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IDAHO YESTERDAYS

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Geologist
Doug Owen

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The Union Depot in Lewiston, Idaho, was the station used by the Camas Prairie Railroad when May Pierstorff was sent from Grangeville to Lewiston via parcel post in 1912. Photo courtesy Nez Perce County Historical Society.

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FROM WASTELAND TO WONDERLAND: CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL MONUMENT

by David Louter

Craters of the Moon National Monument is not, at first glance, a very hospitable place. The history of Euro-American reaction to the area reflects a more general change in reaction to the interior West and to landscapes totally unlike those found in Europe. This study of Craters' transition is drawn from the author's administrative history and historic-context study prepared for the National Park Service. In addition to his work as an historian for the Park Service's office in Seattle, David Louter is a graduate student in history at the University of Washington. His doctoral dissertation, in progress, is entitled "Windshield Wilderness: The Automobile and National Parks in Washington State."

THE PACIFIC NORTHWEST was home to some of the country's earliest national parks. Mount Rainier was established in Washington in 1899 and Crater Lake in Oregon in 1902. Idaho, however, was a noticeable exception. Its boundaries did not, and still do not, embrace a national park; the closest the Gem State came was a slim section of Yellowstone on its eastern border, and that was more by chance than by design. Idahoans did not find themselves without a park for a lack of trying. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, some attempted to create national parks out of Shoshone Falls, Lake Chatcolet, and the Sawtooth Mountains. But for reasons ranging from inadequate public interest to objections over the restrictions a park—and thus the federal government—would impose on resource use, these proposals failed.[1]

The state did, however, achieve national attention with the creation of its first national park site, Craters of the Moon National Monument, in 1924. Ironically, while Idaho possessed more widely admired scenes of natural beauty, it seems that Craters of the Moon succeeded in being protected where other areas failed because it was a rather small, isolated, and largely unheralded expanse of volcanic terrain. Although today it is widely acclaimed for its strange volcanic beauty and scientific importance, this landscape was considered a desolate waste throughout the nineteenth century. It was not until the early twentieth century that the volcanic country's harsh countenance had been worn away by a greater familiarity with desert places, mostly through the work of natural scientists, the wilderness preservation movement, and efforts to boost the local tourist economy.[2] Looking upon the region now more as a scenic wonder than a scenic waste, a relatively small group of Idahoans sought briefly to protect it as a national park and then in earnest as a national monument. The most significant obstacle preservationists faced was not political opposition but Craters of the Moon's own image as a wasteland. This was its most enduring quality, and to understand the history of its establishment is to understand its transformation from a lava wasteland to a lava wonderland.

AMERICANS HAVE CONSIDERED the Craters country a wasteland almost as long as they have found it a wonderland. Located in a cradle of the Snake River Plain, this expanse of undulating lava flows, cinder cones, craters, and myriad volcanic formations was created when molten basalt erupted from fissures in the earth's crust fifteen thousand years ago. The black and raw lava flows roll like a quiet sea; the formations that line the fissures, or Great Rift, for some sixty miles from north to south rise like islands above a surface swirling with frozen eddies and cascading blocks of lava foam. Nineteenth-century Americans viewed this landscape with disdain, their perception rooted, not surprisingly, in the fear and hatred that Americans harbored for the West's desert places. With their hot and arid climates, deserts inflicted suffering on explorers and travelers and overwhelmed them with uncertainty and danger. Deserts, moreover, lacked any valuable resources or scenes of familiar natural beauty

[1]Carlos A. Schwantes in *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 233-234, offers a general overview of the national-park question in Idaho. A more detailed analysis can be found in James G. MacCracken and Jay O'Laughlin, *A National Park in Idaho? Proposals and Possibilities* (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1992).

[2]For a more extensive treatment of these and other aspects of the monument's history, see David Louter, *Craters of the Moon National Monument: Historic Context Statements* (Seattle: National Park Service, 1995).

St. Paul photographer F. Jay Haynes photographed these snow-dusted spatter cones at Craters of the Moon in 1924. Photograph courtesy Montana Historical Society Photograph Archives. Haynes Foundation Collection #H-24195.

to offset their miserable conditions.[3] Consequently, few people were inclined to find this remote area of the Snake River Plain appealing. As the popular writer Washington Irving depicted it in the early 1830's, it was a place where "nothing meets the eye but a desolate and aweful waste; where no grass grows nor water runs, and where nothing is to be seen but lava."[4]

The wasteland image, though common to much of the American West in the nineteenth century, was particularly important in the case of Craters of the Moon. While other sections of the West's landscape were revised in a more favorable light as the century wore on, Craters of the Moon's image as a desolate waste persisted. As many western historians and geographers have observed, the myth of the "Great American Desert," which portrayed lands west of the Mississippi River as dry, treeless, and unfit for agricultural settlement, spoke perhaps less to the reality of the western landscape than it did to the cultural lens through which Americans viewed it. In other words Irving—and for that matter a nation with deeply felt agrarian ideals on the verge of expansion—may have expected to find a fertile country in the West similar to lands east of the Mississippi Valley. Such an expectation would have skewed his perception of the Snake River Plain and its isolated sections like Craters of the Moon.[5]

While some myths were punctured by firsthand accounts, encounters with the volcanic desert only strengthened the Craters of the Moon country's wasteland image. Irving, like many of his readers, never traveled to the Craters country; he explored the region vicariously through the eyes of Benjamin L. E. Bonneville, the romantic Army captain who entered the Snake country fur trade during the years 1833 and 1834. The fur trappers of Bonneville's time bolstered Irving's view of the lava district. At the height of fierce competition in the 1820's and 1830's, for example, British and American fur companies converged on this remote corner of the Snake River country; but rather than enter into Craters of the Moon, fur parties danced around it like a wound that had horribly scarred the land. In their minds, the arid and jagged lava district was a fur

[3]Patricia Nelson Limerick, *Desert Passages: Encounters with the American Deserts* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1985), 3-8; Martyn J. Bowden, "The Great American Desert in the American Mind: The Historiography of a Geographical Notion," in *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geography*, edited by David Lowenthal and Martyn J. Bowden (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 119-147.

[4]Washington Irving, *The Adventures of Captain Bonneville, U.S.A.*, vol. I (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1898), 198. For a valuable treatment of the Snake River Plain, see Todd Shallat, editor, *Snake: The Plain and Its People* (Boise, Idaho: Boise State University, 1994), especially 123-161.

[5]Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Land: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950), 201-213; Anne Farrar Hyde, *An American Vision: Far Western Landscape and National Culture, 1820-1920* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), 23-27; Anne Farrar Hyde, "Cultural Filters: The Significance of Perception in the History of the American West," *Western Historical Quarterly* (August, 1993), 24:354-356.

desert, a hazard to health and travel, and therefore worthless land best left alone. Fur hunters instead routinely passed through the desert between the Big Lost and Snake rivers some twenty miles east of this volcanic landscape. In the opinion of Peter Skene Ogden, prominent Hudson's Bay Company expedition leader, this section of the plain itself was a "cursed Country" and the "greatest impediment in the route" between the Snake River and the Flathead Post.[6] The alternative, as one group of trappers discovered, was to spend days lost in a hellish country of gaping volcanic chasms, delirious from heat and lack of water.[7]

As EXPECTANT CAPITALISTS who judged the lava district by how it met their desire for profits, fur trappers may have offered only a limited perspective on this desolate country. But like the fur trappers before them, thousands of overland emigrants who crossed the volcanic country in the mid-1800's thought of it as a physical and visual wasteland. Their impressions of the region were influenced not as much by economic factors as they were by their own travel objectives, environmental realities, and cultural conditioning.[8]

Many emigrants selected Goodale's Cutoff, an alternate route of the Oregon Trail that took them past the northern bounds of Craters of the Moon, where its lava flows meet the mountains. Hardly irrational people, these emigrants came from middle-class backgrounds and, like their counterparts on the main road, their reasons for encountering this desolate land lay largely beyond it: in the farms they wanted to establish in the fertile valleys of Oregon, or in the precious minerals they wanted to extract from the western mountains.[9] Emigrants also chose the alternate route for reasons specific to a particular place and time—to avoid frequent Indian attacks along the main road and to reach the recent gold discoveries in the Salmon River country and Boise Basin more directly. During the Civil War era, the cutoff grew so popular that nearly eleven hundred people crossed as one party in 1862—the single largest party to cross a section of the overland trail.[10]

The popularity of the trail, though, did little to convince emigrants of Craters of the Moon's scenic charms. On the one hand, the lava flows threatened to impede their progress, impressing upon them all the more the gritty hardships of everyday travel in the desert heat and difficult terrain. As they traveled through the Craters of the Moon lava fields, emigrants followed a narrow, tortuous trail that pinched their wagons between the lava flows and the slopes of the Pioneer Mountains. The experience shocked some emigrants and left others feeling helpless as the sharp basalt cut their horses' hooves and the "rough beach of lava" threatened to break their wagons into so many parts already littering the trail.[11]

