A Winter Wonderland
But for How Much Longer?

Perched at the crest of the Cascade Mountain Range, Crater Lake National Park is one of the snowiest inhabited places in America. Storms from the Pacific Ocean dump an annual average of 43 feet (13 meters) of snow at Park Headquarters. Since 1931, however, when rangers first began keeping track, totals have been trending downward. Last winter, Park Headquarters received only 16 feet (5 meters) of snow—an all-time record low.

At first blush, warmer winters might appear to be good news, since deep snow certainly makes life difficult. Many animals, including deer and elk, are forced to leave the park in order to survive. Park employees must toil constantly to keep roads plowed and facilities functioning. And the public, once so fond of the snow, often find it to their disappointment—Crater Lake is completely obscured by clouds almost 50% of the time in the winter and early spring.

But consider the bounty that blizzards bring. The thick blanket of snow provides protection and warmth for a variety of "subranean" (under the snow) mammals such as shrews, voles, and pikas. Snow provides people with opportunities to ski, sled, snowshoe, and marvel at winter’s beauty. The park’s snowpack also benefits communities outside the park, since it eventually feeds the Rogue, Umpqua, and Klamath Rivers, providing water to farmers, ranchers, cities, and wildlife downstream. And above all, it’s thanks to snow that a lake in the west rim of the caldera. Along the way, participants discover how plants, animals, and Crater Lake are shaped by the forces of winter.

Worryingly, less snow in the winter is having negative consequences in the summer. It’s leading to longer and more severe fire seasons, a rise in insect epidemics and invasive species, and hardship for native plants and animals, as they struggle to survive in a climate to which they’re not adapted. So, despite the challenges that long and snowy winters can impose on the park, they are ultimately a cause for gratitude, delight, and celebration. Let it snow—please!

Table: Average Annual Snowfall at Park Headquarters, by Decade:

- 1930s – 614 inches (1,560 cm)
- 1940s – 623 inches (1,582 cm)
- 1950s – 572 inches (1,453 cm)
- 1960s – 507 inches (1,288 cm)
- 1970s – 495 inches (1,257 cm)
- 1980s – 475 inches (1,207 cm)
- 1990s – 493 inches (1,252 cm)
- 2000s – 455 inches (1,156 cm)
- 2010s – 377 inches (957 cm)

Ranger-led snowshoe walks are a fun way to experience the winter wonderland of Crater Lake National Park. Walks are offered every Saturday and Sunday (and some holidays) at 1:00 pm from late November through the end of April. Space on each tour is limited, and advance reservations are recommended. You can sign up at the Steel Visitor Center or by calling 541-594-3100. Participants should be at least 8 years old, be in reasonably good physical condition, and come prepared with warm clothing and waterproof footwear.

School groups, outdoor clubs, and other organized groups of 10 or more people can arrange for their own ranger-led walk, staff permitting. Group walks are available on weekdays and weekends.

Watch the Park Film

Two years ago, a new film debuted at the Steel Visitor Center—the park's first new orientation film since the 1980s! Covering a variety of topics, it examines the park's significance and the wonder that Crater Lake has inspired for generations. The film is called Crater Lake: Into the Deep and includes dramatic underwater footage along with state-of-the-art animation that depicts the lake's violent, volcanic past. The film is 22 minutes long and is shown daily on the hour and half-hour.
Crafter Lake National Park is open year-round, 24 hours a day. Some roads, trails, and facilities, however, are closed seasonally due to snow.

Much of the year, the park’s North Entrance Road and Rim Drive are closed to cars. They close for the season on November 1 (or earlier if there is significant snowfall). Crews begin removing snow from these roads in April, but opening dates vary. The North Entrance Road and West Rim Drive tend to open in early June. The East Rim Drive typically opens in early July.

Highway 62 is plowed daily and open year-round, as is the 4-mile road from Highway 62 to Park Headquarters. The 3-mile road from Park Headquarters to Rim Village is also kept open as much as possible (typically about 80% of the time in the winter), but it tends to close during heavy snow. When the road is open and weather permits, Rim Village offers spectacular views of Crater Lake. For current road and weather conditions, call 541-594-3100.

Even when plowed, park roads are often snowy and icy. Come prepared with tires that have good traction. Carrying chains is advisable during snow storms. Before visiting, check the weather forecast. For your safety, do not stop or park on the roadway. Parking is allowed only in plowed pullouts and parking areas.

