

Additional Points of Interest

Geology of Central Oregon- The rocks in the Ochoco Mountains are from the Clarno Formation. These were formed 50 million years ago during the Eocene Period. Volcanoes in central Oregon deposited layers of lava and ash up to 1000 ft. thick. Mudflows called "lahars" resulted from ash and water. This mud preserved the plants and animals of the area. The fossils of wood, fruit, nuts, magnolia, avocado, and banana trees indicate a tropical climate. The fossilized animals include horses, camels, rhinos, and hippos. The Painted Hills and John Day Area were affected by the eruption of the volcanoes near the Cascades 36 million years ago. The buff rocks are the color of the original ash. The red bands are due to the iron content of the ash, iron that has oxidized. The green layers are the result of an anaerobic environment, one that lacked oxygen.

John Day Fossil Beds- Within the heavily eroded volcanic deposits of the scenic John Day River Basin is a well-preserved fossil record of plants and animals. This remarkably complete record, spanning more than 40 of the 65 million years of the Cenozoic Era is world-renowned. This 14,000 acre National Park is divided into three widely-separated units: the Sheep Rock Unit, the Painted Hills Unit, and the Clarno Unit. The main headquarters is at the visitors center in the Sheep Rock Unit. Although there are interesting and amazing fossils, don't expect any dinosaurs. Oregon was underwater at the time dinosaurs walked the earth.

Distances:

- Prineville to Visitor Center (Sheep Rock Unit) 80 mi.
- Sheep Rock to Painted Hills Unit 45 mi.
- Painted Hills to Clarno Unit 75 mi.
- Clarno to Sheep Rock Unit 81 mi.

Mitchell - This town is proud to be one of the last authentic old west towns of Oregon. The first house was built on a homestead filed in 1867 by I. N. Sargent, the man who platted the town of Mitchell. The town was incorporated and named for an Oregon senator, John Hipple Mitchell, in 1893. Today businesses are family owned. Look for hunting and camping supplies, home cookin', espresso, and gas. Shop for antiques, crafts, local interest books, unique fine-furniture fashioned from twisted juniper wood. Pose for an olde time sepia portrait. Meet "Henry", an American Black Bear rescued and adopted by local residents. Explore a "Thunder Egg" mine. Guest ranches, river rafting, and fossil digging

are nearby. The Visitor Information Center, located in the laundromat will have brochures on the area.

Water- Much of the water in the Painted Hills is very alkali and therefore undrinkable. Early settlers would treat the water with sugar and cider vinegar.

Rockhounds- Treasures in the Prineville area include agates with dendrites, white plume agates, moss agates, green jasper, limbcasts, jasper with agate, Ochoco chalcedony, thundereggs, and petrified wood. An annual Rockhound Pow-Wow is held at the fairgrounds in Prineville, each summer. For information on the Powwow call the Chamber at 541-447-6304.

Transportation- Once gold was discovered in the gravel of the John Day River in 1861, temporary roads took shape in the canyons. Freighters used the roads for their pack strings. Stages followed. Henry H. Wheeler, whose name is given to the neighboring county, started running stages over Sherars Bridge in 1864. Wheeler setup stage stations in several locations. Freighters hauled considerable amounts of whiskey from The Dalles to the saloons of Mitchell. In winter it was common practice for the freighters to tap one of fifty-gallon barrels for refreshment along the way.

John Day River- Great bass fishing.

Traveling Notes:

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A. Downtown Prineville - 0 mile.

The tour starts at the intersection of 3rd and Main St. Proceed east on Highway 26. Tour the courthouse and Bowman Museum before you start.

B. Ochoco Reservoir - 7.4 miles.

Boat launch with single wide dock, fish cleaning station. Good fishing for trout.

C. Ochoco Lake Campground - 7.4 miles.

Free day use area around perimeter of campground. Terrific picnic spot: fire grates, tables, water, camp host, play area for children. 22 campsites.