On the other hand, the realities of desert travel magnified the fact that emigrants were culturally unprepared to make sense of this peculiar desert scenery. They were accustomed to scenes of cultivated fields and lush, forested countrysides, not a dry, treeless, and flat terrain. The lifeless and monotonous landscape made distances seem infinite; worse, this unfamiliar terrain caused some emigrants to associate the region with death and failure and caused still others to associate it with a spiritual wasteland.[12] As one emigrant remarked, the Craters country "could only remind one of the black valley of death." Later, pinned between the lava flows and foothills, she expected that she and her party would surely "perish" by the road if they did not press on.[13] In 1864, Julius Caesar Merrill spoke for many emigrants when he wrote:

> It was such a relief to see the distance widening between us and those volcanic strata. It was a desolate, dismal scenery. Up or down the

[6]William H. Goetzmann, *Exploration and Empire: The Explorer and Scientist in the Winning of the American West* (1966; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1978), 107-108; Peter Skene Ogden, *Peter Skene Ogden's Snake Country Journals, 1824-25, 1825-26*, edited by E. E. Rich (London: Hudson's Bay Record Society, 1950), 30-33, quotation from 33. Carolyn Rhodes-Jones, "An Evolving View of the Landscape: Trappers, Tourists, and the Great Shoshone Falls," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Summer, 1979), 23/2:19-21, offers a general overview of fur trappers and the Snake River landscape. See also John S. Galbraith, *The Hudson's Bay Company as an Imperial Factor, 1821-1869* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957), 82-89; and James P. Ronda, *Astoria and Empire* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1990), 176-191, for the forces motivating fur traders to enter the Snake River Plain and some of their impressions of it.

[7]Warren Angus Ferris, *Life in the Rocky Mountains: A Diary of Wanderings on the Sources of the Rivers Missouri, Columbia, and Colorado, 1830-1835*, new revised edition (Denver: Old West Publishing Company, 1983), 53-54.

[8]Peter G. Boag, "Overlanders and the Snake River Region: A Case Study of Popular Landscape Perception in the Early West," *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* (October, 1993), 84:122-129.

[9]John D. Unruh, Jr., *The Plains Across: The Overland Emigrants and the Trans-Mississippi West, 1840-1860* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1979).

[10]Irving R. Merrill, "Tim Goodale and His Cutoff: A Major Trail Segment During and After the Fourth Migration Wave," *Overland Journal* (1990), 8/3:9-11. It should be noted that this record party only crossed the section of trail in the immediate vicinity of today's monument.

[11]Winfield Scott Ebey, "A Journal of [a] Trip over the Plains," vol. I, "April to August, 1854," Winfield Scott Ebey Papers, University of Washington, Seattle, 230-231, 234-237; Charles Nelson Teeter, "Four Years of My Life, or, My Adventures in the Far West," typescript, Charles Nelson Teeter Papers, Idaho State Historical Society, Boise, 107; Julius C. Merrill, *Bound for Idaho: The 1864 Trail Journal of Julius Merrill*, edited by Irving R. Merrill (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1988), 100.

[12]Boag, "Overlanders and the Snake River Region." Overlanders in some cases found familiar scenes and panoramas to raise their spirits, such as at City of Rocks. See Limerick, *Desert Passages*, 5; Hyde, "Cultural Filters," 361-362.

[13]Mrs. W. A. Loughary, "A Brief Journal of the Travels and Incidents of an Emigrant Ox Train across the Plains . . . ," Woolverton Family Papers, University of Oregon, Eugene, 21.

"Washington's Profile" in lava—a natural wonder if not sublime scenery. ISHS 70-86.12.

valley as far as the eye could reach or across to the mountains in the dim distance the same unvarying mass of black rock. Not a shrub, bird, nor insect seemed to live near it. Great must have been the relief of the volcano, powerful the emetic, that poured forth such a mass of black vomit.[14]

Thirty years after Bonneville's encounter with the region, the impression of it remained largely the same—an impression that lasted well after overland migration waned. To some degree, it persisted because the lava district simply did not present the kind of country countless miners, ranchers, and settlers desired. As they passed by the area they saw desolation, not a landscape containing mineral wealth, grass for livestock, or well-watered soil for farming. This reality hit home as the myth of the West as a fertile garden replaced the myth of the West as a desert in the 1870's and 1880's. Around this time, ranchers searched for a fabled lush green valley—said to be hidden in the midst of the volcanic desert and known only to Indians. Although some were successful and found water flowing across an island of grass in the lava flows, the stream soon percolated into the porous lava: another "lost river," a mirage in Craters of the Moon's unremitting desert.[15]

To a larger degree, the negative impression persisted because the lava country's scenic qualities were deemed pedestrian and insignificant; the volcanic district quite simply did not match the images of natural beauty popular at the time. The upper-class tourists who flocked to the Snake Plain in the 1880's and 1890's made this abundantly clear. Well-traveled in the picturesque landscapes of Europe and eastern America, they sought out the fabled wonders of the West, the plain's most famous natural wonder—Shoshone Falls—not the "unbroken monotony" of a volcanic landscape where desolation was "everywhere written upon its black surface."[16] Flowing deep in the basalt canyon of the Snake River, this magnificent waterfall achieved national renown for being higher than Niagara Falls and equally if not more impressive, earning it the name "Niagara of the West." The popular metaphor revealed not only the skillful advertising of tourist promoters but also the kind of scenery tourists wanted to see, for Niagara symbolized the sublimity and grandeur in the American landscape.[17]

Compared to Shoshone Falls, Craters of the Moon was the opposite of the natural beauty Americans cherished, a barren waste. This aversion was especially clear after the Union Pacific Railroad built the Oregon Short Line across southern Idaho in the mid-1880's. In this era, railroads brought the vast majority of Americans to the West's natural wonders, and through their promotional literature, as the historian Alfred Runte has observed, "the railroads were without rivals in their ability to bring the West into the living rooms of the American people."[18] The Union Pacific's promoters, who trumpeted the virtues of Shoshone Falls, never featured the remote lava country in their tourist literature. Their silence may have been for practical reasons; the volcanic area lay too far north of the railway line to include in their tours. But more likely, promoters were targeting an elite clientele who preferred to travel in comfort and see the sublime and picturesque scenery of waterfalls, canyons, and mountains their line provided. As Carrie Strahorn, wife of Union Pacific promoter Robert Strahorn, suggested, the Oregon Short Line's passengers would welcome their scenery any day in contrast to Craters of the Moon's "thousands of acres of black rock."[19]

By 1898, the popularity of Shoshone Falls had grown so strong that concerned citizens proposed setting it aside as a scenic reserve, most likely a national park.

[14]Merrill, *Bound for Idaho*, 101.

[15]"Complete Story of the Lost Valley," *Idaho Republican* (Blackfoot), January 24, 1927; Smith, *Virgin Land*, 208-213.

[16]John Codman, "The Shoshone Falls," *Century Magazine* (April, 1890), 39:924. See also Earl Pomeroy, *In Search of the Golden West: The Tourist in Western America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957).

[17]Rhodes-Jones, "An Evolving View of the Landscape," 22-25. See Edwards Roberts, *Shoshone and Other Western Wonders* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1888), for an example of the broad popular appeal of Shoshone Falls. See also Barbara Novak, *Nature and Culture: American Landscape and Painting, 1825-1875* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

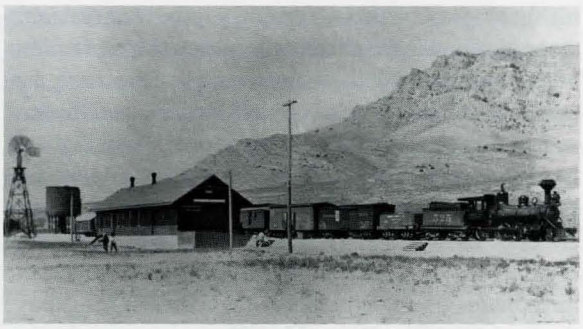
[18]Alfred Runte, *Trains of Discovery: Western Railroads and the National Parks* (Flagstaff, Arizona: Northland Press, 1984), 12; Robert G. Athearn, "The Oregon Short Line," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Winter, 1969-1970), 13/4:2-18.

[19]Robert E. Strahorn, *The Resources and Attractions of Idaho*, 7th ed. (1881; St. Louis: Woodward and Tieran, Company, 1894); Carrie A. Strahorn, *Fifteen Thousand Miles by Stage* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1911), 450-451. The 1881 edition of Robert Strahorn's book has been reissued (Moscow: University of Idaho Press, 1990); his wife's book has also been reissued, in two volumes with new pagination for the second volume (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988).

