

HAROLD T. STEARNS
CONSULTING GEOLOGIST

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1779 Woodland Ave., Apt #32
E. Palo Alto, Calif. 94303
January 6, 1966

file
Mr Roger J. Contor, Superintendent
Craters of the Moon National Monument
Arco, Idaho 83213

Dear Mr Contor,

4	Superintendent	
2	Park Ranger	
1	Naturalist	
3	Administration	WGS
	Maintenance	

This will acknowledge your letter of Dec. 23 which was forwarded to me here from my home at Hope, Idaho. I will set down some of my recollections from the 1920s in re to the Craters of the Moon area, for whatever value they may have in your comparison with current flora, fauna and changes in general. I do not have my original field notes, which were copious, with me here but my original Guide Book lists the animals and plants in the monument area at that time. There probably is an old copy of around the Monument office somewhere.

Field work started in 1921 with a model T Ford and a bedroll. I used to carry two planks to drive the car over cracks in the lava and a shovel to dig the wheels out of loose cinders. I depended for water entirely upon the water holes.

By 1926, things were much easier as I lived in a small shack belonging to the custodian but it was very cold and I chopped ice off my water bucket to make morning coffee.

My impression is that the water holes have been disappearing, possibly from removal of the water by visitors. In the old days sheep grazed the grassed areas heavily, on their way to and from winter feeding grounds. In 1921, Mr. Martin had a big iron cage in the area, trying to capture a bear alive. Sage hens were very abundant and gathered in large flocks. I have seen hundreds at a time in the general area. Their droppings above a lava cave near Dubois formed niter deposits in the cave. I published an article about this curious deposit in the American Mineralogist about 1924. Rabbits were a real curse in the area in 1921 before disease reduced their numbers. Drives against the rabbits on Sundays and holidays were common and I recall that several thousands were killed in a 40-acre tract adjacent to alfalfa fields in the Mud Lake area. The rabbits and the sheep kept the grass down. Coyotes were abundant and circled camp every night. Their population rose and fell with the rabbits.

Antelope herds travelled thru the area but preferred the flats of the Lost River sinks and the valley floors. Homesteaders shot them for meat in any season so I think there may be more around now than in the early 20s. I never saw Mountain sheep in the Monument area but they may have drifted in during the winter when feed was too scarce elsewhere. I think the most pronounced change is your statement that several hundred deer summer in the Rift zone as deer were scarce at all times. A few used to winter in the craters north of the highway. I don't recall having ever seen any during summer.

Page 2 to Mr. Condon.

No laws were enforced in those days, re hunting, and the residents, often from necessity, lived on game. I remember, with two others in my party, lived once for 30 days on sagehen which are delicious but tiresome when eaten for breakfast (fried), for lunch (cold) and for dinner (roasted). We shot only what we needed for each day. No refrigeration!

In 1921, evidence of fires was common, possibly set by lightning or sheepmen or both. The sheepmen did not want sagebrush as it kills out the grass. Limber pine grew sparsely. Burned logs and stumps of some were noted and probably are still around as they rot very slowly, especially when charred.

I suggest that you write to the several topographers whose names are on the USGS map of the Monument area. They might be of help, if still alive.

Thanks for your kind words re my Craters booklet. The area was one of my earliest assignments and still is one of my favorites.

Sincerely

Harold T. Stearns
Harold T. Stearns

HTS/m