Winter Closures

Many park facilities are closed in the winter and early spring. Projected dates for operation of 2016:

- May 20–Oct. 9
- May 27–Oct. 10
- May 27–Oct. 7
- June 24–Oct. 9
- June 18–Oct. 31
- June 24–Sept. 16
- June 24–Oct. 9
- July 1–Oct. 15
- January through March
- July 1–Oct. 10
- June 24–Oct. 9
- June 18–Oct. 31
- June 24–Sept. 16
- June 24–Oct. 9
- July 1–Oct. 15
- January through March
- July 1–Oct. 10
- June 24–Oct. 9
- June 18–Oct. 31
- June 24–Sept. 16
- June 24–Oct. 9
- July 1–Oct. 15
- January through March
- July 1–Oct. 10
- June 24–Oct. 9
- June 18–Oct. 31
- June 24–Sept. 16
- June 24–Oct. 9
- July 1–Oct. 15
- January through March
- July 1–Oct. 10

Winter Viewing

When skies are clear, excellent views of Crater Lake can be obtained at Rim Village. During storms, however, the lake is typically obscured by clouds. The lake is completely “invisible” about 50% of the time in the winter and early spring. In avoid disappointment, check the weather forecast before you leave home. To check visibility at Rim Village, visit the park’s website (www.nps.gov/crla) to view a webcam pointed toward the lake.

A partial view of Crater Lake can usually be obtained from an observation room on the top floor of the Rim Village Cafe & Gift Shop. The observation room is accessible via elevator. For a better view of the lake (and when deep snow blocks the view from the observation room), you’ll need to climb to the top of a snowbank and take 20 to 30 steps across the snow. A “snow ramp” across from the Rim Village restroom building provides the easiest access to the top of the snowbank, which is often 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.6 meters) tall. Be careful—the snow ramp can be icy and slippery, and dangerous snow cornices overhang the rim of the crater. It can be difficult to spot. Stay back from the edge!

Snowmobiling

In the winter, the park’s North Entrance Road is groomed for snowmobiles, which may travel as far as the rim of Crater Lake. Snowmobiles must stay on the groomed and marked route; they are not allowed on the Rim Drive. Snowmobiling is open as conditions permit, typically from December through March.

Facilities

**Steel Visitor Center**

The Steel Visitor Center at Park Headquarters is open every day of the year except December 25. Winter hours are 10:00 am–4:00 pm, becoming 9:00 am–5:00 pm in mid-April. Rangers are available to answer questions, provide weather forecasts, issue backcountry permits, and help plan your visit. Postcards, maps, books, and other educational materials are available for sale (see page 4).

A 22-minute film, Crater Lake: Into the Deep, is shown on the hour and half-hour. The film explores the park’s significance and the lake’s violent, volcanic past.

Kids ages 6 through 12 can earn an official Junior Ranger badge by completing an activity book, available at the visitor center free of charge.

**Rim Café & Gift Shop**

The café & gift shop opens daily at 10:00 am (except on Nov 26), and closes at 4:30 pm in mid-April. Rangers are available to answer questions, provide weather forecasts, issue backcountry permits, and help plan your visit. Postcards, maps, books, and other educational materials are available for sale (see page 4).

A 22-minute film, Crater Lake: Into the Deep, is shown on the hour and half-hour. The film explores the park’s significance and the lake’s violent, volcanic past.

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**Accessibility**

The Steel Visitor Center is accessible to people with mobility impairments, as is the Rim Village Café & Gift Shop. Wheelchair permitting, partial views of Crater Lake can be obtained from the top floor of the gift shop, which is accessible via elevator.

**Drinking Water**

There is a drinking fountain and water bottle filling station inside the Steel Visitor Center.

**Emergencies**

Dial 911 to report any emergency, 24 hours a day. A call box is located outside the “snow tunnel” entrance to the administrative building at Park Headquarters. First aid is available at the Steel Visitor Center or nearby Ranger Station.

**Gasoline**

Gasoline is not available in the park. Charging stations for electric vehicles may be available; inquire at the visitor center. Gas is available in the nearby communities of Chiloquin, Prospect, and Diamond Lake.

**Lodging & Camping**

There are no lodgings or camping facilities open within the park. Overnight camping in pullouts or parking lots is prohibited. Primitive backcountry camping is allowed (see next page). Ask at the Steel Visitor Center for a list of accommodations outside the park.