Their interest suggested that Shoshone residents and the large numbers of tourists—many of them from Idaho—who visited the falls during the summer months considered this natural wonder worthy of preservation on a level similar to that of nearby Yellowstone National Park. The association offered compelling evidence of Shoshone Falls's national-park caliber. As the nation's first "national park," established in 1872, Yellowstone "inevitably fixed an indelible image of grandeur and mystery in the public mind." As a deeply significant symbol of American culture and the park idea, it was the standard against which all other national parks would be measured. Still more compelling evidence of the falls's park caliber was its association with Niagara Falls, which through unchecked commercialism had been a spark for the national-park idea. Similar to its eastern counterpart, the "Niagara of the West" was coveted for its uses in reclamation and hydroelectric power generation—uses that killed the preservation proposal and eventually diminished the scenic qualities of the falls.[20]

The brief movement to protect Shoshone Falls indicated the type of scenery Idahoans, and Americans in general, considered worthy of national-park status. Americans evaluated scenic beauty in terms of its "monumentalism"—a concept, according to Runte, that accorded natural features cultural significance and an important component in the development of the national-park idea. Culturally conscious Americans had a long history of imposing European standards of beauty on their landscapes, just as they did in art, literature, and architecture. In this respect, they likened rock formations in the Southwest to ancient ruins, the Rocky Mountains to the Swiss Alps, the timeworn canyons to Europe's cultural antiquities. They also praised unique natural features like Yellowstone's geysers and California's giant sequoias as evidence that their young country made up in scenery what it lacked in relics.[21]

This kind of nature appreciation displayed a latent nationalism that encouraged the creation of national parks to protect such scenic marvels as Shoshone Falls—and to ignore volcanic landscapes like Craters of the Moon. But it also revealed that preserving marvels of nature faced opposition from commercial interests, which represented the nation's commitment to materialism and the advancement of personal wealth in developing the country in the nineteenth century. Thus from the outset the preservation of national parks relied on the fact that they were scenically beautiful but economically worthless.[22] In the case of Shoshone Falls, preservationists were unsuccessful in making this argument, especially since so much of southern Idaho's agricultural development depended on irrigation.



One of the first trains to come through Arco, in about 1901. ISHS 66-15.16.

THE CHARRED LANDSCAPE of the Craters country was unquestionably worthless, a fact that would ultimately strengthen arguments to preserve it in the early 1920's. In this respect, Craters of the Moon differed from other park proposals of the time because preservationists would find themselves in the opposite situation from most park campaigns: they were given the task of proving the merits of its scenic beauty and scientific value rather than its worthless character.

The task was improbable but not impossible. Americans began to change their minds about Craters of the Moon's desolate appearance around the turn of the century. The same kind of admiration for nature that led to the creation of national parks, for example, was large enough to embrace even the Craters country. By the time that tourists were praising Shoshone Falls, there were signs that some travelers perceived in the Craters country a landscape of wonder rather than waste.

Faint glimmers of this new impression were reflected in the travel accounts of a few individuals who recognized the region's uniqueness. In their minds, it had no companion landmark on the North American continent and scarcely any in the world, an observation that accorded the Craters country distinction. Scottish geologist Sir Archibald Geikie, for example, suggested that the Snake River Plain—and by association exposed sections like Craters of the Moon—were among those places in the American West that lifted the "mist from

[20]Rhodes-Jones, "An Evolving View of the Landscape," 25-26; Alfred Runte, *National Parks: The American Experience*, 2nd revised edition (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1987), 21.

[21]Runte, *National Parks*, 5-9, 57-58, 213-214, quotation from 213.

[22]*Ibid.*, 49.

my geological vision," for they provided valuable theoretical evidence about the geological history of his home country. To the untrained eye, the fresh appearance of the lava's rippled surface and hollow sounds underfoot were inspirational, moving one traveler to posit that the Craters territory and the rest of the Snake River plateau composed the "largest crater or Lava Bed in the world." Moreover, the entire region possessed an Old World quality in which the three buttes (Big Southern and Twin buttes) rose above the horizon "like Pyramids."[23]

Craters of the Moon's reappraisal also benefited from the reevaluation of western deserts well under way by the 1890's. Late in the century, the initial fear and hatred Americans had for deserts mellowed "into acceptance and even celebration," noted historian Donald Worster. "Americans by then had found ways of coping with western exigencies,and with that coping came familiarity, self-confidence, and eventually the seeds of delight."[24]

The key to their coping was the discovery that life could thrive in the desert. The warm Southwest, for example, relieved lung ailments with its clear, dry air and became a national sanitarium for those escaping the damp and polluted air of eastern cities. In a matter of decades, healthy Americans decided the desert was a good place for them, too, especially once irrigation projects secured water, fields bloomed, towns grew, and modern transportation systems initiated safe and efficient travel. Tourists, enticed by the work of boosters like the Southwest's Charles Lummis, helped confirm this new vision by traveling to see the desert's rich array of natural and cultural wonders. As the works of writers Mary Austin and John Van Dyke attested, this turnabout had a deeper meaning. For a generation of Americans adjusting to the rigors of modern life, deserts answered powerful needs for natural beauty and solitude, a sense of order and renewal. They also helped satisfy a longing for a western frontier, one that existed more in myth than in reality. On a smaller but no less important scale, the scientific community—botanists, ecologists, and geologists—contributed to this blossoming appreciation through their studies of how other forms of life had adapted to and thrived in deserts, as well as how natural forces had shaped them.[25]

DURING THE EARLY twentieth century, the new values Americans invested in western landscapes—as places of beauty, antiquity, and national pride—coalesced to revise the meaning and significance of Craters of the Moon. To see Craters anew and ascertain its national-park potential, people first needed evidence of its value. In 1901, Israel C. Russell, a seasoned geologist of the American West, set this process in motion when he conducted the first reconnaissance of the Snake River Plain for the United States Geological Survey. Russell's initial orders were to survey the plain's water resources, but he became so preoccupied with the region's geology that his study was expanded and a large portion was dedicated to Craters of the Moon—a place that fascinated him. Russell's report reflected both his love of science and his romantic notion of the frontier—two passions that drove his interest in and impression of this small part of the Snake River Plain, a place he called "Cinder Buttes" and which he was the first to portray as a true natural wonder.[26]

Russell believed that Craters of the Moon was geologically impressive because it represented a microcosm of the entire plain and thus held the key to its geological history. Craters of the Moon contained all of the plain's formations—among them cinder cones, craters, caves, and lava flows—in a relatively small space. Moreover, the formations appeared to be remarkably fresh—as if the molten rock had just recently cooled, sometime in the last two hundred years. Although stands of limber pine grew in hollows and brightly colored plants carpeted cinder beds and cones, the volcanic terrain was mostly bare, making its landscape easy to read and its history relatively easy to describe. All the region lacked, he concluded, was a live volcano. While the district's natural history excited the geologist, its natural beauty intrigued him almost more. The concentration of volcanic formations presented a visual feast of texture and "many pleasing

[23]Sir Archibald Geikie, *Geological Sketches at Home and Abroad* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1882), 237-238, 242-245; William E. Davis, "George Forman: The Great Pedestrian," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Spring, 1966), 10/1:4-5. See also E. W. Jones, "Some Wonders of Idaho," *Historical Society of Southern California Publications* (1888), 1:23-29.

[24]Donald Worster, *Rivers of Empire: Water, Aridity, and the Growth of the American West* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 67.

[25]*Ibid.*, 65-74; Hyde, *An American Vision*, 191-243; Limerick, *Desert Passages*, 91-94; and Robert G. Athearn, *The Mythic West in Twentieth-Century America* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1986).

