

[https://magicvalley.com/lifestyles/recreation/hikers-retrace-the-great-rift-retracing-limbert-s-footsteps/article\\_e6c2c222-2368-11e4-a46f-0019bb2963f4.html](https://magicvalley.com/lifestyles/recreation/hikers-retrace-the-great-rift-retracing-limbert-s-footsteps/article_e6c2c222-2368-11e4-a46f-0019bb2963f4.html)

## 6 Hikers Retrace the Great Rift, Retracing Limbert's Footsteps

By Julie Wootton [jwootton@magicvalley.com](mailto:jwootton@magicvalley.com)

Aug 14, 2014

SALE! SUBSCRIBE FOR \$1/MO.

Hikers are pictured during a week-long Great Rift expedition in April.

(Courtesy of Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve)

ARCO • Allie Konkowski has mud-covered, worn hiking boots to remind her of a weeklong trek along the Great Rift.

The boots sat on a table Aug. 6 at Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve's visitor center as a group of hikers recounted their experience in the lava.

They had 360-degree views of untouched, pristine landscape along the Snake River Plain, said Konkowski, a Craters of the Moon intern from the Student Conservation Association.

“You’re out there and all you can see is lava.”

The hikers described the lava-covered landscape as unrelenting. It seemed impossible to finish the trip.

Six people hiked more than 60 miles in April — botanist Mike Mancuso, Brian Bean of Lava Lake Ranch east of Carey, photographer Craig Wolfrom and three Craters of the Moon employees: Dan Buckley, Ted Stout and Konkowski.

“For me, hiking the Great Rift was a joyful and challenging experience,” Stout said.

The group had three objectives: Safely follow famous Idaho explorer Robert Limbert’s path along the Great Rift, document lava features and plants and promote the wilderness characteristics of the Great Rift.

For his 1920 trek, Limbert brought along friend W.L. Cole and a dog.

The sharp lava rocks were rough on the dog’s paws, and the explorers regretted bringing him, Stout said. They fashioned canine boots out of leather and carried the dog for some stretches of the hike.

Limbert’s photos and account of the 1920 journey were published in National Geographic in 1924. That’s the same year President Calvin Coolidge established Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve.

The Great Rift is a volcanic system with a series of deep cracks in the Earth’s crust, extending more than 60 miles from Craters of the Moon’s headquarters near Arco to the southeast.

“The cracks make natural travel corridors that you can follow, theoretically,” Stout said.

A fissure extends 65 miles and “opened up to emit successive lava flows some 15,000 years ago resulting in spatter caves, ice tubes, caves, and cinder cones,” according to the Idaho Division of Tourism Development’s website.

This spring’s six hikers figured out early on they weren’t the first ones to venture along the Great Rift. They found Shoshoni arrowheads, an old canning jar from the 1940s and World War II-era shell casings.

Along the way, they discovered 15 caves not previously documented. They also noted 11 species of bats.

Hikers carried 55- to 65-pound backpacks and braved below-freezing temperatures at night. They brought a park radio for communication.

It was truly a wilderness experience, and it provided plenty of opportunities for solitude, Stout said.

But he doesn’t necessarily recommend it. “I would not suggest hiking the entire Great Rift.”





This week on the campaign trail Cory  
Booker's out, Trump's impeachment...

[READ MORE >>](#)

...

After loading up cars in the first day, the hikers drove for hours before reaching the Wood Road Kipuka trailhead.

They enjoyed having a trail to follow for a while, “but that trail ran out very quickly,” Stout said.

A major issue the group encountered was huge cracks in the Earth along the way, which Stout called “one of the major impediments to travel.”

They planned to hike 10 miles the first day, but Stout said they ran out of steam. “We never made it to the camp we were scheduled to get to.”

Instead, they spent their first night in a “nice forest of stunted juniper trees,” Stout said. Moss covered the ground, which provided good padding.

Kipuka means “island of vegetation” and is surrounded by lava flows. It’s of great scientific interest due to native plants that usually haven’t been affected by people or grazing, Stout said.

On the second day, they spent the night camping near King’s Bowl and Crystal Ice Cave.

King’s Bowl is a “truly remarkable spot,” Stout said, caused by an explosion about 2,000 years ago.

Throughout the week, the six encountered strong winds as they navigated the rift.

One night, some of the hikers stayed up to see a lunar eclipse, but others didn’t manage to stay awake long enough.

About halfway through the trip, they found a kipuka near Bear Park totaling about two square miles.

They were surprised to see a herd of 35 elk at the island of vegetation, surrounded by miles of lava rocks.

That night, they set up the “bleakest camp of all” on lava rocks, Stout said. “That was a tough night.”

There weren’t any places to stake a tent, so they put rocks on the corners instead, Konkowski said.

At Coyote Butte, they were treated to an expansive view of the Pioneer Mountains. At Vermillion Chasm, they saw a vent formed about 4,000 years ago, Stout said.

After a week of hiking, the group was ready to finish.

“We were running out of food and skin on the bottom of our feet,” Stout said.



 +19

Gallery: Great Rift Expedition  
Aug 13, 2014

### The Hikers’ Schedule

Here’s the route the six hikers took on their Great Rift trip. They made tweaks along the way and didn’t always make it to their planned camping destination each night.

- April 11 — After a long drive that morning, they hiked to the Wood Road Kipuka trailhead and planned to camp at Old Juniper Kipuka. (10 miles)
- April 12 — Pillar Butte to Wapi Park, ending at King’s Bowl and Crystal Ice Cave (8 miles)
- April 13 — Bear Trap Cave to Craters of the Moon lava flow (12 miles)
- April 14 — Bear Park to New Butte (12 miles)
- April 15 — New Butte to Black Trail Butte/Lost Valley (6 miles)
- April 16 — Black Tail Butte to Vermillion Chasm to Sheep Trail Butte and then to Echo Crater (11 miles)
- April 17 — From Echo Crater back to trailhead (3 miles)

### Tips for Exploring the Great Rift

Hikers who made the trek in April offered these tips:

- Bring at least one gallon of water per person per day.

- Make sure you have sturdy footwear.
- Having a pole or two for support is important for balancing.
- Gloves are helpful because it's easy to get scraped while gripping or falling onto lava rocks.
- Travel in a group with at least three or four people.
- The best time to explore the Great Rift is early spring, when there are still pockets of snow to use for drinking water.