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Thru the
"Craters of the Moon,"
in Idaho
by
R.W. Limbert. - Boise - Idaho.

To find a region hundreds of miles in extent as yet unexplored and unknown except thru Indian ~~lesion~~ ^{found} was recently the experience of W.L. Cole and the writer. In fact we ~~saw~~ scenic wonders of a sort not found elsewhere unless it be the Hawaiian Islands. To stand and gaze with a amazement mingled with fear at things of which the world knows nothing, of passing alone thru volcanic craters thousands of feet across and hundreds of feet deep, rolling boulders into the black depths of others and failing to hear them strike bottom, crossing miles of folds of rock similar to the folds of a huge blanket was indeed an experience never to be forgotten. We found caves with walls of solid ice and hundreds of ice stalactites while a few feet distant was the charred and cindered remains of the greatest volcanic eruption in the ~~xxx~~ geological history of the world. Such was our adventure in probably the last unexplored section of the United States. To be exact it lies in the south central portion of Idaho about forty to sixty miles north of the town of Minidoka. People living in this section of the country are all familiar with the stories more or less founded on facts of the mysteries of this region. On the Indian reservation to the south withered and bent old men tell around the camp fires, the story of how their fathers fathers father spoke of the land afire and of a mysterious stronghold their ~~forefathers~~ ^{warriors} would retreat to in time of war ~~and~~ ^{to} hide the ~~women~~ ^{squaws} and ~~children~~ ^{paposes}. This place was supposed to contain water and fire wood and to be a hidden valley. History tells us that marauding bands of Indians would swoop down on emigrant pack trains during the gold rush of the early day and then retreat into this inaccess-

ible place where their trail could not be followed. This was a common ^{also} occurrence of the Sheepstealer Indian Wars of Central Idaho. There is a story in this country that near the settlement of Carey, Idaho lives an old grey haired man who claims to have been blindfolded and taken to this mysterious place after five days travel from a point near where the town of American Falls now is. Several parties have been organized to locate this ^{place} ~~place~~ but the western stockman will not travel on foot and pack on his back bedding and camp equipment and so the attempts failed after a few miles of progress.

The region is frequented by grizzly bear and it was the quest of these that led W.L. Cole and myself to ^{try} ~~crossing~~ from north to south, something that never before had been ~~made~~ attempted. For seventeen days we wandered along, finding scenic wonders that in many instances had never before been viewed by white men. Part of the time we followed a faint Indian trail marked across the bear rocks by small piles of rock, again we would climb to some point and sight the faint streak in the play of light. Once we lost it for a whole day but kept on traveling by the sun and compass bearings. Travel over this country is ^{like} ~~like~~ walking on an ice jam or a series of rocks the size of a piano, each on a balance and ^{ready} ~~ready~~ to give the moment your weight is applied. Eight to eleven miles per day in an air line was the best we could do. Often we would come to

^{indeed} a huge crevice in the rock that seemed bottomless along which we would ^{sometimes a quarter} ~~sometimes a quarter~~ have to walk, trying to find a place narrow enough to step over. After crossing we would sometimes find another a few feet distant along which we would have to travel in perhaps an opposite direction. Sometimes we sight a point apparently a few hundred yards ahead and be several hours

reaching it. Bad as the daylight travel was it did not compare to trying to sleep on those jagged piles of rock at night. We could scarcely find a place suitable to sit on, let alone lie ^{down} ~~on~~. The fourth day out from our starting point Minidoka, we began passing low mounds of cinder ash buttes and at noon the fifth day observed a mound of rocks with a piece of sage brush walled in its side. Using this as a pointer we sighted along it and found another mound close to a natural tank of water. This was our first drink except for snow water since striking the bad going. Northward from here we saw a butte having a horse shoe shaped depression in its side. This was the first crater we saw and hurrying to its top we sat down to view the panorama below us. Far to the north were a series of buttes like the one we were on. Below us on the east were a number of channels where a lava flow had twisted like a meandering creek across a level meadow. Beyond that showed a number of low ~~oval~~ oval mounds and then a long black line that denoted the east side of a canyon wall in the morning light. Westward were patches of scrub cedar and juniper and in the far distance just topping the sky line were the snow capped peaks of the Sawtooth range. Climbing down to the mounds we found them to be huge bubbles of rock with a shell several inches thick, some of which had broken in exposing ^{interiors} ~~rooms~~ as large as the average living room.