[26]C. Willard Hayes to C. D. Walcott, May 14, 1902, Records of the U.S. Geological Survey, Record Group 57, Entry 81, box 36, file 821, National Archives, Washington, D.C. (hereafter NA). Russell frequently requested assignments in the remote and wild recesses of the West—the "wilder and rougher," he said, "the better." See Israel C. Russell to C. Willard Hayes, March 22, 1902, *ibid.* Biographical information on Russell can be found in Warren P. Lombard and Martin L. D'Odoge, "Israel Cook Russell," *Science* (October 5, 1906), 24:426-431.

variations in color," he wrote, "ranging from deep red through brown and purple to lusterless black."[27]

Russell wanted Americans to appreciate the Snake River Plain and its hidden treasures like the Craters country, but he knew that accomplishing this would be difficult. Assuming that most Americans disliked deserts, he appealed to their nostalgia over the nation's disappearing wilderness and described the region as a last frontier. "To lovers of nature," he wrote, "and all who rejoice in scenes of natural wilderness . . . unmarred by the hand of man, the plains of southern Idaho present exceptional attractions." Russell realized that this approach alone would not sway his audience. It would also take patience and time to bring people to share his views. Those unaccustomed to deserts, he noted, were quick to judge the region as "worthless" and "useless." Only after weeks or months riding across the plain's "seemingly boundless surfaces" could one see its true beauty: the way light from a clear dawn or dusk textured the plain with shadows, ignited its palette of pale yellow, reddish brown, gray, and black, and mixed them into a "sea of purple" rimmed by "shimmering mountains." Only then could one find this landscape to have "charms unthought by the casual passerby."[28]

It was doubtful that many Americans could afford the luxury of spending weeks in the Snake River Plain, meditating on its special places like Craters of the Moon. The region surrounding the volcanic country was lightly populated and the nearest railroad depot was some twenty miles to the northeast in the village of Arco. Russell nevertheless introduced a new way of thinking about this lava landscape, one that expressed not only its geological significance but also its scenic values in a language common to all. In 1906, a tourist promoter took the geologist's words to heart in a promotional piece on the scenic marvels of the Snake River. Rather than condemning the "great Snake River Desert" as a hostile environment, the writer noted that it only appeared to be flat, featureless, and gloomy. Once an observer's initial shock and feelings of isolation have passed,

> the boundless plain loses its monotony. The expanse seems to awaken and throb with life, the silent sentinels of the desert tell a tale of long ago, when mysterious forces were at play. For this is the field of the most gigantic volcanic action that ever occurred in America.

And the best place to see examples of the "terrific movements that once took place," he concluded, was at Craters of the Moon.[29]

WHILE THE ARTICLE did not set off a tidal wave of tourists, it emphasized that in the early twentieth century the volcanic environment, once loathsome and ugly, was being praised increasingly for its fantastic shapes and colors. In doing so, the article suggested that the region was a natural oddity; it contained the "curiosities" that interested many in the late nineteenth century and inspired them to preserve as national parks examples of awe-inspiring nature as well as the so-called "freaks of nature." Although the Craters country was progressing toward a new image as a wonderland, it still did not readily come to mind when Idahoans envisioned a national park in their state. And, similar to the experience at Shoshone Falls, park advocates discovered that an area's outstanding scenery did not guarantee it park status.

In 1908, Senator Weldon B. Heyburn of Idaho proposed setting aside the beautiful Lake Chatcolet and its surrounding forest and waters in the panhandle of northern Idaho as a national park. The area's picturesque scenery and popularity as a vacation spot seemed to make it an ideal parkland, but Heyburn's colleagues in Congress were not convinced of the proposal's merits and refused to grant him his desire to get for Idaho "one national park." Congress greeted Heyburn's proposal as just another ploy to boost the local tourist economy at the expense of the federal government. This perception revealed that the concept of a national park itself was unclear, contributing to the proposal's failure. Until the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, no standards for national parks existed, and until that time few people understood the "concept of what a national park ought to be." Yellow-

[27]Israel C. Russell, *Geology and Water Resources of the Snake River Plains of Southern Idaho* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1902), 72-106, quotation from 106. Pioneering geologists like Russell and later Harold T. Stearns, mentioned below, attempted to understand the age of Craters of the Moon's lava flows and to decipher the history of its eruptions. A common conclusion was that the most recent eruption occurred within the last several hundred years. Understanding the evolution of the lava flows, however, proved elusive, since the technology did not exist yet to analyze the various overlapping and complicated flows. Using more advanced methods and tools of analysis, recent geological studies have determined that there have been eight eruptive periods, the first occurring 15,000 years ago and the most recent 2,000 years ago. See Mel A. Kuntz, *et al.*, "The Great Rift and the Evolution of the Craters of the Moon Lava Field, Idaho," in Bill Bonnichsen and R. M. Breckenridge, editors, *Cenozoic Geology of Idaho*, Bulletin 26 (Moscow: Idaho Bureau of Mines and Geology, 1982), 423-437.

[28]Israel Russell, *Geology and Water Resources of the Snake River Plains*, 13-28, quotations from 19-20.

[29]William Howard Kirkbride, "The Scenic Marvels of Idaho," *World's Work* (June, 1906), 12:7649. Russell produced two more reports on the area. He recounted his second trip there in *Notes on the Geology of Southwestern Idaho and Southeastern Oregon* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1903). His third piece, which probably received wider circulation, was "The Recent Volcanoes of Southwestern Idaho and Southeastern Oregon," *Scientific American Supplement* (April 16, 1904), 57:23652-23655, 23668-23670.

People gathered in downtown Arco to draw lots of available lands when the Big Lost River Irrigation Project opened in 1909. ISHS 77-16.1L.

stone may have set the stage for preserving premier scenic wonders, but by the turn of the century the commercial advantages of a national park to a local economy contributed to the establishment of some decidedly inferior parks. Heyburn, it seems, preferred a national park similar to a gentile summer retreat and beach resort common at the turn of the century rather than one which preserved a rare natural wonder, and Congress responded accordingly.[30]

Heyburn's efforts led indirectly to Lake Chatcolet becoming the site of Idaho's first state park—the first of its kind in the Pacific Northwest—in 1911. But the creation of the state park, named in Heyburn's honor, did not constitute a park movement—state or national—in Idaho. Idaho officials showed little concern for creating state parks or improving those that came under their jurisdiction over the next several decades. Moreover, their indifference reflected the fact that many Idahoans distrusted the federal government—what they saw as infringements on states rights, such as the reservation of public lands for national forests or national parks—and thus why the anti-park sentiment ran high in Idaho.[31]

This anti-park sentiment was a powerful force in defeating proposals for a Sawtooth national park, Idaho's most popular and long contested area for a park. Preservationists believed that the Sawtooth Mountains, first proposed in 1911, met all the requirements for a national park: they contained towering peaks, sparkling lakes with forested shorelines, thundering waterfalls, beautiful streams, and upland meadows. The National Park Service agreed. The agency's dynamic first director, Stephen T. Mather, had created park standards to evaluate the worth of numerous park proposals inundating his bureau, and the Sawtooth's alpine wilderness clearly satisfied these new criteria; it was "large enough, primitive enough, and/or unique enough to be national in interest." But Mather abandoned the Sawtooth park proposition because the issue was too volatile and would require "too much battling."[32]

His comment referred to Idaho's park opponents, resource users like Thomas C. Stanford, a vocal rancher who believed that

> the creation of such a National Park would not add one speck to the beauty of nature's work, but . . . would close the gates tight against hundreds of thousands of livestock and prove a ruinous liability, instead of an asset to Idaho.[33]

Mather's comment also referred to the competition his young agency faced with the older and politically powerful Forest Service. As was the case with most new national parks, the Sawtooth would have been removed from the Forest Service's domain, an action to which it did not willingly accede.

[30]Thomas R. Cox, "Weldon Heyburn, Lake Chatcolet, and the Evolving Concept of Public Parks," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Summer, 1980), 24/2:2-11.

[31]Thomas R. Cox, *The Park Builders: A History of State Parks in the Pacific Northwest* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1988), 106-107. See also R. G. Cook, "Senator Heyburn's War Against the Forest Service," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Winter, 1970-71), 14/4:12-15; H. Duane Hampton, "Opposition to National Parks," *Journal of Forest History* (January, 1981), 25:42-45.

[32]Robert Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954), 184-185, 176-177. No study of the Sawtooth national park campaign has been written. See Jean Conly Smith, "What is There of National Interest in the Proposed Sawtooth National Park in Idaho," ca. 1911, typescript, Jean Conly Smith Papers, ISHS; Ralph E. Woods, "The Proposed Sawtooth National Park," *New West Magazine* (May, 1916), 7:7-11; Enos Mills, "Proposed Sawtooth National Park," *New West Magazine* (October, 1916), 7:18-22.

[33]Thomas C. Stanford to Editor of [Idaho] *Statesman*, April 3, 1916, box 1, file 4; Thomas C. Stanford to Addison T. Smith, November 17, 1922, box 1, file 7, Thomas C. Stanford Papers, Boise State University, Boise, Idaho (hereafter BSU).

In 1920, Arco's main street was a quiet place. ISHS 80-40.21.

Both of these influences could be seen in the career of Congressman Addison T. Smith, who represented an agricultural district from southern Idaho and was an early supporter of a Sawtooth park. Though he waxed poetic about making a park of the West's most "magnificent mountain scenery" in 1917, he considered the idea a mistake several years later—a change of heart due in no small way to Stanford's vigilance. As Smith reminded Stanford late in his career,

> I am opposed to creating a national park in Idaho, believing that if we have good roads to these natural and scenic sections, which are generally in the national forests, there would be no advantage to the people to have their jurisdiction placed under the National Park bureau.[34]

ALTHOUGH CRATERS OF the Moon seemed to be an unlikely candidate for a national park, its image as a wasteland made it, ironically, a better candidate than were other areas in the state. It was a "worthless-worthless land," a desert landscape long considered a visual and economic waste, which, once it came to be considered beautiful by a wide audience, was not seen as a threat by traditional park opponents. To achieve park status, Craters of the Moon needed and received what other park proposals seemed to lack—strong, local support. Already receiving some praise as a volcanic wonderland in the early twentieth century, Craters of the Moon was boosted aggressively by Arco residents as one of the state's premier scenic wonders. The promotional campaign, although aimed at attracting tourists, aided significantly in bringing attention to the Craters country and its potential as a national park.

