
Stop 38. Crater Lake

Arrival datetime: Monday, June 17, 3:00PM
Sites visited: Oregon Caves National Monument,
Crater Lake National Park
Accommodations: Crater Lake
States traveled: California, Oregon

After more driving through lush green forests and over and alongside clear rivers and streams, we reached the state of Oregon, where this landscape continued. It took five minutes, but we finally passed a jack rabbit running along side the road at 25 miles an hour. We also passed two lawn-front signs that said something like, “Stop taxing US for the UN.” We had heard that Oregon had no sales tax and it was easy to see why.

Michael did the best he could through the narrow winding roads to Oregon Caves National Monument. But we arrived at 10:02AM, missing the 10:00AM tour by a few minutes and the ranger informed us that it was full anyway, so there was no point in trying to catch up to it. We meandered through the gift shop and put on extra clothes and hiking boots for the 42° cave temperatures.

The Ranger had suggested we check out the Oregon Caves Chateau, but we did not have time before the tour. We told him that we knew it had just opened, that we had called every month for the past several months, but it was not yet open for the season just a few weeks before we arrived. Sympathetic park rangers had told us that the concessionaire had not been chosen yet, and the lodge may not open as a result. The current Ranger

looked incredulous, like why would we bother. We explained that the Chateau was included in a book we had, “Great Lodges of the West.” The Ranger rolled his eyes and his companion looked ready to crack up, biting her lip to keep from laughing. We guessed we were lucky never to have connected with the new concessionaire.

The Caves were notable only because they were really caves. Unlike the tourist-ready large rooms and well defined attractions of Mammoth and Carlsbad, Oregon Caves made you bend and scamper a bit. The lighting was low and the walls were for the most part close on either side. Where there was a room, there were the same cave scenes as in the other caves, stalactites, stalagmites, popcorn, columns, and streams. But there were not very many of them. A few had different terms. Thin draperies were still called “bacon,” but thicker draperies were named for the shape in which they fell, like “bananas.” The Ranger was knowledgeable and the tour was worth the time, if only for the very real experience of being 250 feet below the surface. He also pointed out something we had not before seen in our cave tours: a fault line. Two diagonally balances surfaces, one lying on top of the other, touching only in strategically balanced outcroppings of one



Oregon Caves National Monument.

or the other. It was easy to see how the top one might slide during an earthquake. He assured us that it was not likely to happen anytime soon, but that earthquake activity was frequent as evident from other similarly shifted rocks in the cavern. A column or a drapery was often split horizontally in two and the top half shifted a few inches or more away from its base.

So though it was late and we had a riverboat tour scheduled an hour away, we had to check out the Oregon Caves Chateau. We also had not yet gotten our obligatory gift mug and bookmark as these items had not been available in the gift shop run by the National Monument. The Chateau was a very interesting wood building, but the wood was not near as

interesting as that of a chair we saw in the gift shop. It looked like a combination of redwood burl and redwood. The base was a small trunk. Every piece was very natural but it all hung together into a functional chair. We fell in love with it and decided to get it for our anniversary. The woman at the shop did not know how much it was and was completely confused by our questions on shipping. She had opened the shop for the season that morning and told us that it was a cooperative effort by community merchants because the park concessionaire had pulled out at the end of last year. She also apologized for not having Cave bookmarks.

We found that the chair was made by Harvey Shinerock, a woodworker with a

shop on our way to the river tour company. So we went there. We toured his shop and a home he was building around it and it was just amazing. He had experienced a fire in his home a few years before and was building himself a new one around the cabins he used for workshops. The existing cabins were completely contained within a wooden frame and the upstairs part of the frame had already been built. The beams both upstairs and down were made of whole redwood trunks with genuine burls, all sanded down and smooth for maximal decorative effect. The floors were tiled in green polished, serpentine like slate, with smooth river rock embedded in swirling decorative patterns. The bathroom walls were also tiles in the green rock, and elaborate fixtures and door carvings were everywhere. No detail had been overlooked. All was smooth but somehow the rustic materials made it look completely natural. In his showrooms, there were several examples of the chairs we liked, as well as tables, lamps, headboards, and various home decorations. They were all of the same polished, yet nature-made appearance.

But we liked the chair we had first seen at the Oregon Caves Chateau the best. Harvey also explained that the concessionaire had pulled out because the only lucrative part of the business was cave tours, and the Park Service had decided to take them over. He said that he had loaned the chair to the shop as a community service, and would happily to give them another one. He tacked only \$200 onto the price for shipping us the one we had seen. He also let us know that our chair was made out of madrone. We had seen the big red trees from the side of

the road and had supposed perhaps they were giant manzanita.

