

Lava Beds National Monument
Indian Well Headquarters
Tulelake, CA 96134
530-667-8113
www.nps.gov/labe

47

WHITNEY BUTTE

Length: 7 miles round-trip

Hiking time: 4 hours

High point: 5,010 feet

Total elevation gain: 500 feet

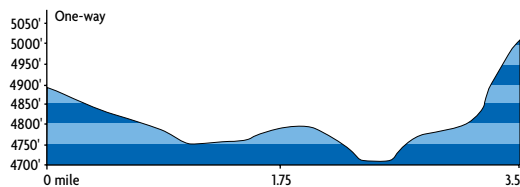
Difficulty: easy

Season: mid-April through mid-November

Water: none; bring your own and plenty of it

Map: USGS 7.5' Lava Beds National Monument

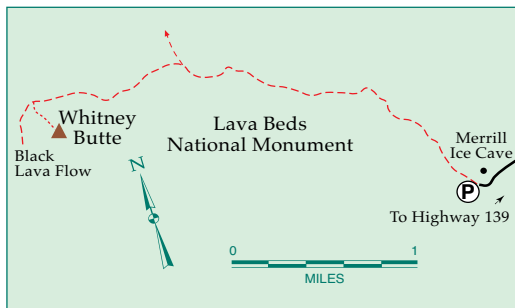
Information: Lava Beds National Monument



Hike through an open landscape past chunks of recently extruded dark lava to the top of a small

volcano, where you'll have sweeping views of Mount Shasta, Lava Beds National Monument, and other volcanic landforms of far northeastern California.

Coming from the north on Highway 139, turn right 5 miles south of the town of Tulelake. Follow Lava Beds National Monument signs for 24 miles, turn right (west) at the sign for Mer-



rill Cave, and continue 0.6 mile to the trailhead. Coming from the south on Highway 139, turn left 26 miles northwest of Canby and follow Lava Beds National Monument signs 16 miles to the visitor center. From the visitor center, go north 1.2 miles, turn left (west) at the sign for Merrill Ice Cave, and drive the final 0.6 mile to the trailhead.

At the trailhead you'll see a short, paved trail

Volcanic vista in Lava Beds National Monument (Photo by John R. Soares)



to Merrill Ice Cave. Check with the visitor center for any access restrictions. If you do explore the cave, follow these rules: don't go alone; carry at least three sources of light; wear sturdy shoes, a hard hat, jacket, pants, and gloves; be careful not to harm rock formations; stay on existing paths; and leave quietly if you encounter bats.

Start the adventure by exploring the dark and frigid recesses of Merrill Ice Cave.

Various bunchgrasses and wildflowers line the path to Whitney Butte, as do sagebrush, bitterbrush, mountain mahogany, and western juniper. These plants can tolerate the dry, desertlike conditions of northeastern California, a region that sees little rainfall.

Along the trail's first mile lies black basaltic rock, which once oozed as a hot liquid from nearby fissures to eventually cool into the twisted shapes you see around you. You'll also be treated to views of Tule Lake and the irrigated fields to the lake's north, as well as 6,618-foot Mount Dome looming to the northwest and 9,495-foot Mount McLoughlin, a cousin of Mount Shasta, far off in southern Oregon.

The first sight of the steep, snow-clad slopes of 14,162-foot Mount Shasta awaits at 1.8 miles. Bear left at a trail fork at 2.2 miles and skirt the north flank of Whitney Butte. At 3.3 miles you'll see the Medicine Lake highlands just to the south, as well as the massive Black Lava Flow, a sheet of basalt covering several square miles. Your trail ends at the base of the Black Lava Flow, where you'll see lichens, sagebrush, and a few other plants gaining a tenuous foothold on the 20-foot-high sheet of inhospitable rock.

Be sure to climb to the top of Whitney Butte, a cinder cone. Begin by a trailside ponderosa pine about 3.3 miles from the trailhead, where you get the first good views of the edge of the Black Lava Flow. From the top you can view the cinder cone's collapsed center and also enjoy a 360-degree view of the entire volcanic landscape.

Consider exploring some of the Lava Beds National Monument's lava caves before leaving. Inquire at the visitor center about the best caves and proper safety procedures.