Arco residents did not immediately turn to the lava fields as their calling card; but after experiencing the boom-and-bust cycles associated with ranching and mining in the West in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, civic leaders looked for other ways to promote a stronger economic base for their burgeoning community. Early in this century, they appeared to have found the answer. Arco seemed on the verge of a sustained boom when the Big Lost River Irrigation Project opened in 1909, boosting the population of the dusty village and surrounding area sixfold—to nearly six hundred—by 1910. But the Carey Act project, like others of its time, promised more than it delivered, forcing many settlers to abandon their lands, and stalling the isolated community's progress. Afterward, Arco leaders turned to marketing the region's outdoor opportunities as part of their strategy to strengthen the local economy.[35]

If boosters could not harvest wealth from fields of grain, then they would harvest it from tourists. In 1910 the Oregon Short Line, which arrived in 1901, ran summer excursions from Blackfoot to the Lost River Valley, thereby awakening Arco residents to the possibilities of tourism. In the hyperbole of civic pride, the *Arco Advertiser* reported that the Lost River country's

[34]Addison T. Smith, "Proposed Sawtooth National Park in Idaho," in *Proceedings of the National Parks Conference, 1917* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1917), 258; Thomas C. Stanford to Addison T. Smith, February 20, 1923, box 1, file 8; Addison T. Smith to Thomas C. Stanford, September 28, 1932, box 2, file 7, Stanford Papers.

[35]Hugh T. Lovin, "Water, Arid Land, and Visions of Advancement on the Snake River Plain," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Spring, 1991), 35/1:3, 10; Mikel H. Williams, *The History of Development and Current Status of the Carey Act in Idaho* (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation), 18-20; U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, vol. 2, *Population* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1913), 414; "Another Twin Falls," *Arco Advertiser*, August 20, 1909; "Big Lost River Valley from 1879-1923," *Arco Advertiser*, June 1, 1923.

appeal as "a pleasure resort . . . is becoming famous."[36] Soon, Arco boosters expanded their focus to include Craters of the Moon. They were attracted to the blackened landscape west of town because unlike nineteenth-century explorers and travelers, they had little reason to fear or avoid it. They could visit the strange environment on their own terms, set out from their homes in the morning by horse, wagon, or automobile and return in the evening, safe and sound. They possessed what Israel Russell had recommended a decade earlier, the time and patience and now the incentive to appreciate this strangely beautiful country.

Their interest in the district's fantastic formations also reflected national trends: the "See America First" campaign, which sought to keep tourist dollars in America, and Progressive beliefs in the benefits of outdoor recreation for the body and soul. When Arco sightseers first visited the "Devil's Playground" in the summer of 1912, they determined that they had stumbled across a place of great tourist potential and declared in the patriotic rhetoric of "See America First" that

> globe trotters have always been desirous to see places where, when nature was young, the earth's internal forces played havoc with her surface and left it in weird and fantastic shape.

Now those globe trotters could come here. As the local paper reported:

> How many know that one of the greatest vents the world has ever known lies but a few miles away from here, that one may drive to the spot, make careful inspection for hours, and return before the day closes?[37]

At the same time, boosters believed the region possessed more than the potential to "rank as one of the greatest regions on earth for sightseeing." There was "food for contemplation" in the area's "queer shapes" and "wonderful fields" of lava. Only a truly thoughtless person, the argument went, would not be inspired by this landscape to meditate "upon the past, present, and possible future of this mundane sphere and its inhabitants."[38]

HOWEVER EARNEST THEIR convictions, economic or otherwise, Arco boosters found it difficult to convince American tourists to visit this marvel of nature. The region's desert image was simply too strong, despite the new appreciation of deserts and the publicity of "See America First." Two campaigns attempted by Arco business leaders illustrate this point. First, in the Progressive spirit, they promoted the lava country and Big Lost River Valley as an antidote to urban ills, calling attention to the region's invigorating air and "healthful scenery" and its opportunities for outdoor adventure.[39] Second, when the antiurban approach produced few results, the problem seemed clear; they needed to improve automobile access to the lava district. Getting people there would surely convince them of its scenic charms.[40]

This latter plan seemed the more promising of the two. The automobile was revolutionizing the average American's vacation. Between 1913 and 1919 alone, automobile ownership increased from 1.2 million to a staggering 7.5 million. Not simply a reflection of the auto's popularity, this increase demonstrated that automobiles were becoming more affordable, higher quality machines in reach of middle-class Americans. Further encouraging auto travel, in 1916 the federal government passed a law to aid states in the improvement of rural roads. Freed from the earlier restrictions of train travel and poor roads, many motorists headed for the outdoors, the West especially, as part of a national nature movement.[41]

With the western landscape attracting this new breed of tourist and with the promise of better roads, the benefits seemed great for the remote yet wonderful Craters country. In 1915, Yellowstone National Park opened its gates to cars, and adventuresome motorists headed across country to the San Francisco World's Fair—many of them taking the Lincoln Highway, which connected to Yellowstone. In addition, more national parks were opening to motorists, and an ambitious National Park Service campaigned hard to attract them by improving park roads and supporting plans for a Park-to-Park Highway.[42] By 1920, a vocal good-roads campaign succeeded in bringing the "Idaho Central Highway" through Arco. The east-west highway connected the Lincoln Highway route to Yellowstone with the Sawtooth Mountains west of town. Craters of the Moon was located roughly equidistant between these more popular destinations, and boosters

[36] "Excursion to Arco," *Arco Advertiser*, June 24, 1910.

[37] "The Devil's Playground," *Arco Advertiser*, June 7, 1912.

[38] "The Devil's Playground Re-Visited," *Arco Advertiser*, June 21, 1912.

[39] "Ancient Craters," *Arco Advertiser*, June 27, 1913; "Lost River Valleys—The Butte County Country," *Arco Advertiser*, December 11, 1914; "Fishing is 'Bully' on Big Lost River!!!" *Arco Advertiser*, April 9, 1915; "Discover A Great Cave Near Arco," *Arco Advertiser*, June 2, 1916.

[40] "New Automobiles," *Arco Advertiser*, March 14, 1913.

[41] Frederick L. Paxson, "The Highway Movement, 1916-1935," *American Historical Review* (January, 1946), 51:248, 243; John A. Jakle, *The Tourist: Travel in Twentieth-Century North America* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1985), 64-83.

[42] Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks*, 147-150; "A Scenic Detour from the Lincoln Highway," *Arco Advertiser*, June 11, 1915.

hoped the new road would siphon off a large flow of tourists and deposit them at the "craters, one of the most scenic spots in the West."[43]

Once more, Arco boosters were disappointed. Although the highway skirted the northern margins of Craters of the Moon and made visiting it an "easy and interesting little excursion," as one paper later boasted, the number of "daring" automobile tourists lagged behind expectations. Poor road conditions, though a reality in southern Idaho, were not the reason, nor was Idaho's automobile ownership, which surpassed the national average by 1920. Craters of the Moon's desert reputation seemed to keep most middle-class tourists away. As a group of Arco business leaders discovered, the nearby Sawtooths were easily drawing large numbers of scenic tourists around this time. Thus the only way to win over tourists, lamented Clarence A. Bottolfsen—editor of the *Arco Advertiser*, future two-term governor, and avid supporter of the Craters country—was to portray Craters of the Moon's sublime and dormant state as the perfect complement to Yellowstone's active geysers, boiling mud, and hot springs.[44]

In 1921, Robert Limbert, Idaho's most recognizable promoter and accomplished showman, naturalist, explorer, and photographer, offered a solution slightly different from Bottolfsen's. He pushed the association with Yellowstone one step further and proposed that Craters of the Moon be set aside as a national park. By casting this once-despised lava country in a new light—as a national treasure—Limbert invoked the sanctity of national parks, which the majority of Americans respected, and in doing so declared Craters of the Moon a sacred place that should be preserved.

