

# Devil's Garden Auto Tour Loop

## Modoc National Forest

*Devil's Garden Ranger District*



**The Garden grows lava rocks, juniper, sagebrush, wild horses, wildlife, and a heap of respect**

It rises quickly some 500 feet from the valley floor north of Alturas and Canby, flattens out for miles, and is virtually uninhabited. It's aptly named "Devil's Garden".

**Devil's Garden** is an expansive prehistoric lava flow, with sparse vegetation, rough broken lava rock, juniper trees, and sagebrush flats in a semi-arid region covering about a half-million acres. While it's dry most of the year, in the early spring it often looks like the "land of lakes" as all of its water holes fill. The farther north you travel, the Garden's dryness gives way to conifer forests and is home to some of the biggest mule deer in the area. It is also home to the massive migrating Oregon-California mule deer herds.

The **Devil's Garden Rim** between Alturas and Canby marks where the lava flow stopped. The rimrock cliffs are shaped by nature and often plunge more than 100 feet straight down.

The Devil's Garden Travel Loop takes us 20 miles north from Alturas to Davis Creek on U.S. 395.

**Davis Creek** was named in honor of an early prospector who had been murdered in that area in 1868. The town was founded by two men, Ramer and McKinley, who came to Davis Creek to build a mercantile in hopes the town would become a booming farm community. The existing Davis Creek Mercantile, built in the 1950's, still holds the atmosphere of day's past.

**At Davis Creek, the tour turns west at the Davis Creek Church, heading towards Goose Lake.**

The tour crosses **Goose Lake** on the causeway and winds its way up the west side of the lake and into the Garden. At 3.5 miles west of Goose Lake, on Forest Service Road 73, is **Householder Reservoir**. The 25-acre reservoir provides an excellent recreational largemouth bass fishery. A pair of osprey (fish eagles) have established a nest near the reservoir and can often be seen making spectacular dives into the water after their prey.

Everly Reservoir is 4 miles west of Goose Lake, off road 73. The reservoir is a 120-acre wetland developed to improve the nesting habitat for waterfowl of the Pacific Flyway. In addition to Canada Geese, the most common species of nesting ducks seen in the area are mallard, cinnamon teal, pintail, and bufflehead. Bald eagles are also prevalent from spring through summer.

The **Little Grizzlie Creek Restoration Project** is 20 miles northwest of Davis Creek on road 73. The project encompasses 240 acres along Little Grizzlie Creek. The area was originally all meadow, but because of poor timber harvesting practices and overgrazing, the stream channel began down cutting and large gullies were formed. This resulted in lowering the water tables, the wet meadow drying out, and

sagebrush encroachment, which reduced vegetation production for livestock use and loss of wildlife habitat.

In 1960-61, again in 1989 and 1992, dikes were either built or reconstructed to eliminate the problems and to restore the land to wet meadow. All of the restoration area is fenced and livestock grazing is intensely managed so there is ample vegetation cover to protect the land. The pastures are managed also to enhance wildlife and waterfowl habitats by restricting grazing to short periods during the grazing season.

Continuing west along the forest road you'll come to **Crowder Flat Guard Station**. Visitors are welcome from 10a.m. to 6p.m. The guard station was built in 1919, as an 8-foot by 10-foot log cabin. In 1923 an addition was added, and in 1951 another addition and remodeling took place. This building is now the office for the present guard station. In 1991 new modular barracks, large enough to house 10 people, were built.

Traveling 2 miles south of the Crowder Flat Station, the tour finds Janes Reservoir. Janes has dry camping, fishing, wildlife viewing, and exploration possibilities.

The reservoir is 150 acres in size and is surrounded by a magnificent ponderosa pine forest. Rainbow and brown trout are planted in the reservoir each spring by the California Department of Fish and Game.

Taking a turn onto Forest Service Road 136, the tour goes to **Blue Mountain Lookout**. Visitors are welcome, 10a.m. to 6p.m. Originally built in 1920, the lookout was a small platform in a juniper tree situated on the east point of the mountain. In those days a lookout would spot a fire, call it in to forest headquarters, and then walk or ride horseback to the fire and try to put it out. The tower that now stands was built in 1931. This road is not recommended for large trailers or motor homes.

The Devil's Garden is also home to a 300 to 500 head wild horse herd. The **Devil's Garden Plateau Wild Horse Territory** covers 260,000 acres just off Crowder Flat road, 28 miles north of Alturas.

The wild horses are managed by the Forest Service to maintain a healthy herd and not overgraze the land. Excess wild horses are captured annually by using portable corrals, jute fabric for funnel wings, cowboys, and a helicopter. The captured animals are transported to Litchfield, 90 miles south of Alturas, to the Bureau of Land Management facilities for the wild horse adoption program.

Heading south on **Crowder Flat Road** you'll come to the **Big Sage Reservoir** turnoff. Big Sage is 5,500 acre-feet of fishing, boating, wildlife viewing, and fun. The reservoir is home to some huge channel catfish and largemouth bass. Fishermen like to call it theirs. It was originally constructed in the early 1900's to provide irrigation water to the **Warm Springs Valley** between **Alturas** and **Canby**. The reservoir is now also a primary recreational warm water fishery.

**Devil's Garden Conservation Camp** was built on the site of the Devil's Garden Airport. The conservation camp, a joint operation between the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection and the California Department of Corrections, is a minimum-security adult camp, housing 120 inmates. Various types of services to Modoc County are provided by the inmates in the area of wild land fire control, wildlife habitat improvement, timber improvement, roadside brush removal, and numerous other community projects.

The 6,000-foot airstrip was constructed during World War II, but was seldom used. After the war the field was abandoned and turned over to the city of Alturas, who surrendered it to the Forest Service. The Forest Service made necessary improvements to the airstrip and established it as a tanker base for forest fire-fighting planes. For a while, 2 air tankers were constantly at the airstrip, ready for fires on the Modoc and surrounding forests. The airstrip is no longer in service.

**For More Information:** Visit our Web Site at: <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/modoc/> or call, visit or write

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