**Lost & Found**

Report lost & found items to the Steel Visitor Center or call the park’s lost & found at 541-594-3360.

**Park Features**

Rocks, plants, animals, and water are all suddenly left undisturbed for others to enjoy. Collecting, disturbing, feeding, or disturbing natural, cultural or historical features is prohibited.

**Pets**

Pets on a leash (or otherwise securely restrained) are allowed in the park, provided they stay within 50 feet (15 meters) of plowed roads and parking lots.

**Sunrise & Sunset**

Dog owners are asked to respect the “no-leash” rule.

**Wildlife**

Humans can usually be had for them and potentially dangerous for you. Approach, touching, disturbing, or feeding wildlife is prohibited.

**Winter**

The snowmobile route is open as conditions permit, typically from December through March.
**Ski Trails**

Crate Lake National Park features many marked ski trails and unmarked routes. The most popular are described below. These trails are not groomed and some may be hard to follow; ask at the Steel Visitor Center for more information.

### EASIER TRAILS

**Mazama Loop**
- Distance: 1.7 mi. (2.7 km) loop trail
- Recommended for beginning skiers, this flat trail loops through Mazama Campground and provides views into Annie Creek Canyon. It is marked with blue diamonds attached to the trees and, from December through March, orange snow poles are placed along the route.

**West Rim Drive**
- This is the park’s most popular ski route, providing spectacular views of Crater Lake and Wizard Island. It follows the West Rim Drive, which is unplowed from November to mid-April. The route is not marked, but Crater Lake is generally apparent. The route features gently rolling terrain and is suitable for ski tours with modest skills. Be aware, however, that conditions are often icy and windy. Occasional forest areas provide some protection from the wind. Tips of varying lengths suggest the route to each of the following destinations before turning back to Rim Village. Vale View, a false summit across from the Rim Village restrooms.

**Discovery Point**
- Distance: 1.2 mi. (1.9 km)
- Discovery Point is a popular summer pull-off on the West Rim Drive. The overlook offers a fine view of Wizard Island and Mark6, a very good gold prospector, John Hillman first set eyes on Crater Lake in 1853. The overlook is not signed but is fairly obvious as a broad, level viewpoint.

**Wizard Island Overlook**
- Distance from Rim Village: 2.3 mi. (3.7 km)
- This small, unmarked viewpoint provides an even better bird’s-eye view of Wizard Island than the distance viewpoint that prompted out of the Rim Lake around 7,300 years ago.

**Union Peak Overlook**
- Distance from Rim Village: 3.1 mi. (5.0 km)
- The next road segment is a steady climb, gaining 240 feet (73 meters) in elevation. On a clear day, the ascent is worth the effort; just follow the road curve sharply to the right, a small, unmarked viewpoint on the left offers long-distance views of the Cascades Mountain Range. Union Peak, the snow-covered peak opposite the viewpoint (13 km) to the south. Of the viewpoint is Mt. McLaughlin, 35 miles (56 km) away. The snow cover extends as far as Mt. Shasta, 100 miles (161 km) distant.

**Beyond Union Peak Overlook**
- Distance from Rim Village: 3.9 mi. (6.3 km)
- Diamond Lake Overlook: 4.6 mi. (7.4 km) North junction: 6.0 mi. (9.7 km)
- Exploring further requires caution. Just beyond Lake Overlook, the road narrows and cuts into a cliff. When this roadblock fills with snow, it may be advisable to leave the road and bypass the cliff higher up on the slope. Next, the road traverses the north face of Watchman Peak, an avalanche-prone spot that is sometimes dangerous. Do not hesitate to remove your skis or turn back conditions warrant. If you continue, possible destinations include Watchman Overlook, Volcano Overlook, and North Junction. Another option, popular with snowshoers, is to attempt the summit of Watchman Peak via its western side. A test of endurance and outdoor skills—a test of endurance and outdoor skills.

### INTERMEDIATE TRAILS

**Hemlock Loop**
- Distance: 1.3 mi. (2.1 km) loop trail
- This enjoyable loop trail offers a lot of variety. It explores a forest of mountain hemlock trees punctuated by meadows that provide distant views to the south and east. It can be skied in either direction, but traveling counterclockwise provides more interesting downhill slopes and views. In the spring, the trail begins by climbing 45 feet (14 meters) to its highest point. It then drops 200 feet (61 meters) in elevation before gaining 155 feet (47 meters) on its return trip to Rim Village. The trail is marked with blue diamonds in the trees and, from December through March, orange snow poles in the meadows.