WHILE PERHAPS STUNNING, Limbert's idea was a logical progression in the lava country's evolution from a wasteland to a wonderland. Like many in the Progressive era, Limbert wanted to conserve the nation's disappearing natural resources, longed to find one last frontier—the "places others hadn't been"—in a nation that had become predominately urban and industrial, and, entrepreneur that he was, hoped to profit from his labors. All of these were elements associated with national parks as well as Limbert's own experiences. In 1915, while showing his prize-winning displays of Idaho at the World's Fair, Limbert witnessed the need for outdoor recreation firsthand as many fairgoers asked him about Idaho's outdoor opportunities. An outdoorsman himself, taxidermist by trade, and resident of Boise, he most likely empathized with their interests—and at the same time recognized the potential for business in their attraction to his state's sweeping, and nearly pristine, wild lands.[45]

To Limbert's way of thinking, Craters of the Moon presented an exotic frontier certain to lure tourists to Idaho. In the early 1920's, it was still an unsettled section of country—an unsurveyed, blank space on the map labeled as "rolling lava terrain." It was a land of mystery, complete with fantastic-sounding tales of a lost valley and strange lava beds where dwarf grizzly bears could be found, which attracted him perhaps more than Arco's promotion of its scenic wonders. In order to satisfy his own curiosity and to determine its potential as a tourist attraction, Limbert explored the Craters country. He ventured into its northern margins two times, covering the area of Israel Russell's exploration, before embarking on an eighty-mile trek across the Great Rift in May of 1920. His expedition into this volcanic wilderness lasted seventeen days, during which he traveled north from Minidoka to Era Martin's ranch (near the present entrance), accompanied by Walter L. Cole and an Airedale terrier. Like nineteenth-century explorers, both men carried heavy packs and rifles across the hot, arid, and treacherous lava terrain, prepared for danger—only to return unscathed. Limbert's most important piece of equipment may have been what he took not for survival but for documenting the trip for the public—a Graflex camera.[46]

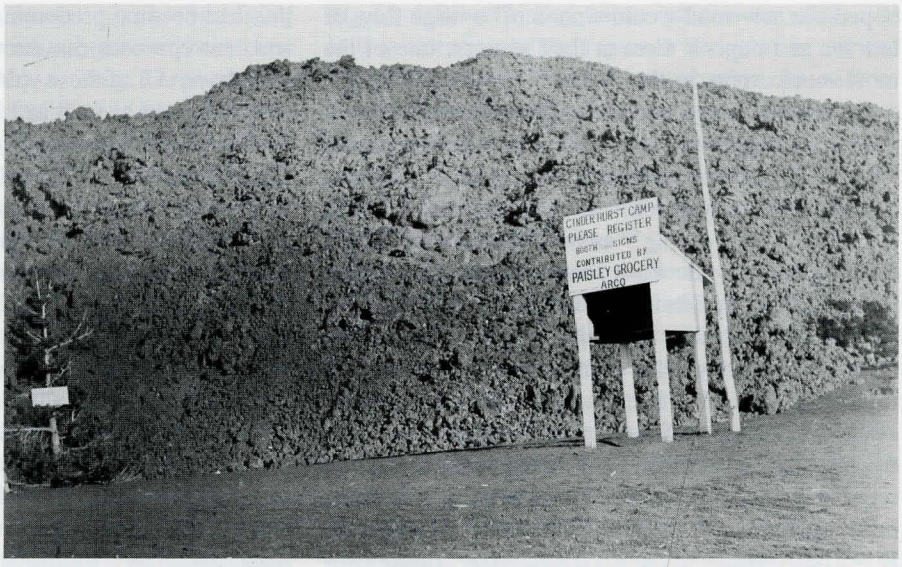
In April of 1921, Limbert used some of his (more than two hundred) photographs to extoll the virtues of this lava country in an article for the *Idaho Sunday Statesman*. The images proved that he and Cole had in fact explored this country—the first whites, he believed, to accomplish such a feat. More important, his images brought the "Valley of the Moon" to the public and supported Limbert's claims that, with few exceptions, the lava district was unequaled in "variety of formation, color, and scenic effects" in the world. In this respect, he reached a wider audience than Arco boosters by illustrating in word and picture what might

[43]"A Scenic Detour From the Lincoln Highway."

[44]*Ibid.*; Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows*, 193-194; "Auto Brings Valley of the Moon Within Easy Reach of Tourists," *Idaho Statesman* (Boise), July 17, 1921; "Sawtooth Mountains Scenic Wonderland," *Arco Advertiser*, September 10, 1920; "The Lost River Valley As a Scenic Interest," *Arco Advertiser*, December 17, 1920.

[45]Nicholas Casner, "'Two-Gun Limbert': The Man from the Sawtooths," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Spring, 1988), 32/1:2-7. See also Samuel P. Hays, *Conservation and the Gospel of Efficiency: The Progressive Conservation Movement, 1890-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959); and Roderick Nash, *Wilderness and the American Mind*, 3rd edition (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1982).

[46]Robert W. Limbert, "Among the 'Craters of the Moon,'" *National Geographic* (March, 1924), 45:303-328. Although this article combines his several explorations into Craters of the Moon, it is the most comprehensive source for his adventures.



Arco businesses provided assistance to the new national monument in many forms—including both registration areas and labels for various sites. ISHS 63-132.12.

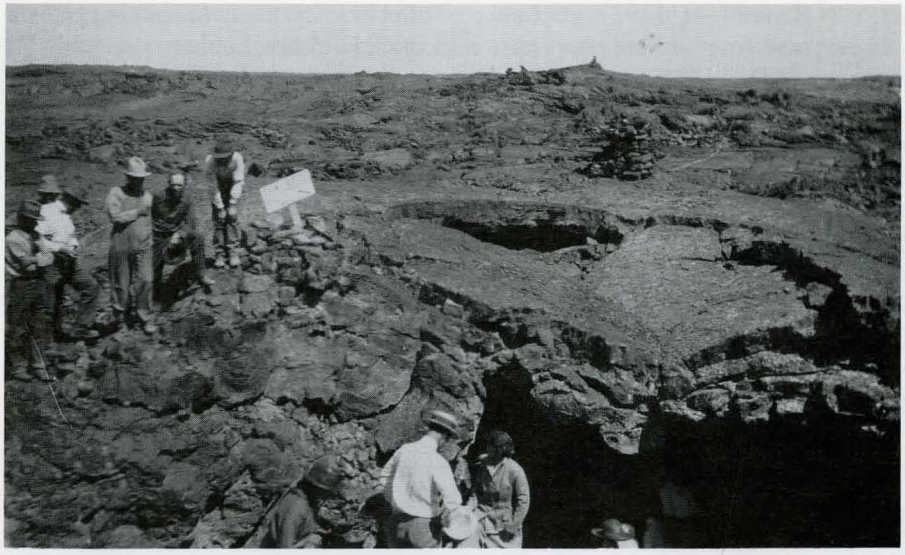
otherwise seem too fantastic for a volcanic desert: one could find snow, ice, and water in lava cavities; see birds, bees, and bear tracks; and find what might be Indian trails, camps, and markers. Above all, Limbert described the lava country as a land of solace and beauty, a wilderness of scenic grandeur, a place where "the human voice seems a sacrilege in the amphitheater of nature such as these huge craters seem to be." Here some of "the grandest sights imaginable" were created by the countless shapes and hues—the "immense rolls and folds of fantastically formed lava . . . colored blue, black, and brown," and the myriad craters that "start at your very feet and dot the landscape to the horizon line." Without question, then, "no more fitting tribute to the volcanic forces which built the great Snake River Valley could be paid than to make this region into a national park."[47]

Although Limbert's presentation launched a campaign to convert the lava district into a national park, the park idea did not necessarily ensure the lava country's preservation. In large part, the campaign was about continuing to convert Craters of the Moon's image as a wasteland into that of a wonderland; only when that was accomplished, it seemed, would it become a park. Over the next several years, this process proceeded on two levels—publicity and verification. The first level was highly successful. As in many park movements of the time, Limbert, who spearheaded the campaign, drummed up local support by conducting free lectures, meeting with civic groups, and guiding several more explorations of the lava region with parties of community leaders and reporters from across southern Idaho. These explorations also attracted national attention because they included scientists from the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Biological Survey. The trips, in turn, produced more promotional material—several hundred more photographs, movies, and sketch maps of the Craters country, as well as information about its natural history—all of which Limbert published in a series of exceptional photo essays in state newspapers and national magazines. A general theme running throughout these works was that the "Moon Valley's" wonders not only complemented Yellowstone's, they surpassed them as well.[48]

DESPITE THIS PROMOTIONAL success, the second level of the campaign was less effective. Craters of the Moon's desert image still lurked in the shadows, forcing park advocates to prove that the volcanic district was national-park caliber. As demonstrated by previous park campaigns in Idaho, park proponents usually defended a scenic region's reservation as its highest use—if not only use—over all other commercial interests. At first, it seemed as though the worth-

[47]*Ibid.*, 327, first quotation; Robert W. Limbert, "Our Next National Park," 1-2, 7, typescript, ca. 1921, box 1, file 18, Robert W. Limbert Papers, BSU, second, third, and fourth quotations; "A Trip to the Moon Right Here in Idaho," *Idaho Sunday Statesman*, April 10, 1921, final quotation. Limbert's *Statesman* article has been republished, illustrated with some of his photographs, and accompanied by an article by a reporter from the Jerome, Idaho, newspaper, as " 'Odd and Fantastical Shapes and Formations': Early Exploration of the Craters of the Moon," *Idaho Yesterdays* (Fall, 1992), 32/3:17-22.

