



Modoc National Forest Obsidian Mines

General condition of roads accessing the obsidian mines

All roads accessing the obsidian mines are gravel or native surface roads. Four-wheel drive is not necessary to get to the mines, but it can be handy on some steeper slopes. Vehicles should have enough clearance to navigate some rocky areas – clearance on a standard pick-up or SUV is sufficient. Native surface roads often have protruding rock that make it wise for you to know your vehicle clearance and negotiate areas slowly enough that both you and your vehicle get to the obsidian mines in good shape. Access to each mine is described below

Rainbow Mine

Forest Road 46N30, called the “30 road,” is a maintained gravel surface road. All standard passenger vehicles can use this road pretty comfortably. As with all “dirt” roads, there are some areas of wash-boarding (ridges across the road). The mine is located in beautiful pine plantations, the trees being planted in the early 1900’s following a forest fire. The Rainbow Mine is just up the hill from the Lassen Creek Campground where drinking water and restrooms are available. Elk have been seen often in the Fandango Valley/Lassen Creek area so remember to look up from your rock collecting every once in awhile.

Rainbow, black and some mahogany (brown) are the obsidian colors commonly found at this mine.

Obsidian Needles

The first leg of the road to this mine is gravel; however, after the first 3 miles or so there is often some rutting from traffic during wet weather, some wash-boarding and also areas where rock protrudes. The final few miles have areas that are quite rocky and it’s recommended that those sections be navigated more slowly. High clearance vehicles such as pick-ups and SUVs are recommended. The mine is located in a pine and fir forested area. There are no facilities at the mine and with a southwesterly aspect it is highly recommended that Forest visitors come supplied with drinking water, snacks, and be prepared to pack out what you pack in.

The needles mine is best known for its “needles” that are naturally occurring needle-like pieces of the volcanic glass. Needles can vary in length from an inch or 2 to as long as a foot or more. Diameters of the needles also vary from 10’s of an inch to an inch or more. The longer thinner needles have been desired for wind chimes because of their pleasant sound while the smaller needles have been used for jewelry. Whether you want to make anything of it or not, the obsidian needles are very interesting. This deposit, to the best of our knowledge, is one of very few – perhaps only 2 or 3 – locations in the world where volcanic glass has fractured in this manner to produce the needles as you find them. This mine also produces very pretty obsidian rocks varying in color from black to mahogany, translucent to variegated coloration and highlights.

Pink Lady

This mine can be accessed from the west by continuing up the road from the obsidian needle mine, from the north and connecting into the same road system, or from the north by following the “30 road” along Lassen Creek and up onto the ridgeline. However you choose to explore, high clearance vehicles are again recommended. You will also encounter some moderately steep slopes with loose rock on the roadway that can decrease your traction. Four-wheel drive is not essential but can be a help on these steeper sections. This mine is at a higher elevation, about 7,000 feet, in lodgepole and pine forests. It receives the least use of any of the 4 designated mines and has no nearby facilities. Bring water, food, and prepare to pack out what you pack in.

Pink Lady is aptly named as the obsidian located in this designated quarry is pink and varies from light lavender to rose.

Middle Fork Mine

This mine is accessed by gravel surface for the first leg, but once you make the right turn shown on the map, you will encounter protruding rock and rough road. The mine itself is located off the road on an unimproved native surface track. The mine is a short walk from the main road – less than 1/4 mile – but 4-wheel drive is required to drive in on the unimproved road. The mine is surrounded by mostly white fir forest and open brush/grass areas. The closest restrooms are located at Plum Valley Campground, which is located a few miles up Forest Road 45N35 shown on the map, and is tucked into a very quiet, secluded forest area. If you plan to hunt for rock here, bring water, snacks and pack out what you pack in.

Middle Fork obsidian ranges in color from rainbow to black and mahogany.