**East Rim Drive**
- The East Rim Drive is a good alternative to the West Rim Drive. The forested route provides protection from the elements and, upon reaching Sun Notch, a spectacular view of Crater Lake and the Phantom Ship. The route is not marked and should have no trouble following the path of the underlying road, which is unplowed from November to mid-June. The route is rated “intermediate” because it features longer and steeper climbs. The forested route to East Rim Drive and crosses several areas prone to avalanche activity, so avalanche forecasting is possible. Most skiers attempt to reach one of the following destinations before returning:

- **Sun Notch**
  - Distance from trailhead: 1.8 mi. (2.9 km)
  - Loop trail, mt. Windy, 0.6 mi. (1 km)
  - East Rim Drive climbs 250 feet (76 meters) to a junction. Then follow blue diamonds down through the forest and up a series of ledges of Vidae Falls. Off-Route Option: Plowed Road

**Vidae Falls**
- Distance from trailhead: 3.1 mi. (5.0 km)
- Vidae Falls is a spring-fed cascade that drops 200 feet (60 meters) of elevation while passing the park’s residential area. Then begins a steep climb, which in 1.3 mi. (2.1 km) gains 436 feet (133 meters). The climb is popular with skiers looking for a short, invigorating workout. Views from the summit are limited, but on the return trip Crater Lake is visible on the skyline straight ahead.

**Sun Notch**
- Distance from trailhead: 4.5 mi. (7.2 km)
- To view Crater Lake, skiers must continue on to Sun Notch, gaining an additional 105 feet (32 meters) of elevation. Skiers must also cross—or bypass—a second avalanche zone. (A detailed map of the Applegate Avalanche Bypass Route is available at the Steel Visitor Center.) Sun Notch itself is 25 miles (4 km) north of the East Rim Drive. To find it, leave the road at the end of the snowy section. Hard turns; the surface is not marked. The view from Sun Notch is dramatic. Nearly 1,000 feet (305 meters) above the water, it directly overlooks a rocky island known as the Phantom Ship. Stay back from the edge of the caldera as it is dangerous, overhanging snow walls.

**Galfrid-Applegate Ridge**
- Distance from Rim Village: 18 mi. (29 km)
- Another lake-viewing option for snowshoers and advanced skiers is to attempt the uppermost 6,200 feet (1,889 meters) of Galfrid-Applegate Peak. This is an unplowed route that descends through the meadows and groves of trees. Leave the East Rim Drive at the summit of the first climb. The rim is 1.4 miles (2.3 km) due west of Rim Village, a route elevation gain of 950 feet (290 meters).

### ADVANCED TRAILS

**Raven Trail**
- Distance: 7 mi. (11 km)
- This trail is used by a number of park rangers after work. It descends steeply from Rim Village to the Mackinaw, dropping 610 feet (186 meters) in elevation. It is also a steep drop in elevation, which requires two vehicles or a shuttle to the top. When icy, the trail can be dangerous. Fast, high-speed downhills are possible. It flattens out halfway to Park Headquarters, where it crosses the base of a large avalanche chute then runs parallel to the ridge for times of heavy snow, when the road to Mt. Jefferson backcountry road is also used by snowmobiles who ride on the lake. Upper Trailhead: Snow ramp near Crater Lake Park Headquarters. Lower Trailhead: Snow ramp near Crater Lake Park Headquarters. Recommended for beginning skiers, this upper route offers a fun and challenging backcountry experience. It is typically skied from north to south and therefore is downhill. The snow is deeper here and avalanche considerations are different. From the lower trailhead to the viewpoint of the Pacific Crest Trail. The trail then climbs 250 feet (76 meters) to a junction. The lower trail climbs 250 feet (76 meters) to a junction. The upper trail is marked with blue diamonds and some older orange and red blazes, but skiers should carry a topographic map and a compass or GPS. Trailhead: Snow ramp across from the Rim Village restrooms. Ski west, just past Rim Village, and back for the trailhead design on the south side of West Rim Drive.

### Circling the Lake

Each winter, approximately 80 skiers and 30 snowshoers travel all the way around Crater Lake. It’s a trip that can be exceptionally rewarding, rich with spectacular views. It can also be physically demanding—a test of endurance and outdoor skills.

