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## ***Stop 35. Mount Shasta***

Arrival datetime: Monday, June 10, 4:00PM  
Sites visited: Mount Shasta, Muir Peak, Castle Lake  
Accommodations: McCloud Inn  
States traveled: California  
Departure datetime: Monday, June 10, 9:00AM

We left the sulphur of Drakesbad behind us, and the “Check Engine” light on the Cadillac finally went off. Yet it did not come on again when we drove through Lassen National Park from the southwest entrance to the northwest on our way to Mount Shasta. We stopped at the “Devastated Area.” We kept looking for devastation, like perhaps a large area of lava and no growth. So if there had not been a sign at the parking lot, we surely would have missed it. Mount Lassen had last erupted in 1915, and by now the areas that had been covered with hot rocks and mud slides was rich with plant life. A trail took us past some good examples of the types of rock that had been thrown from the crater 10-12 miles away. Some were taller than Michael and ten times as broad. Drakesbad had given us a pack lunch so we stopped near a marker for the Nobles Pioneer Trail, named for someone who led pioneers through these mountains from Nevada to California. We climbed up high above the road on huge obviously volcanic boulders, and ate.

At the northwest Park entrance we finally got to see the Intro to the Park video and learned that the yellow colors around the mud pots and boiling springs was sulphur or sulphur oxides. We bought postcards of the 1915 eruption at the Loomis Museum. We walked from there to

Manzanita Lake without seeing one manzanita bush, but did get a very nice view of Lassen Mountain. We also saw an old fashioned seismograph. There was no explanation of how it was supposed to have worked, but Michael figured it out for us.

A Forest Service Scenic Vista just outside of Lassen gave us a nice view of Lassen mountain through tall Jeffrey and Ponderosa pine trees. It had a short path through tall pines that would be harvested in 2043, according to a posted sign. We recalled that our guide in Sante Fe had told us that the Forest service allows loggers to clear an area, plant trees, then come back later and harvest them. We started noticing that a lot of the woods around us were planted with all the same kind of tree at the same age, neatly spaced with very little ground cover. These forests were just as pretty to drive through as the natural ones, and at a glance to an untrained eye, there was nothing unusual about them. We wondered how many we had already driven through.

As we drew closer to Mount Shasta, it repeatedly popped up through the trees on the highway. It was broad and white at the top, but not quite dome shaped. A few peaks created a crater formation and a much smaller peak named Shastina,

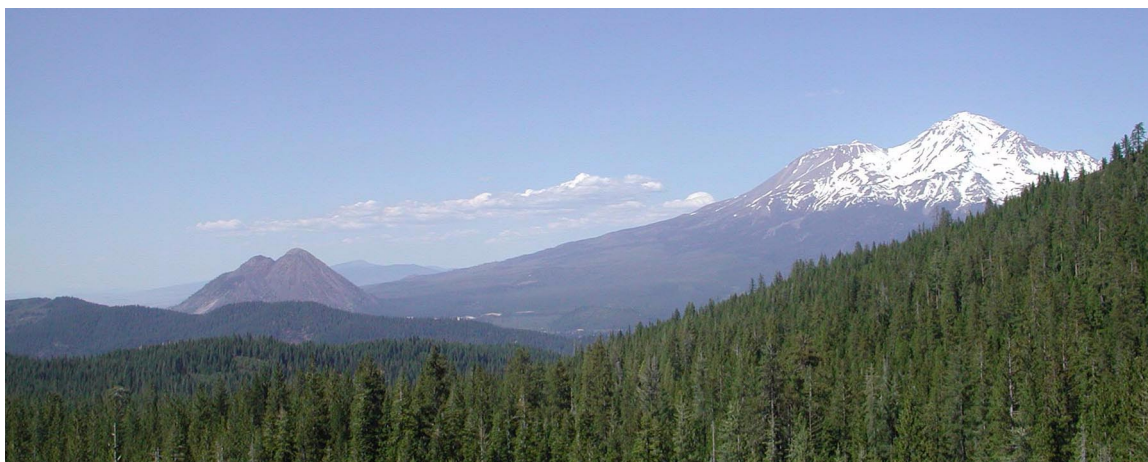


*Mount Shasta popping up along the highway.*

which distinguished itself to the west. The melting snow created pretty patterns of white and green ovals and triangles that started just below the all-white top and gradually became all green, melding into the forest below. We had thought Mount Lassen dominated a landscape, but we had not yet experienced landscape domination. From McCloud, where we were staying, and the surrounding towns like Shasta, you could see Mount Shasta from virtually everywhere. If trees blocked your view, you need not walk more than a block to find it again. We decided that if we actually lived around there, we would have to learn to use crampons and climbing gear because you could not see that mountain every day and not be beckoned to the top at least once. As it was, the snow cover made it, like Lassen, easy to resist. That said, the mountain is only about 14,162 feet high. In September, the snow is not nearly as

dangerous, so it is little more than a hike, or so the literature says.