[48]Casner, " 'Two-Gun Limbert,' " 6-7, summarizes Limbert's promotional efforts well. See also "Would Create a National Park in South Idaho," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, April 1, 1921; " 'Moon Valley' Trampers Back Friday Morning," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, June 25, 1921; "Valley of the Moon, Idaho, Declared a Wonderland," *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 8, 1921.



Visitors—local, judging by their attire—to Dew Drop Cave at the monument shortly after it opened. ISHS 72-201.32L.

less-lands thesis would work in Craters of the Moon's favor. Supporters could claim without contest that the lava district lacked economic value. In June of 1921 two groups from Idaho, the Pilgrim Brotherhood of the First Congregational Church of Boise and the Boise Community Council, used this as justification for the creation of the "Valley of the Moon National Monument." In their petition to President Warren G. Harding, they stated that the Craters country was useless now and forever for "agriculture, grazing, lumbering, or any other of the industries of civilization."[49]

The groups' selection of the monument rather than park classification further strengthened their proposal. By authority of the Antiquities Act of 1906, the president could quickly and easily set aside historic, prehistoric, or natural areas of scientific interest as national monuments provided they were small and only the most important features were protected. The establishment of national parks, on the other hand, required an act of Congress; parks often embraced large natural landscapes containing a wealth of resources coveted by many, subjecting park proposals to lengthy political disputes.[50] Idaho's usual park foes expressed no concern about losing this worthless piece of country to federal protection.[51]

The monument's backers, however, faced a greater challenge convincing federal officials that without any commercial value or political challenges the volcanic district was "alone of value as one of the greatest scientific and natural wonders of the continent." Even when promoters claimed that private interests were threatening to exploit Craters of the Moon's most attractive resources for commercial gain, the National Park Service showed little alarm. Charged with managing the nation's parks and overseeing many of its monuments, the Park Service was swamped with park proposals, many of them unsuitable. Though an aggressive agency, it was thus cautious about accepting recommendations at face value, especially for unknown entities like the Craters country.[52]

The monument's proposal, as it turned out, was too vague for Park Service officials to begin an investigation. Its supporters certainly painted "a very attractive picture," wrote Acting Director Arno B. Cammerer in the summer of 1921, and he hoped to send a representative soon to inspect the area. But monument backers needed first to reduce the size of the proposed site (1,200 square miles) to meet the requirements of national monuments; and second, to produce a more accurate description of its location—instead of somewhere between the "Oregon Short Line Railroad and

[49]Pilgrim Brotherhood of the First Congregational Church of Boise to Addison T. Smith, June 15, 1921, and Community Council of Boise to Warren G. Harding, June 24, 1921, Records of the National Park Service, Record Group 79, Entry 7, Central Classified Files, Craters of the Moon National Monument, box 580, file 0.35, NA (hereafter NPS). The Community Council reported that the 128 "Civic, fraternal, labor, business women's, religious and racial organizations" that were members of the council unanimously supported the proposal.

[50]Hal K. Rothman, "Second-Class Sites: National Monuments and the Growth of the National Park System," *Environmental Review* (Spring, 1986), 10:44-56.

[51]Thomas C. Stanford to Addison T. Smith, July 5, 1930, box 2, file 5, Stanford Papers. In fact, the Park Service would receive more criticism from the monument's supporters for not making the new monument large enough. See Robert W. Limbert to Addison T. Smith, February 14, 1924, NPS. For more coverage of this and other matters related to the monument's establishment and subsequent management, see David Louter, *Craters of the Moon National Monument: An Administrative History* (Seattle: National Park Service, 1992).

[52]Community Council of Boise to Warren G. Harding, June 24, 1921; Shankland, *Steve Mather of the National Parks*, 184-185.

the State Highway from Arco to Hailey''—if these unsurveyed lands were to be reserved from private entry. Waiting for more information and busy with the tourist season, the Park Service shelved the proposal.[53]

Those who supported Craters of the Moon did not seem inclined to meet the Park Service's request because, to their way of thinking, there was no question of the lava country's qualifications for a national monument. But without some way to verify the area's physical existence, as well as its less tangible values, the federal government would not move to protect it. In spite of this, Limbert and a coalition of civil groups from across southern Idaho, known as the Craters of the Moon National Park Association, continued to promote the region tirelessly. Arco boosters, close to realizing their dream of a tourist drawing card, stepped up their support as well. They envisioned their town as the proposed monument's gateway and vowed to do everything in their power to attract attention to Craters of the Moon. They distributed promotional materials to communities along the Idaho Central Highway, built a short road into the lava district, and made other minor improvements for tourists. By 1923, they could boast that more than a thousand tourists, many from out of state, had passed through the Craters country and signed a petition calling for its protection as a national monument. They even selected ''Craters of the Moon'' as the proposed monument's official name, because of its likeness to the moon viewed through a telescope.[54]

This approach was successful in popularizing the lava country, but it faltered in proving the area's national significance. To correct this situation and to put the monument campaign back on course, Congressman Addison Smith, no stranger to park issues, took up the monument cause in the fall of 1923. Like many before him, he was deeply impressed by Craters of the Moon. After meeting with Robert Limbert, Smith sent Stephen Mather a copy of Limbert's 1921 article in the *Idaho Sunday Statesman* and requested that Craters of the Moon be set aside as a monument. The article moved Mather to state that Craters of the Moon was ''national monument material of the highest interest,'' but he held back from a full endorsement until his agency had proof that the area measured up to its reputation.[55]

Mather's response to the proposal was a tribute to Robert Limbert's work, especially once the director learned that *National Geographic*, a loyal supporter of national parks, would soon publish another of Limbert's articles on Craters of the Moon. But fine photographs and colorful descriptions alone were not enough to create a monument. Since Limbert was neither a geologist nor a trained writer, Gilbert H. Grosvenor, editor of *National Geographic*, delayed publishing Limbert's essay for several years until he could verify the incredible story. Finally, under some political pressure from Addison Smith, Grosvenor moved the article along. Mather in turn could not ignore the forthcoming publication because an appearance between the covers of *National Geographic* was an almost certain endorsement of the area's national significance. Thus the article's path to print paralleled Craters of the Moon's path to monument status, for both hinged on the inspection of a geologist.[56]

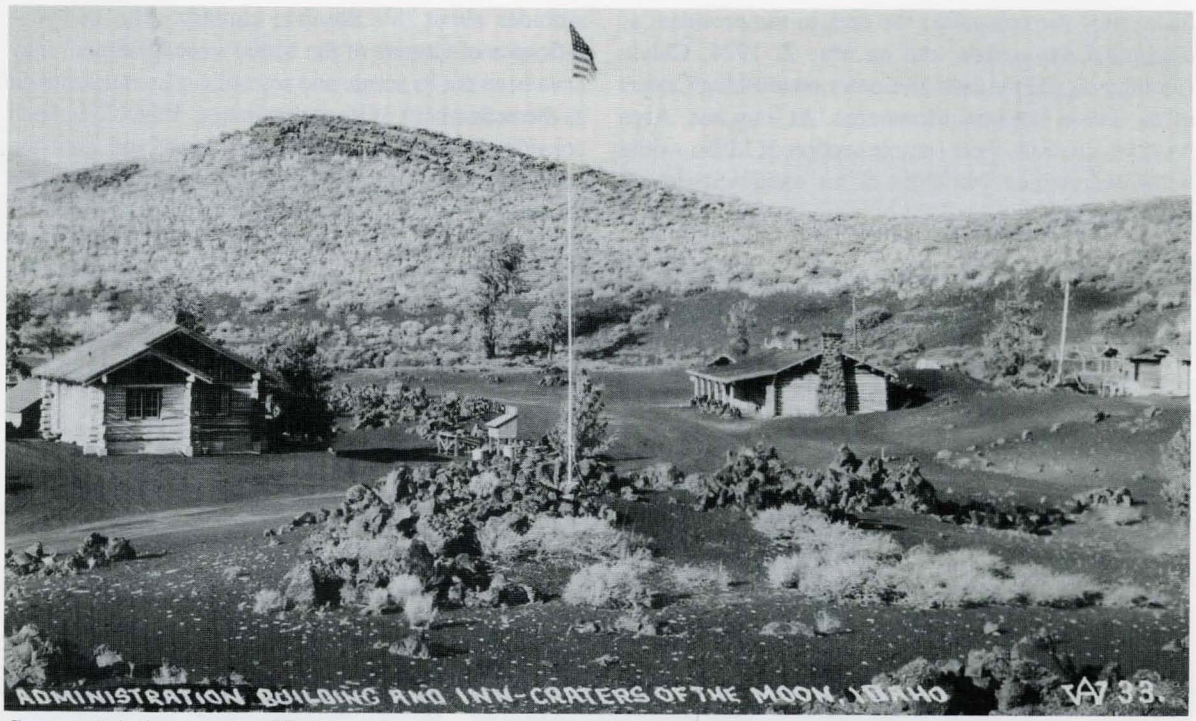
THE NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC SOCIETY and National Park Service consulted with experts in the Smithsonian Institution and the U.S. Geological Survey for advice, and coincidentally engaged the services of Harold T. Stearns, a geologist with the Geological Survey, to verify the significance of Craters of the Moon. A young geologist from the Northeast, Stearns had been studying the volcanic region since 1921, was familiar with the monument campaign, and was friendly with Robert Limbert. Both organizations were interested in Stearns because he had conducted the most extensive studies of the area, the first since Israel Russell's, and was well on his way to becoming an authority on the region. (Russell's report was apparently too general to help either organization.) Ironically, Stearns had approached *National Geographic* about writing his own article on the lava district after he returned to Washington, D.C., sometime in late 1923 or early 1924. He graciously agreed to review Limbert's essay, however, which he thought was well illustrated but contained ''little geology.'' Based on this critique and Stearns's knowl-