I wish I could properly describe the sight that met our view as we came to the edge of the canyon wall. Imagine a huge canyon wall with the walls of bright red, almost a vermillion, with a floor of mounds and depressions punctuated here and there with a black spot that denoted a hole of some kind. Going down we found extinct or dormant geysers of solid lava. One of these formations was about twenty five feet wide and about four feet high with a five foot hole in the center where the material composing the mound had spewed forth. Another was in the shape of an inverted

cup about six or seven feet high, it had evidently at one time had a very small opening in the center which had ~~XXXXXXXX~~ caved in leaving a hole several feet across. As we walked thru this odd place we often remarked what a wonderful sight it must have been when in eruption and how strange ~~for~~ it was nobody had ever before succeeded in reaching these places. As far as is known we were the first whites to cross this region. Part of the cause of the failure of the previous parties that made the attempt was lack of water. We made our trip just as the snow was going off when the cracks and crevices held drifted snow and ice which we melted for drinking purposes. We called the canyon we were in the "Royal Gorge". Near the north end of it we found a crater where the lava when erupted had evidently been of a higher temperature as it had painted the sides of the volcanic throat with layers of lava until it was about two inches. Here and there along the sides were streaks and clots where the plastic substance had slowly run back until it congealed. Below was the vague depths of the crater crusted over with snow. After leaving the ~~Royal Gorge~~ ^{Vermillion} we came to a number of craters from fifty to three hundred feet deep, one of these had a series of yellow and green rings around the sides evidently caused by sulphur deposits. Climbing to a high point of rock we were surprised to find a crater in the very top and on looking down ~~the opening could be seen angling off at a 45° angle. On the north rim was a narrow crack down which we climbed reaching a landing some sixty feet below. Standing at the bottom and looking up the sensation was that of being in a gigantic well, while at the side of us the crater was blocked by an immense snow drift.~~

Leaving here the surprises came fast. We passed a butte terraced with mountain sheep trails, another had an immense crater in its top, the sides

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of which were almost perpendicular walls. One of the strangest things found on the trip was a natural ice cave from the ceiling of which hung huge icicles or ice stalactites six to ten feet long. The side walls of the cave were incrustated with a coating of ice two inches thick, the floor was covered with ice about three or four feet thick and so clear that one could plainly see the detail of the rock below. We had no light with which to explore this interesting place and had to content ourselves with breaking pieces of ice and bowling them back into the depths where we could hear them skidding and sliding for hundreds of feet. It was with regret we left but we are going back better equipped this Spring for further exploration.

Our main camp was established in a crater about a quarter of a mile in diameter and about seven or eight hundred feet in depth. The walls were an intense red with splotches of yellow, brown and grey. Words spoken in a loud voice were echoed and reechoed from wall to wall to die away in a series of faint murmurings. One day on a side trip from here we crossed several large cinder flats and in rows of dots across them were the tracks of bear made possibly hundreds of years ago before the lava had become settled and hard. The tracks were several inches deep and had filled with a species of dwarf buckwheat and rye grass. As we passed these tracks we often remarked of what the thoughts and feelings of the wild animals were when the region was in eruption. Another cinder contained about two hundred lava piles or sputter cones where the molten substance had been shot out thru vents in the surface and built up into mounds or cones as much as ten feet high. Many had evidently been higher but being top heavy had tumbled over. In the top of each was a vent from two to twenty inches in diameter and of depths unknown. Near here was a cinder

butte in the top of which we found a crater which closed in as it went down and then opened up again like the interior of a bottle. We rolled rocks, one as large as an office desk, over the edge and tho we listened intently we never heard them strike bottom. We turned from this place with a feeling of wonder and awe. Several others of a similar shape were found with a mound of ice and snow in the center. Up the sides of all were traces of old indian trails. We found one crater which we estimated to be half a mile wide and at least a thopsand feet deep. An average office building could have been placed on the bottom and resembled a lump of sugar in a huge bowl. One wall of this immense crater was a perpendicular cliff, almost a vermillion in color, the south side was a cinder and lava rock slope and the bottom a cinder flat about a hundred ~~xxx~~ yards across. As we walked around the rim we found the northwest side to be a knife edge on the other slope of which was still another huge crater and another sharp rim on the far side of this crater was the slope of a third crater which contained a lake in its bottom. As we stood on the edge and gazed downward the surface seemed agitated and ruffled into small waves.

