time explore cave openings and uncover likely looking rock piles, etc. He uncovered several small openings and some entrances to much larger caves. This procedure lasted over several years.

When I was about 10-12 years old (1922-24), Mr. Hopkins would take, at first, our family on overnight tours of caves that were open and some Mr. Hopkins had removed the rocks and debris from the entrance. We used flashlights, kerosene lanterns, for light and when we came to a large room or other places of interest, Mr. Hopkins would cut off a piece of magnesium string and light it with a match. It was a brilliant light, something like a flash for camera use. These trips through the caves were made at night, so Mr. Hopkins surmised, your eyes would be accustomed to the darkness in the caves.

Over a period of time we met Mr. Howard who was I believe, a "miller" at the Martin Flour mill. They sold Crater Lake brand flour. Mr. Hopkins and Mr. Howard would spend hours talking about the Lava Beds; both agreed it should be a national monument.

During the 1920's we spent quite some time in the caves, as boy scouts or as a group of friends we would have a campout with other scout groups in the area -Merrill, Malin, Alturas, Dorris and Klamath Falls. I remember the scouts cleaned an area, close to what is now the monuments headquarters, for easier camping. We got excess water from a cave. With other groups usually from Klamath Falls, we would camp out in other areas. We would tie a string at the entrance and venture inside caves or tubes. In the very early cave explorations with Mr. Hopkins, I remember big horn sheep found frozen in the ice, maybe a total of 4 or 5.

In another cave Mr. Hopkins would get a young fellow to hunker down and look down a long black tunnel that had ice on the floor. He would get your attention looking for the stalactites hanging down from the ceiling and then give you a big push - down the pitch black tunnel you would go sliding on the ice and water -winding up at the bottom in utter darkness and very wet. You could hear the group laughing at the top of the tunnel.
In later years, my sons as Boy Scouts and mostly as a group of friends would make reservations with the Rangers (Mr. Fisher, our old school teacher) and spend nights sleeping in Fleener Chimneys. The Ranger and the group of boys would secure a rope at the top of Fleener Chimneys and go down the rope into the opening below and spend the night. During the day the group would explore caves, mostly the area of the Modoc Indian War.

One of the areas that are not in the Lava Beds National Monument is the rock breast works build by the soldiers over by Sand Mountain (Butte) in case the Indians started to leave the area. We find this area as interesting as the Stronghold area and believe it should be more accessible to visitors. Glass Mountain with its large "flint" slide should be shown as one of several "flint" deposits. (Another Paulina Lake area). This flint according to stories I have heard and read was trading stock with other Indians. Another flint area is Davis Creek over by Lakeview.

Captain Jack's Stronghold and Petroglyph Point
By Anne Ezell

I was in my 30's when I first visited the Lava Beds National Monument. This visit was as a family group with my husband and children. We walked the short trail of Captain Jack's Stronghold. I picked this as our first thing to do because of the tremendous importance of this site to our local history.

My most recent visit was with the Klamath Historical Society, not last summer, but on the trip before that when we all rode down on the bus. I remember being very impatient to go see everything (along with some others), so we left lunch for later and took off ahead. I was overwhelmed by the petroglyphs. On this trip we also visited the Tule Lake National Wildlife Refuge.
OUR LAVA BEDS EXPERIENCE
By Richard and Susan Rambo

It was in December 1983 that Susan and I had our most memorable experience with the Lava Beds. I remember it was a Sunday. Earlier that day, Susan, her son Jimmy, age 13, and I drove into Klamath Falls from our home in Keno to do some shopping. We decided to return home by way of State Line Road. As we approached State Line Road, Susan mentioned that Jimmy had never seen the Lava Beds and since we were close, we should visit the Stronghold. I readily agreed. It had been approximately 20 years since I had last visited the Lava Beds. Additionally, the Lava Beds hold special significance to me, as my great-grandparents, Robert and Matilda Whittle were the first interpreters hired by the Peace Commission to meet with Captain Jack at the Stronghold to discuss peace negotiations. (See Trumpeter No. 43.)