[53]Arno B. Cammerer to Frederick Vining Fisher, June 27, 1921, and Arno B. Cammerer to W. J. Abbs, September 3, 1921, NPS.

[54]Arco boosters marked water holes, erected a registration booth, and even spun plans for a campground and hotel: *Evening Capital News* (Boise), November 1, 1923; ''Limbert to Talk about Craters,'' *Arco Advertiser*, March 17, 1922; ''Hotel at Craters Soon,'' *Arco Advertiser*, May 19, 1922; *Salt Lake Tribune*, March 23, 1924. The selection of the monument's name was mostly for the sake of publicity and was meant to avoid confusion with an area named the ''Valley of the Moon'' in California. In addition to ''Valley of the Moon,'' the region was also known as ''Moon Valley'' and ''The Craters.'' See Smith to Mather, November 28, 1923; and Harold T. Stearns, ''The 'Craters of the Moon' in Idaho,'' *The Geographical Journal* (January-June, 1928), 71:43.

[55]Addison T. Smith to Stephen T. Mather, November 28, 1923, NPS; see this file also for an internal memo from Arno B. Cammerer to Arthur E. Demaray, December 10, 1923; ''Congressman Smith Lays Plans to Get National Monument,'' *Evening Capital News*, October 6, 1923, for quotation.

[56]Smith to Mather, November 28, 1923; Gilbert H. Grosvenor to Edward F. Rhodenbaugh, March 8, 1924, Edward F. Rhodenbaugh Papers, box 2, file 4, BSU.



Commercial photographer Wesley Andrews turned many of his images of Craters into postcards—including this one of the original administration building and accommodations for visitors to the monument. ISHS 71-141.7.

edge of the area, the magazine finalized the essay for publication in March of 1924.[57]

The Park Service also asked Stearns to undertake a more rigorous task: to evaluate the proposal to make Craters of the Moon a national monument. In addition to recommending the proposed monument's size and boundaries, should Stearns deem it worthy, the agency was anxious to have him certify the scientific value of this area which had achieved such popularity in so short a time. In January of 1924, Stearns submitted a report in which he "unreservedly recommended" creating a monument of thirty-nine square miles, for it would "preserve for the people of the United States the most recent example of a fissure eruption in this country." Like Russell, Stearns noted the region's scenic qualities, the recency of the eruptions, and the close proximity of the formations to each other and the highway. But unlike his earlier counterpart, he emphasized that the "most remarkable phenomenon in the whole region," from a geological perspective, was the Great Rift, a "huge fracture in the earth's crust" from which molten lava escaped to the surface and created the great variety of volcanic formations within the proposed area. As Stearns noted, it "was not until the discovery of the Craters of the Moon that such volcanic phenomena were known to exist here in the country." Protection of this region would serve the interests of not only science but also the general public. Although rugged and barren, the proposed monument's topography "has a scenic charm peculiar to itself which arouses the admiration of the scientist and the curiosity of the tourist."[58]

The merging of scientific fact and popular appeal was, in the end, ultimately responsible for the establishment of Craters of the Moon. Two of the nation's most respected scientific organizations, the Smithsonian and Carnegie institutions, backed Stearns's proposal, all of which added further weight to Craters of the Moon's reputation as a wonderland worth preserving. Although Mather privately worried that adding another monument to the park system would strain his agency's limited financial resources, he approved of Craters of the Moon. In light of the area's popularity and its geological value, he wrote in February of 1924, "it is evidently our duty to fall in line." Two months later

[57]Arno B. Cammerer to Philip S. Smith, January 8, 1924, NPS; Grosvenor to Rhodenbaugh, March 8, 1924; Harold T. Stearns, *Memoirs of a Geologist: From Poverty Peak to Piggery Gulch* (Honolulu: Hawaii Institute of Geophysics, 1983), 3, 40; and Stearns, "Craters of the Moon National Monument," *The Geographical Review* (July, 1924), 14:362-363, 366.

[58]Harold T. Stearns, "The Proposed Craters of the Moon National Monument, Butte County, Idaho," 18, 12, 14, NPS. The source of the volcanic formations—a single volcano or numerous vents in the earth's surface—was the subject of some debate during Russell's time. Stearns's discovery of the Great Rift helped settle this debate.

his agency recommended the area to the president as a national monument, and on May 2, 1924, Calvin Coolidge signed the executive order establishing Craters of the Moon National Monument. At long last, Arco boosters crowed, their remote section of Idaho would be known officially as "one of the scenic districts in the west."[59]

THE MONUMENT'S ESTABLISHMENT completed the lava country's evolution from wasteland to wonderland. Avoidance had characterized the volcanic district's history, and finally avoidance served it well. The very reason people stayed away from and despised Craters of the Moon in the nineteenth century—its stark and blasted appearance—was its drawing card, its signature of significance, in the twentieth century. These were conditions, it seemed, that allowed it to succeed where other park proposals failed. The relatively short and successful monument crusade, with its absence of political adversity, tended to obscure the long process of acceptance. But the monument's establishment only capped a century of changing attitudes about this desolate country. The real significance of Craters of the Moon's establishment may have been not its scenic and scientific elements as much as the refinement of its desert image. It had long been considered a visual and physical wasteland until the early twentieth century, when deserts came to seem less menacing and more enticing. Although Craters of the Moon captured the imagination of modern Americans, its negative image persisted—if only as an unknown quantity—even after its admirers pronounced it worthy of becoming a national park. In the end, enough people, trained and untrained alike, admired Craters of the Moon—an admiration that kindled their desire to preserve this weird and beautiful place, and thus led to the creation of Idaho's first national monument. ■

[59]See letters in NPS; Stephen T. Mather to Arno B. Cammerer, February 14, 1924, *ibid.*; Executive Proclamation 1694, May 2, 1924, *U.S. Statutes at Large*, L. 43 Stat 1947. Robert Limbert also helped influence Coolidge's opinion, it seems, by sending him a photo-scrapbook of the monument; see Casner, " 'Two-Gun Limbert,' " 7. Craters of the Moon National Monument was the thirtieth national monument administered by the National Park Service. See Department of the Interior, *Report of the Director of the National Park Service, 1924* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1924), 76-77; "Craters Proclaimed National Monument," *Arco Advertiser*, May 9, 1924.

Robert Limbert photographed colleagues photographing the landscape at Craters. Photograph courtesy Special Collections, Boise State University Library. Limbert Collection #199.

When May Pierstorff was sent by parcel post from Grangeville to Lewiston in 1912, the Grangeville Savings and Trust building had stood at the corner of State and Main streets for three years. Designed by Lewiston architect James Nave, it symbolized the boom in Grangeville caused by the arrival of the Camas Prairie Railroad in 1909. Nave used a modification of the Romanesque Revival style in his design and the building was constructed of brick with rusticated stone trim. At the time this photograph was taken, in 1977, the space housing J.C. Penney still had its original pressed-tin ceiling. The building was entered in the National Register of Historic Places in 1978. ISHS 78-5.1.

On the outside back cover: Members of the Blackwell family and friends gathered for the camera in front of the Hotel McCall sometime in 1910. The Blackwell Saloon is at the right, with the family's meat market in the false-front building behind the saloon. The community of McCall was only nine years old at the time. ISHS 1995-11.4.