



History



Cleetwood survey expedition, 1886

Crater Lake Has Inspired People for Many Generations

Crater Lake has long attracted the wonder and admiration of people all over the world. Its depth of 1,943 feet (592 meters) makes it the deepest lake in the United States and one of the deepest lakes in the world. Its fresh water is some of the clearest found anywhere in the world. The interaction of people with this place is traceable at least as far back as the eruption of Mount Mazama. European contact was fairly recent, starting in 1853.

Original Visitors

A Native American connection with this area has been traced back to before the cataclysmic eruption of Mount Mazama. Archaeologists have found sandals and other artifacts buried under layers of ash, dust, and pumic from this eruption approximately 7,700 years ago. To date, there is little evidence indicating that Mount Mazama was a permanent home to people. However, it was used as a place for visionquests and prayer.

Accounts of the eruption can be found in stories told by the Klamath Indians, who are the descendants of the Makalak people. The Makalaks lived in an area southeast of the present park. Because information was passed down orally, there are many different versions. The Umpqua people have a similar story, featuring different spirits. The Makalak legend told in the park film, *The Crater Lake Story*, is as follows:

A Legendary Look at Formation

The spirit of the mountain was called *Chief of the Below World* (Llao). The spirit of the sky was called *Chief of the Above World* (Skell). Sometimes Llao came up from his home inside the earth and stood on top of Mount Mazama, one of the highest mountains in the region. During one of these visits, he saw the Makalak chief's beautiful daughter and fell in love with her. He promised her eternal life if she would return with him to his lodge below the mountain. When she refused, he became angry and declared that he would destroy her people with fire. In his rage, he rushed up through the opening of his mountain and stood on top of it and began to hurl fire down upon them.

The mighty Skell took pity on the people and stood atop Mount Shasta to defend them. From their mountaintops, the two chiefs waged a furious battle. They hurled red hot rocks as large as hills. They made the earth tremble and caused great landslides of fire. The people fled in terror to the waters of Klamath Lake.

Two holy men offered to sacrifice themselves by jumping into the pit of fire on top of Llao's mountain. Skell was moved by their bravery and drove Llao back into Mount Mazama. When the sun rose next, the great mountain was gone. It had fallen in on Llao. All that remained was a large hole. Rain fell in torrents, filling the hole with water. This is now called Crater Lake.

Honoring the Past, Preserving for the Future

Early settlers and explorers did not hear about Crater Lake from the native inhabitants because this place is sacred to most Native Americans of Oregon and northern California. Makalaks (now Klamath Indians) held the belief that this place was holy and that looking upon it required great power and strength.

Today, some Native Americans continue to choose not to view Crater Lake. Its beauty and mystery form a religious context, much like a cathedral. As you explore this place of earthly violence and unearthly quiet, honor its sacred qualities.

Pioneers

In the spring of 1853, eleven miners from Yreka, California, stopped for supplies at Isaac Skeeter's mercantile store in Jacksonville, Oregon (approximately 90 miles southwest of Crater Lake). They began bragging that they knew how to find the legendary "Lost Cabin" gold mine. Skeeters quickly gathered up ten other Oregonians and set out, using the information overheard in his store. The trip was financed by John Wesley Hillman, a 21 year old who had recently returned home from a successful trip to the California gold fields.

On June 12, three members from this party came upon a large body of water sitting in a huge depression. Hillman exclaimed that it was the bluest water he had ever seen. Skeeters suggested they name it "Deep Blue Lake".

Lack of provisions soon drove the miners down the mountains and back to Jacksonville where they reported the discovery of the lake. However, with no prospect of gold, there was no interest in confirming this discovery. It was soon forgotten.

Naming a Natural Wonder

In 1862, another party of Oregon prospectors explored this area of the Cascade Range. The leader, Chauncy Nye, later wrote a short article for the Jacksonville *Oregon Sentinel*. His article stated, "The waters were of a deeply blue color causing us to name it *Blue Lake*." This was the first published description of the lake.

In the 1850s, hostilities between settlers and Native Americans developed in the area. In response, the U.S. Army established Fort Klamath, seven miles southeast of the present park boundary, in 1863. This led to the construction of a wagon road from Prospect, in the Rogue River valley, to the newly established fort. On August 1, 1865, the lake was

"rediscovered" by two hunters attached to the road crews. Several soldiers and civilians journeyed to see the now-legendary lake. One of the participants, Sergeant Orsen Stearns, climbed down into the caldera and became the first non-Native American to reach the shore of Crater Lake. Captain F.B. Sprague soon joined him and suggested they name it "*Lake Majesty*".

In July 1869, newspaper editor Jim Sutton and several others decided to visit the lake and explore it by boat. By August, a canvas boat had been constructed and lowered to the lake. Five people reached Wizard Island and spent several hours exploring the cinder cone. Sutton wrote an article describing the trip for his Jacksonville newspaper. He called it "*Crater Lake*".

A National Park

In 1870, a young boy in Kansas name William Gladstone Steel unwrapped his lunch, which was wrapped in a newspaper. As he ate, he read an article about an unusual lake in Oregon. The story sparked Steel's imagination. He vowed to see the lake for himself someday.

Two years later, Steel's family moved to Portland, Oregon; where another thirteen years passed before Steel finally gazed upon the beauty of Crater Lake. He was so moved that he decided that it should be preserved forever as a public park. His seventeen year quest to see Crater Lake established as a national park had begun.

In 1886, Steel assisted with the mapping of the lake, which had been undertaken by Clarence Dutton

for the U.S. Geological Survey. During the original survey, soundings of the lake were conducted using a pipe and piano wire. The maximum depth determined by the survey was 1,996 feet (608 meters), only 53 feet off from the depth of 1,943 feet (592 meters) set by the survey of 2000.

Steel's proposals to create a national park met with much argument from sheep herders and mining interests. A fledgling conservation movement began in the late 1800's, greatly aiding Steel's efforts by promoting awareness of preserving natural areas. In 1893, the lake received some protection as part of the Cascade Range Forest Reserve. For Steel, this was not good enough. He continued to work, and on May 22, 1902, Crater Lake finally became a national park.