We pulled into the Stronghold parking lot. As we did, I observed a van parked at the entrance to one trail with a number of people milling about. I pulled up to the other trail leading to the Stronghold. We started out on what I believed to be a short trail. When we arrived, the day was clear, but cold, and a slight breeze was blowing. Shortly after we set out, the clouds moved in. Around 3 p.m. very light snow started falling. We quickened our pace to get back to the parking lot. Jimmy has muscular dystrophy. Although he was capable of walking, his pace was slow. He would develop cramps in his legs if he walked too fast. He quickly tired. We would walk a few hundred feet, then wait several minutes before he could continue. He was too large to carry. We saw no one else on the trail.

We believed we were near the end of the trail. But it appeared that we were going farther out into the Lava Beds than my memory told me we should be going. Snowflakes continued to fall. The trail became more obscure, as the falling light cast distorting shadows. Occasionally, we would lose the trail and we would have to backtrack to get realigned with the correct trail. Our concern grew as we realized we were losing daylight. The trail would not end! Soon, thoughts of reaching the parking lot changed to thoughts of simply finding shelter for the night. We began looking for a cave large enough in which to spend the night. It would have been a miserable night. While we were dressed for the December day, we were not prepared to spend the night. We had no food, water or flashlight and nothing with which to make a fire.

The long loop: Captain Jack's Stronghold.
Just as we were about to lose all light, we came upon a trail marker. One arrow pointed to the east. It was marked "Short Trail". Another arrow pointed the direction we had just come. It read "Long Trail". It now became clear. We had started at the end of the long trail. I did not recall there being two trails. With renewed determination we pressed on in the twilight, tripping on rocks and trying to avoid falling into cracks. At times we created our own trail, but at last we could see the parking lot.

Unfortunately, our experience was not yet complete. When we started the car, we discovered the headlight switch was faulty and the headlights would not come on. Determined not to spend the night in the parking lot, we drove on without the headlights, hoping to reach a phone. We continued trying the headlight switch. Then, just as we hit Highway 39, the headlights came on.

Now, 18 years later, it's still not funny, but the lessons learned and the memories are priceless. And, perhaps in some small way our experience helped us to understand the emotions the combatants in the Modoc tragedy must have felt 110 years earlier.

Aerial view of Lava Beds National Monument, Klamath County Museum Photograph.
Ben Schwartz (BS): "...Ben Schwartz, Curator of the Klamath County Museum. I am interviewing Mr. J. D. Howard. This interview is taking place May 15, 1961 at 10:30 a.m. Mr. Howard has had extensive conversations with Peter Schonchin, the last survivor of the Modoc War, who died in 1940. We hope to get information on this tape of information given to Mr. Howard from Mr. Schonchin. OK Judd, you have anything that we should mention?"

J.D. Howard (JD): "Peter was the last of the Chiefs."

BS: "You better say that again. There was something wrong with the tape."

JD: "Peter Schonchin was the last of the Chiefs. The Schonchins were the Chiefs of the Modoc Tribe."

BS: "How about some of the accounts of the battles in the Indian point of view?"

JD: "Well, there wasn't any battles really that I know of. The white man made up most of the battles. They lived at the stronghold during the Modoc war and traded at the commissary over there at (Gaines) Bluff. They were over there every day buying stuff and trading one thing or another. If you call that a war. I don't call that a war."

BS: "Wasn't there an account of, seems to me you told me in the past, an account of some Indians, that were able to get a wagon that was full of booze or something like that?"

JD: "Yes, of course that didn't belong to the Modoc war. They were bringing it up from Redding."

BS: "Tell us something about it."

JD: "They were hauling up goods for the commissary up at Fort Klamath and over by the Biehn place, right where the road now goes out over the lake. There was a lake there then. The old road went up on the east side of the lake. The Indians saw them coming and they hid in a rift along there about a mile south of the lake. When the wagons came up right over the top of the rim above them, they jumped up, give a war whoop, and the drivers jumped off the wagons and run away. The Indians just went into the wagons and they went to taking what they could and they run into 3 barrels of whiskey. Peter said they hadn't drank very long before they realized that they weren't going to get anywhere at all. So he said they just whipped up the horses and the horses run away and broke the wagons all up and threw the merchandise all over the prairie there. That's what he called a fight. That's more of those things they tell about being the Whites and the Modocs but I never knew why they called them fights of any kind. There was a story that the drivers of the freight wagons had stopped at what was known as the natural bridge and buried three barrels of whiskey. People hunted for that for years but one day I was down
there with Peter and stopped at Malin at the hotel and Bill Dalton was in there at the bar. He asked me if I wouldn't hunt those three barrels up. He said I think if you would go looking for them you would find them. Well, I said, I might some day, Bill, but I don't think there is any use. I don't think they will ever be found and I didn't. However, we went on down and when we got down to the place where the wagons were assaulted, Peter raised up in the car and said, 'Howard, you see that rim over there?' I said, 'Yes sir I see it Peter.' Well he said, 'We had a terrible big fight there. There were three freight wagons coming up and we hid under the rim. Then they got even with us we jumped up and give a war whoop and the drivers all run away.' Well that settled that right there as far as I was concerned. It found it in just a few hours. There was probably not an hour after Bill wanted me to find them."