When the weather is clear, the 31 mi. (50 km) loop takes an average of 6 to 8 hours to complete. Storms, however, force many park visitors to postpone a trip to another day. In general, the route is closed overnight; the route is unveiled, difficult to follow in places, and crossed by a number of avalanche paths. Those attempting the rim should be experienced in winter camping, basic avalanche safety, and avalanche rescue. A backcountry permit is required.

Although the course can typically be accomplished anytime between late November and early May, it is most commonly done in late March and April. Spring provides more hours of light, with the winter months and longer periods of clear weather.
Buy Crater Lake License Plates

If you live in Oregon, consider choosing Crater Lake license plates for your vehicle. For a one-time charge of $270, you can register your car with these beautiful plates while supporting park projects. You can purchase Crater Lake license plates at any time, not just when buying a new vehicle or renewing your registration. Visit any Oregon DMV office or www.oregon.gov/odot/dmv for details.

Climate Chart

Crater Lake National Park is one of the snowiest inhabited places in America. Storms from the Pacific Ocean dump an average of 43 feet (13 meters) of snow at Park Headquarters. That's equivalent to 1.4 inches (3.6 cm) of snow every day for an entire year! The park's tremendous snowfall is a result of its position at the crest of the Cascade Mountains.

Data is from Park Headquarters, 1931-2014.

Volunteer Your Time

Looking for a hands-on way to help the park? Consider sharing your time and talents as a Crater Lake VIP (Volunteer-In-Parks). Full-time volunteers are needed throughout the year to help staff visitor centers and present interpretive programs. Opportunities are advertised several times each year at www. volnow.com. Volunteers are provided free housing in exchange for 3 months of service.

Contribute to the Crater Lake Trust

The Crater Lake National Park Trust is a non-profit organization that raises private funds to support park projects and connect the park with surrounding communities. It helps support, for example, field trips to the park for more than 5,000 grade-school students each year. In a program called a comment form at the visitor center, send an email to craterlake@nps.gov, or write to: Superintendent, Crater Lake National Park, PO Box 7, Crater Lake, OR 97604.

Share Your Comments

Whether you have a compliment, concern, or suggestion, we’d like to hear from you! This is your national park, and we value your input on how best to manage it. You can provide feedback in several ways. Fill out and maintain trails, contact visitors, operate a winter information desk at Rim Village, and assist with special events. Learn more at www.friendsofcraterlake.org.

The Crater Lake Ski Patrol has been assisting winter visitors and maintaining the park's cross-country ski trails since 1983. The patrol is identifiable by their bright red parkas, receive training in wilderness first aid, survival skills, search and rescue, map and compass use, and avalanche safety in exchange for at least 6 days of service. For more information, visit www.craterlakeski.net.

The Mountain That Became a Lake CD

Listed to this CD as you drive the park’s main road, Park rangers and American Indians share facts, stories, and insight about Crater Lake. 60 minutes, $16.95.

Crater Lake Water Bottle

This plastic bottle’s flip-top lid is a convenient way to keep your thirst. 2.59.

Star and Planet Guide

Rotating “planisphere” helps you find stars and planets, and constellations in the night sky. $11.95.

Crater Lake: The Story Behind the Scenery

Large photos with detailed captions accompany the text of this 150-page book. 48 pages, $11.95.

Crater Lake: Gem of the Cascades

A comprehensive guide to the park’s geologic story, written by a former park ranger. 186 pages, $17.95.

Crater Lake NP Topographic Map

Recommended for trips into the park’s backcountry. Waterproof and road map. 1:55,000 scale. $11.95.

Plants & Animals of Crater Lake NP

This folding, waterproof pocket guide will help you identify the park’s most visible species. 11 pages, $6.95.

Volcanoes

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Guide to the National Parks of the United States

A fun, illustrated guide to national parks, from National Geographic features 380 photos and 80 color maps. 482 pages, $26.00.

Trees to Know in Oregon

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Data is from Park Headquarters, 1931-2014.

Shop in the Visitor Center Bookstore

When you shop in the visitor center, all proceeds from your purchase are invested back into the park. The bookstore is operated by the Crater Lake Natural History Association, a non-profit organization established in 1942 to support the park’s educational and scientific programs.

Recommended Reading

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