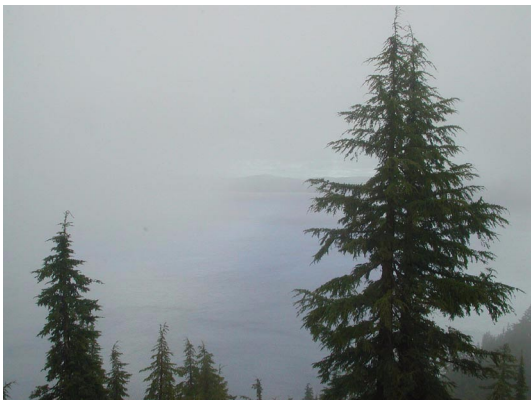
We were late for our boat tour, but it was cold and drizzling anyway. We stopped in Grants Pass at a restaurant overlooking the river for lunch and that seemed a fine substitute river experience. We drove the rest of the way to Crater Lake in the rain. Snow lined the roads long before we arrived, and by the time we got there, it was up to 6 feet high. At the park entrance station, the Ranger warned us that there was “no visibility at the lake.” The Rim Village was so smothered in thick fog that if we did not have a map, we would not know where the Lake was. The wind was vicious and drove the rain diagonally through our clothes as we hurriedly chose what we would bother to take from the car.

As per our plan, we tried to set ourselves up for a boat tour of the lake the next day. We were dismayed to find out that they would not be running for another week. Other guests were similarly annoyed, and we all told the whimsical front desk clerk that we had been told there would be tours. Of course, we felt a little ridiculous because even if there was a tour scheduled for the day, it would obviously be have been cancelled due to weather. Though the window behind the clerk, we could see piles of snow plummeted by rain and trees bending in the wind. But we were to be here three days and we had hope. The response from the front desk was that he would have to track down who lied to us and fire them, and also that we could check out early with no penalty should we desire.

At least they offered a flexible dinner menu with decent service. The Lodge

itself was very scenic, mostly made of stone, with pine tree bark lining the columns and walls in the public areas. The furniture was Frank Lloyd Wright. The room was large, comfortable and faced the lake, though we could not yet see it. We deferred reconsidering our plans until after a trip to the Visitors Center in the morning.

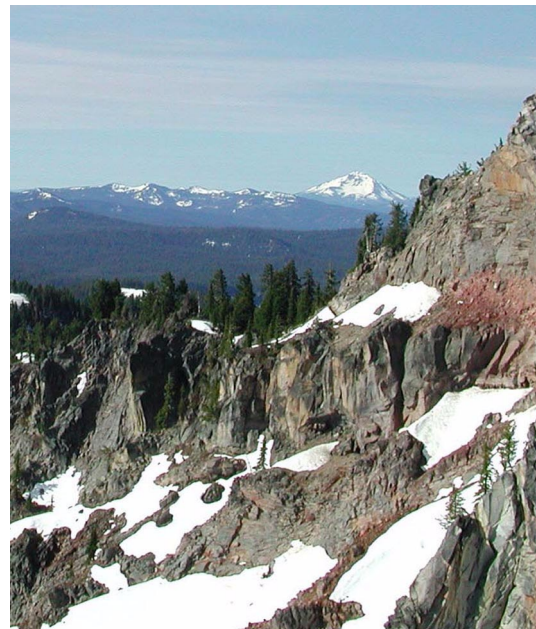
Howling wind and driving rain greet us upon waking Tuesday and we slept late on purpose to give it time to abate. By the time we left the dining room after breakfast, there was a break large enough in the fog to see about half the lake from the back porch. But five minutes later in our room, the view was again obscured by more fog rolling by. We set out for



The fog obscures Crater Lake.

the Visitors Center and saw their 18-minute video. Rather than describe the park geology and activities, it described the volcano that created Crater Lake through the eyes of the Indian Tribe who lived in the area when it erupted about 7000 years ago. The Ranger was no better at giving us activity ideas. “You came in between. The hiking trails aren’t open yet but the ski trails don’t have enough snow on them.”

We drove as far as we could along the west rim, about 5 miles until the road was closed. A slew of others were making the same trip and we met them again and again at every one of 5 or so overlooks. It was 34° according to our car. We were all bundled up as much as possible in layers of spring and summer clothes. No one who was doing the viewpoint hopping had thought to bring a winter coat. Luckily, the view got better with each overlook. The fog rolled away almost completely by noon, and we could see Mount Lassen in the distance.



Mount Lassen from Crater Lake.

We had lunch at the lodge. By the time lunch was over, it was up to about 40° and tolerable to walk along the rim. We saw in the Rim Visitors Center that yesterday the high had been 44°.

Though the lake was gorgeous, we decided to take Crater Lodge up on its offer to leave without penalty the next day. We had heard that there was skiing at our next destination, Mount Hood, and there is only so much lake gawking we



Wizard Island in Crater Lake.

can do without being frustrated that we cannot get more than a quarter mile from our car without freezing. Though we had not planned to ski this trip, it seemed like the thing to do in the mountains of Oregon this June. We brought in our hand

weights from the car and did as much of our Rachel McLish video that we could remember. We walked around the rim a bit more before dinner, and again before breakfast.

Miles traveled:	225
Departure datetime:	Wednesday, June 19, 8:10AM
Departure weather:	42° Sunny