While I busied myself with the camera, euriosity ever came Cole and he made the long climb to the bottom. I could see him standing on a large rock on the shore but he was unable to explain the action of the water. From the top of the rim it looked as if it might be caused by schools of fish. Another large crater was found, the walls of which had been undermined by the lava, the rim caving off on one side and floating away on the flow, where it assumed strange shapes as it was sarried along. One piece was about thirty feet high and not over ten feet in diameter

How it kept from toppling over is a mystery. From a distance the remnants of the crater wall resembled the ruins of a deserted town. An indian water bowl was found cached in a crack of one of the lava and pumice islands. In many places the flowing lava had taken the shape and appearance ~~ERE~~ of a swift mountain river. At the edge of this strange ~~XXXXX~~ stream we found fourteen rock mounds of rock and sage brush evidently built by the indians. They were placed in an irregular row and pointed north and south. The piles were an average of eight feet long, three feet wide and two or three feet high and composed of rocks the size of a man's head and roots of charred sage brush. There are at least six Indian trails leading into this region. The largest and plainest can be followed about eleven miles after which it fades away. Where it goes and why is yet unknown. We climbed the highest of the buttes finding the sides covered with bomb shaped rocks many of them looking like a foot ball with buffalo horns fastened to the ends. Others were observed, the bottoms of which were shaped ~~like XXXXX~~ like a huge oval vase with a long twisted ear or handle on the top. Others were found looking like large loaves of bread, the top of them being cracked and crusted exactly ^{like} ~~like~~ a leaf.

On the bottoms of these bombs were especially the larger ones, were cemented the cinders on which they happened to fall. The lava was probably blown in chunks to an immense height and in falling rotated, twisting the ends or ears which hardened sufficiently to retain their shape. There were thousands of them ranging in size from those small enough to be used as a watch fob to one over thirteen feet long. From the top of this high butte one could sit by the hour examining the view below. We counted the remains of sixty three craters in a more or less perfect condition.

There were probably many more which the light was not right for us to see. About three miles southwest of where we were sitting we found the most peculiar lava flow of all. It was in rolls, twists and folds exactly like a blanket might be rumpled on a disordered bed. These folds were ⁱⁿ many instances twenty five to thirty feet across. The color of this singular place was grey and a bright cobalt blue and covered an area miles in extent. At another place we found seven caves, one we explored for about a half a mile by the light of a single candle. Poking around in a place of this kind by candle light when at any turn you might come to close quarters with a grizzly bear is exciting enough for any one. A short way from the caves we came to a narrow draw or coulee and in traveling down it were surprised to see in the air ahead of us a natural bridge arching from rim to rim. On coming closer we found it to be about seventy feet across and about twenty five feet in diameter. Beyond that we found one of the most curious formations found on the trip. The lava had been poured forth and by some strange act of nature had been piled in the shape of ship hawsers as neatly as man could have done. The shape of the coils was exact, even the small cords composing the cable being represented by a circular twist. In all there were about two acres of this curious formation, the surface having a smooth shiny gloss. How these coiled piles could have been formed was the subject of ~~ENNN~~ our conversation as long as we were in that neighborhood. We afterwards found hundreds of formations of a similar nature, some would be arches, others bubbles, sometimes it would be exactly the appearance of breaking waves of surf on the ocean beach. One piece was found twisted into a perfect knot, How the end could have been twisted over and thru will always be a mystery. This region is truly a land of odd formations and strange happenings. We were unanimous in agreeing we would not have wanted to be there when

the eruption took place. It is little wonder that to the indian's uneducated mind it was a place to be shunned as the abode of evil spirits and to be entered only in times of war. Shortly after this we had the experience of being lost on the lava fields in a dense fog, a fog so intense we could not see fifty feet in any direction. The light was so dull that it resembled the short/ period of twilight just before darkness. After about an hours travel we decided to return to camp and took what we thought was the correct bearing. When we had gone about the distance that we thought should place us on the slope of the crater in which was our camp we looked at the compass and found to our surprise we had been going almost directly away from it. A person's first feeling under these conditions is to start out and hurry, even run and it/ was with effort we retarded our footsteps on the return. We were certainly glad when we finally reached the shelter of the boulder under the side of which we were camped and ~~and~~ had our fire going to dry our damp clothes. The day we passed out of this strange region and traveled over the rolling country to the north we looked back into the far distance thinking of the strange things that we alone had seen, we each determined to go back. What we saw and found is but little of what it contains. Sometime in the month of May will find us on our way with a large ~~party~~ party fully equipped with ropes, lanterns, flashlights and cameras, including a movie outfit and our guns for we expect to bag some of the grizzly bear which live in this remarkable region.

Some day in the not very distant future this place will be created into a Natural Park or Monument, in many respects the equal and in some the superior to the forty five now within the borders of the United States.

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When this is done and trails or roads are built thousands of people will take advantage of the opportunity of visiting this strange region.

Mounds lacking.