

Idaho Section Summer Tour: Craters of the Moon National Monument

The SRM Idaho Section Summer Tour took place in south central Idaho, just south of the Pioneer Mountains and north of the Snake River Plain. The event began with an evening gathering of hungry SRM folks and their families on July 26th. At the Hayspur Fish Hatchery campground, near beautiful Silver Creek, we enjoyed a delicious potluck picnic complete with grilled Vandal steaks and sausages. In the half-light of dusk, we sat around a campfire and listened to brief presentations about our final destination for the tour, Craters of the Moon National Monument. Codie Martin and David Freiberg with the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Paige Wolken with the National Park Service (NPS) talked about the recent expansion of the Monument, decreed by Presidential Proclamation in 2000. The original Monument, which was established in 1924, included 54,440 acres of awesome volcanic features and lava landscapes. The expanded Monument is nearly 755,000 acres and now includes the majority of the Great Rift geologic landscape. The other significant change is that the Monument is now co-managed by the NPS and BLM. This rare pairing is an exciting and challenging endeavor for both agencies. Campfire discussions continued into the night. Topics ranged from local issues such as hunting rights in the Monument to the potential for an “overdue” volcanic eruption at Craters.

The following day, July 27th, several others joined the group for the field tour to Craters of the Moon National Monument. After a drive into the sagebrush steppe and intermittent lava flows, approximately 22 of us hiked out across the A’a (means “hard on the feet” in Hawaiian) lava flow to Carey Kipuka. A kipuka is Hawaiian term for an area of vegetation surrounded by a younger lava flow. Carey Kipuka was added to the Monument in 1962 for its scientific value as an ecological benchmark. Due to its remote location, isolated by rough lava flows, the 170 acre Carey Kipuka has been relatively undisturbed by humans or domestic livestock. It has been the site of several ecological studies and rangeland reference areas. In 1963, during the height of these studies, another SRM tour visited Carey Kipuka. The present day tour identified plant species, observed rangeland health characteristics for the “natural enclosure”, discussed differences between grazed and ungrazed sagebrush steppe, and (surprisingly) spotted snakes.

After hiking back from the kipuka, we drove across the north portion of Laidlaw Park, which is also technically a kipuka, but is quite accessible and a very large expanse of sagebrush steppe rangeland. The northern portion of Laidlaw Park is in excellent to good condition and is seasonally grazed by sheep and some cattle. Although forage for higher stocking rates may be available for livestock, water is not. Well drilling and water hauling are cost prohibitive, so the northern portion of the area is rested for a majority of the year.

We ate lunch in a rare aspen stand on the north facing slope of an old volcanic crater. We discussed the unique features, resources, and management in Laidlaw Park; its importance as a sage grouse stronghold and as a representation of traditional uses within the Monument. We wrapped up the afternoon touring other areas in Laidlaw Park that highlighted rangeland monitoring, successful fire rehabilitation/restoration, and weed management.

Over all, it was an enjoyable and informative tour in a part of Idaho that is frequently forgotten. The strange and interesting combination of volcanic features and hearty sagebrush steppe, now called Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve*, is a unique place that is a little better understood and appreciated.

*In late August, President Bush recently signed legislation designating the area within the expanded National Park Service boundaries of Craters of the Moon National Monument as a National Preserve. The major impact of this legislation, H.R. 601, is that it will now allow for hunting on lands that were closed to this activity by the November, 2000, Proclamation that added over 600,000 acres to the Monument.



Hike to Carey Kipuka



SRM Idaho Section Summer Tour, Carey Kipuka, Craters of the Moon National Monument

CLASSIFICATION NO: A 8219	United States Department of the Interior National Park Service	NEGATIVE NO: 822
Subject: Soil Conservation and Range Soci- ties on a field trip to the Carey Kipuka		
Location: CRMO		
Photographer & Companions: Menning, Chief Park Naturalist		
Date: 6/63		
Remarks:		
		
Form 10-30 (7/57) Print File Card		21974

National Park Service Archived Photo of 1963 SRM Tour to Carey Kipuka