



## Exploring Craters of the Moon by the Loop Road

What at first appears monotonous is really a landscape full of detail and surprises. This brief guide to selected features helps you see the park at your own pace, schedule, and interests. The larger story unfolds as you tour the park by the loop road. Stop first at the visitor center, a good point for beginning your explorations.

**1 Visitor Center** Here you will find information and publications about the park. Exhibits and a short video describe the park's lava phenomena and the Earth processes that created them. Check for schedules of conducted walks and evening programs. Rangers can answer questions about the park and help you plan your explorations.

The seven-mile loop road takes you deeper into the park's scenic attractions. Side trips lead to points two through seven. Most of the drive is one way. Several spur roads and trailheads help you explore Craters of the Moon even further. The trails invite foot travel. You can make the drive, including several short walks, in about two hours.

**2 North Crater Flow** At this stop a short trail crosses the flow to a group of monoliths or crater wall fragments transported by lava flows. This flow is one of the youngest and here the Triple Twist Tree suggests, because of its 1,350 growth rings, that these eruptions ceased only 2,000 years ago. You see fine examples of both ropy pahoehoe lava and a'a lava flows on North Crater Flow. Up the road is the North Crater Trail. Take this longer, steep trail to peer into a volcano vent.

**3 Devils Orchard** On the east side, after the road skirts Paisley Cone, is Devils Orchard. This group of lava fragments stands like islands in a sea of cinders. A short spur road leads to a self-guiding trail through these weird features. As you walk this ½-mile trail, you will see how people have had an impact on this lava landscape and

what is being done to protect it today. This barrier-free trail is designed to be accessible to all people.

**4 Inferno Cone Viewpoint** A volcanic landscape of cinder cones spreads before you to the distant mountain ranges. Cool moist north slopes of the cones have noticeably more vegetation than the drier south slopes. From the summit of Inferno Cone—a short, steep walk—you can recognize the chain of cinder cones along the Great Rift.

Big Cinder Butte towers above the lava plain in the distance. This is one of the largest purely basaltic cinder cones in the world.

**5 Big Craters and Spatter Cones Area** Spatter cones formed along the Great Rift fissure where clots of pasty lava stuck together when they fell. The material and forces of these eruptions originated at depths of nearly 37 miles within the Earth. To protect these fragile volcanic features, you are required to stay on trails in this area.

**6 Trails to Tree Molds and Wilderness** A spur road just beyond Inferno Cone takes you to trails that lead to the Tree Molds Area, Trench Mortar Flat, and the Craters of the Moon Wilderness. Tree molds formed where molten lava flows encased trees and then hardened. The cylindrical molds that remained after the wood rotted away range from a few inches to just under three feet in diameter. *Note:* All backcountry camping requires a permit available at the visitor center.

**7 Cave Area** At this last stop on the loop road take a ½-mile walk to the lava tubes and see Dewdrop, Boy Scout, Beauty, and the Indian Tunnel. You need to carry artificial light in all caves but Indian Tunnel.

## The Limbert Trek