BS: "Very good."

JD: "They never were buried, don't you see."

BS: "Why don't you tell us some of the account of the role that Fern Cave played in the Modoc war?"

JD: "Well, the Modocs, after the massacre up there at the Natural Bridge when Ben Wright held a supper for them and had intended to kill all of them, he only killed a few of them, but the Modocs, when they saw what was happening, they got scared and run away. They went down to the south end of the lake and hid in Fern Cave. Peter told me they stayed there for three months in the cave. They were afraid to come out for fear they would get killed if they did come out."

BS: "Then this is before the war then?"

JD: "Oh yes, long before the war."

BS: "I see."

JD: "There are some pieces, that is foundation-like material, that looked like it might have been rocks around tent foundations. What they were nobody knows, on top of Juniper Butte. I've often thought that that is probably where some of the Whites followed the Indians as close as they could and built those things and had some tents up on the butte there. That's as near as I could figure the thing out."

BS: "Another thing, seems to me that you mentioned, was the occurrence of a site that Peter Schonchin told you about just west of Petroglyph Point."

Peter Schonchin, "Lizzy", Peter's wife, and Angeline, their daughter. 1929. Photograph taken by Bert Thomas.
JD: “Peter told me that there was a tribe of Indians that lived just west of the peninsula nearly a half a mile on a high place on the lake bottom there. They called them Combatuwas. He said his people never associated with them. There was some rift between them and he didn’t know just what it was. One winter, of course he didn’t know what year it was, one winter they had about 5 feet of snow and in the spring there was more rain than they ever had, there was more water running off but during the last stages of the winter there was no more smoke showing up down at the Combatuwas camp. So as soon as the snow got thin enough that he could, he and some of the other kids got their ponies out and rode down there. He said the whole tribe was dead. There was just one man who could just wiggle his toes a little bit. That was the only life they saw in the camp. That was the end of the Combatuwas. They were Indians that traded with the Spanish. They used to raise horses there for the Spanish from farther south in California. That’s all of that, I guess. After the lake had drained low enough so that I could find that high place west of the peninsula, I went down there and tried to find some remnants of those people. A man (Copic) that lived there on the peninsula, had gotten there ahead of me and he cleaned the place but he didn’t find 2 or 3 lard oil lamps there, and several hunting knives. Some of them had silver handles and some rolling pins and bread boards and quite a bit of heavy instruments that the Combatuwas left when they died out down there.”

BS: “This was the site that was a few hundred feet west of Petroglyph Point?”

JD: “Uh-huh. Peter said that the day the killing happened at Canby’s Cross that he went out south of there 200 feet and sat on a rimrock while the discussion was going on in the tent. Then he said they all came out of the tent finally, standing out in front of the tent and still talking, when Captain Jack reached under his blanket and pulled out a pistol and fired point blank at Canby but the cap snipped and the pistol didn’t blow. Ellensman then reached over shoulder, took the pistol out of his hand, and killed Canby. Ellensman and, it was Captain Jack of course that had the gun, but Ellensman reached over his shoulder and took the gun out of his hand, put a new cap on it and he killed Canby.”

BS: “Ellensman killed Canby, not Captain Jack according to Peter Schonchin. This is very interesting.”

JD: “That was outside of the tent. Peter said after the jamboree was over and the white men had gone back to Gillem’s Bluff, he went and gathered all the rocks that had Canby’s blood on it and piled them up in a little pile and showed me where it was.”

BS: “Is the cross properly located?”

JD: “Well, within a few feet, yes.”