The McCloud Hotel was a cross between a hotel and a bed and breakfast. Since we had a suite, they would bring breakfast to our room. We were to check out the menu the night before and make any necessary changes. We had a large hot tub in the room, and though it had not been a particularly energetic day, we hopped in. There was only one restaurant in town, Raymond's. But it was an easy choice also because Alaskan Amber was on tap. Alaskan Amber is a beer we had enjoyed in Alaska last year, and it is not distributed on the east coast. We had a hearty Italian meal then toured McCloud on foot. We got ice cream at the only other place open in town. We had a good night's sleep and a weird breakfast, kind of scalloped potato dish that would be more appropriate as a side dish for dinner. We ran errands in the town of Shasta, then set off on the scenic



*Muir Peak and Mount Shasta.*

Everitt Memorial Highway to the “old” ski area, where both our hotel and the local chamber of commerce visitor’s center had told us was a good place to see the mountain. There were nice views of both Lassen, in the distance, and Shasta, above us, from the highway. There were also great views of Muir Peak, a volcanic formation just west of Lassen that John Muir had christened on a visit to the area. However, the road to the ski area was close at Bunny Flat, miles from our destination. So we settled instead on a short hike to Mount Shasta’s base camp, a Sierra Club run facility (or lack thereof) a mile and a half or so from the parking area.

As in the Walker Valley of Drakesbad, Bunny Flat was a snow-free meadow. The ascent was slow, and gradually snowdrifts appeared in the path. But unlike Lassen, a little over a mile in, there was snow everywhere, three to four feet of it. We navigated easily, as it the path was laden with mud from the boots of other hikers. There were more hikers on this trail than we had seen in since Yosemite. All had huge backpacks and most were carrying ski gear and ice picks.

Though the temperature had probably reached the fifties and one could see spring thaw approaching, it was still winter here. At the bottom, it had been 68° and Michael was wearing shorts. But we were moving and did not get very cold. From the base camp, we thought we could see the top and it did not look that snow covered. But later realized that we were experiencing the Mount Lafayette effect. We call it that because we have hiked Mount Lafayette in New Hampshire several times in the fall. We go up a lower peak to the south, then head north on the ridge to Mount Lafayette. From the lower mountain, it looks like the peak to Mount Lafayette is the next peak to the north. But once you arrive at the next peak, you see a higher one that was obscured from vision by the first. You think, that must be Mount Lafayette. But once you get to the top of that peak, you find yet another beyond it. Where we were on Mount Shasta was like the lower peak. When we noticed that there was very little snow on it, we realized that the top of the mountain must be behind it.

We drove to Siskiyou Lake and enjoyed the view but did not actually do anything

on the water. It was late when we got back to the hotel. We had been warned that the only restaurant in town was closed on Tuesdays, so we ordered “wine service” with cheese and crackers, the only type of food offered at dinner hour at our hotel. We supplemented it with potato chips, an apple, and a cookie left over from our Drakesbad sack lunch.

We worked on the computer a bit and Michael thought Jennifer had uploaded the pictures from the digital camera. She had not, but he deleted them anyway. It was the first time on the trip we lost pictures, so we do not have any hiking on the snow or being so close to the base of Mount Shasta.

After another weird breakfast, we headed for Muir’s Peak, though it seems only John Muir called it that. The locals renamed it a few times since he passed through. Now they call it Black Butte. Though it does not have a flat top so is technically not a butte at all. It is shaped like a cinder cone. A National Forest publication we got at the visitors center called it, “a treeless dome of hornblende andesite.” At the bottom, it was gray and black colored and it got progressively more red as we ascended. Some of the rock reminded us of rhyolite from the Colorado plateau. Most was a combination of several types, melted into each other in various colorful patterns. Perhaps that is what “hornblende andesite” means. Nearly all of it was flecked with centimeter long black stripes, some of these reflected the light like gems.

The path rose steadily through sharp-edged rock and gravel. It was easy to travel if you did not look down or up.

Looking down, you could see what looked like the result of numerous rockslides that had formed a very steep slope, with boulders up to several feet in diameter precariously balanced on downward sloping loose piles of rocks of various sized. A slip of the trail would surely start a rockslide with you at the center. Jennifer once caused a foot-long slide by stepping on a loose rock. Her voice went up four octaves as she warned Michael not to do the same. Michael also caused a small slide in the same place, but did not tell Jennifer about it until they were both safely down. He called it a “rock-slide-alito,” as he is want to use the Spanish suffix as a way to minimize the significance of things.

Looking up, the view was the same, various sizes of precariously balanced rock aimed straight down the 60-degree slope. So we looked at our feet on the narrow trail, less than one foot in places, sometimes overrun with rock that was evidence that slides did in fact repeatedly occur. Occasionally, we saw empty space beneath the rocks on our feet, indicating that the rocks on which we stepped were balanced across miniature canyons created by precariously balanced rock below.

At about 6400 feet, Muir Peak is not nearly as tall at Mount Shasta, but it had great views of Mount Shasta from the trail and from the top. The narrow pointy peak triggered Jennifer’s acrophobia, but she made it to the top and managed to eat lunch clinging to the crags. Luckily, the Forest Service literature had been wrong and a few oases of scrawny trees clinging to the rock provided shade from the midday sun. In these oases, there were also manzanita and other low lying



*Mount Shasta from Muir Peak.*

bushes, and a great variety of flowers. Rare red cactus like blossoms we had first seen in Sedona, big white dogwood blossoms, and miniature red, orange, and purple blossoms that looked like little lilies.

It was above 80° and we headed next for Castle Lake, an alpine lake surrounded by granite about 10 miles away. We put on our suits and pondered for a while at the

shoreline, then plunged in. It was only slightly less cold than Mirror Lake in Yosemite, but it felt great to us. We swam for about one minute, then climbed up a warm rock and basked in the sun for twenty. We were still cool and refreshed when we got back to the car, still cool enough to relish a warm hot tub when we returned to the hotel. We had dinner again with Alaskan Amber at Raymond's.

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Miles traveled:	275
Departure datetime:	Thursday, June 13, 9:30AM
Departure weather:	71° Sunny