D. Mill Creek Rd. - 9.9 miles.

Turn onto this road to visit Stein's Pillar, Brennen Palisades, and the Mill Creek Wilderness Area. The Civilian Conservation Corps program active from 1933 - 1940, had a camp in this wilderness, 20 miles east of Prineville. It was one of 1500 camps. More than 2.5 million unemployed young people aged 17-25 participated in the CCC. Tasks done by the CCC included building bridges, cutting fire trails, checking erosion, and constructing fire towers.

E. Brennen Palisades - 14.9 miles from turnoff on Mill Creek Road

Turn right on Dry Creek Road-3.1 miles from turnoff; good hiking area.

F. Stein's Pillar - 17.7 miles from turnoff on Mill Creek Road to the Pillar hike trail head. For viewing and information, continue until 19 miles from the turnoff. Stein's Pillar, 350 ft. high and 120 ft. wide, is the core of an ancient volcano. It is named for an Indian fighter, Major Enoch Steen of the 1st US Dragoons, who explored the area in 1860. This area begins the Mill Creek Wilderness and comes out at the Ochoco Divide. It borders the Bandit Springs area. The spelling of the pillar was changed over time. It is still pronounced "Steen's Pillar".

G. Ochoco National Forest - 18 miles.

The next fifteen miles take you through a pine forest in the high country, a two lane road bordered by Ochoco Creek. The forest of 851,095 acres is used by hikers, hunters, campers, horseback riders, anglers, rockhounds, and stargazers. Watch for deer, elk and wild horses. More info at: www.fs.fed.us/r6/centraloregon.

H. Bandit Springs - 49 miles.

Site of 9.6 miles of cross country ski trails. Easy to difficult. The largest diameter ponderosa pine in Oregon is located to the RT of the restrooms. Bandits robbed a bank, the sluice boxes and the miners. They left six horses tied to a log during a rapid escape. Unfortunately they never returned for them. Look carefully and find the 6 horse skeletons.

I. Ochoco Divide Campground - 30 miles.

28 campsites. Forest Service information is 1/4 mile east of campsites.

J. Painted Hills - 43 miles to turnoff, then 6 miles from turnoff onto Bear Creek Rd. Handicap accessible, restrooms, picnic area, water, hiking trails, view points, area information. Local camping at: Barnhouse Springs- bathrooms, fire grates, tables, tent camping, no water. Clyde Holiday (open seasonally-April-Oct.) - fee, water, restrooms, showers, fire grates, tables, tent camping, trailer sites, electricity, dump station, John Day River access.

K. Mitchell - 46 miles.

The streets and businesses of Mitchell capture the flavor of an 1870's mining town. Lunch with the locals on delicious, homemade entrees. See additional points of interest.

L. Walton Lake - 25 miles

East of Prineville to Ochoco Ranger Station, 7 miles NE of Ranger Station on Forest Service Road #22. Overnight camping permitted. Trout are stocked. Good fishing from a float tube. Wonderful family vacation spot. As early as 1877 this site provided water via ditches and flumes for gold mining activities along Scissors and Judy Creeks. The present day lake was created in 1968 by the US Forest Service and the Prineville Chapter of Izaak Walton League of America.

Highway 26- Painted Hills Tour

Listen to the wind in the trees and imagine the miners in days of old. Listen to the wind in the Painted Hills and imagine the Cascades as active volcanoes.

Take a daytrip focusing on the geology and history of Central Oregon. Proceeding NE from Prineville you'll visit the remains of eroded volcanoes at Stein's Pillar. Continuing on you'll visit the sites of Oregon's native treasures: tall trees, silver and gold mines, and people of hearty spirit.

After visiting the glorious Painted Hills and discovering the signs of prehistoric animals, visit Mitchell before looping back. In the Ochoco's take the turnoff through Summit Prairie to visit a spectacular wildflower area.