

CRATERS OF THE MOON NATIONAL PARK

H. C. DAKE

Craters of the Moon, a National Park northeast of Twin Falls, Idaho, is well worth visiting especially to those interested in volcanic activity and spectacular igneous formations of recent origin. The park comprises some 77 square miles, all recent lavas, variously estimated to be from 300 to 10,000 years old, and can be reached by a good highway from Twin Falls.

A splendid road of seven miles has been constructed within the park to enable the motorist to see numerous spots of interest. A full day or more can be spent in the park viewing the many recent cinder cones, volcanoes, and flows of lava. Due to the refrigerating and insulating effect of the porous rocks upon the percolating water, the water is reduced to very near the freezing point. At several places in the park, shallow holes have been dug in the loose rock to enable the visitor to obtain an ice cold drink of pure water from nature's own refrigerator.

There are 30 distinct craters in the area. The lavas seen are practically all basalt, therefore obsidian is practically wholly lacking. Most of the park is situated at an elevation of 6,000 feet, which means bright sunshine but cool, pleasant evenings and nights. Very lit-

tle vegetation and only a few stunted trees are to be seen, practically the entire 77 square miles are devoid of plant life owing to the lack of soil.

While the writer was visiting the park, the caretaker called his attention to two mineral occurrences which are of interest owing to their mode of origin. The park caretaker in investigating one of the craters, was lowered to a depth of some 200 feet by heavy rope. In the floor of the crater a shallow well or pocked yielded about five pounds of a snow white compact mineral, which proved to be pure kalinite (potassium alum), by optical tests. The mass of kalinite was in the form of a circular shaped disk as though it had been purified by recrystallization in a large evaporating dish. In all probability the kalinite is the result of leaching of soluble salts from the surrounding lavas. During rains and with melting snow the alum would be dissolved and then recrystallized during the summer months of warm weather. After centuries of this a small cake of very pure kalinite accumulated. Saline minerals are not found elsewhere in the park unless they may be present under similar circumstances.

The other mineral examined consisted of rough crystal growths found in an adjoining crater mouth. This proved to be gypsum, variety selenite.

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