BS: “Tell us something about what Peter told you about the Dry Lake battle?”
JD: "Peter said they had been camped about three days at Dry Lake when the soldiers came down there and camped on the west side of the lake not over 500 feet from where they were and didn't know the Indians were there. At the end of the three days, they discovered the Indians were there and a skirmish started, but only one man was killed and he lived from the time he was shot before noon till seven in the evening. That was Ellensman, the only man that was killed there."

BS: "How many warriors, do you know, were killed in the war?"

JD: "I don't know, Ben, how many was killed, but very few as far as that is concerned. I know without ever asking Peter, there were not many men killed in the war. Peter said he held Ellensman in his lap from the time he was shot till the time that he died that evening and showed me the crack where they sat in so the soldiers couldn't shoot them. He then said they took Ellensman about three miles west of there, dug a pit, put the kindling in it, and built a pile of logs on top of it and put the body on the logs and cremated Ellensman in the little glade in the pine timber and took me up there and tried to find it, but he wasn't able to find it. There is more to that though. Canby's watch was on Ellensman when he was burned and he had $350 in gold he had taken off of Canby's body. That's all of this I guess."

End of tape.
Editor's Page -

Susan Rambo, Editor

Dues were due in January! If you look on your mailing label you will see an entry above your name. A date entered indicates you are paid through that year. Initials indicate you are receiving a complimentary issue or are a Life Member.

Ken Harter spoke at our January meeting about the Bly Balloon Bomb; Jack Bowden spoke in February about railroading in Northern California; In March, Kim Bellavia, Museum Manager informed us of her plans for the museum.

Paid up members are entitled to a 10% discount at our Museum Gift Shop. We have one of the best selections of local history books, T-shirts, caps, mugs, bookmarks, paper dolls, cards, videos, jewelry, Oregon foods, Christmas ornaments and local artist's commissioned works, just to name a few items. Think of the museum when doing your gift shopping!!

Be sure to call Anne Federhart, our Sunshine Lady, if you hear of anyone who is ill or needs cheering up. Her number is 541-884-5475.

Meetings are held the 4th Thursday of the month — with some exceptions. See schedule or call 883-4208. We meet at the Klamath County Museum meeting room, 1451 Main St., Klamath Falls, Spring Street entrance.

Welcome new members: Margaret Gerbino, Robert Mackrell & Paul Ward.

Please make a note on your calendar that our evening meeting times have changed to 7 p.m.

2001 Meetings
April 26 7 PM
May 24 7 PM
June Annual Tour
July Summer Potluck
September 27
  7 PM
October 25 7 PM

2001 Board of Directors
President: John Fortune
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Klamath County Museum Classes for April and May 2001

Klamath County Museum is offering great new classes for April and May. A class lasts one hour for each Saturday of the month. The cost for each class is $20.00 (includes the cost of materials.)

Janet Erl, freelance illustrator, wildlife and nature artist, will offer a class on Drawing Wildlife for four Saturdays in April from 10:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. This class is available to persons 7 years of age through adult. Mrs. Erl has done exhibit artwork for museums and cover art for magazines and games; she comes to us with an impressive art background. This class will be offered again in May.

Gerald Skelton, Culture Site Protection Specialist for the Klamath Tribes, will offer a class in the art of weaving whole tules into mats and other forms for four Saturdays in April from 11:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. This class is available to persons 9 years of age through adult. Mr. Skelton has created exhibits for the Klamath County Museum during his tenure here as Curator and we heartily welcome his willingness to share his skills and his enthusiasm for this Native American art. This class will be offered again in May.

Our third class, Docent Training for the Baldwin Hotel Museum, is from 1:00 p.m. to 2:00 p.m. on eight consecutive Saturdays in April and May. Train this spring to lead tours in the Baldwin Hotel Museum this summer. There is no charge. Learn your local history by seeing it and showing it to others. Volunteering may be scheduled around jobs, summer school, or travel, over one month or the entire summer. Our goal is to provide continuous coverage as the public is allowed by tour only.

This class is essential for all new Baldwin volunteers, especially those who are participating in the High School Volunteer for Credit Program. Students interested in this program should go to their counselors or to Klamath County Museum for full details. Sixty hours of volunteer service will earn a student one-half elective credit toward graduation, or 120 hours one full credit. University and Community College students should check with their departments for credit verification. There is no elevator in the Baldwin Hotel Museum, so docents must be able to lead tours up and down four floors.