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United States Department of Agriculture



QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE MAROON LAKE AREA

HOW WAS THE VALLEY FORMED?

Maroon Valley was formed by glacial erosion followed by stream erosion and landslides. Evidence of erosion is everywhere- from bare and treeless avalanche chutes, to rocky talus slopes, to the layered terraces of gravel in road cuts, to the glacial “hanging valley,” which is about 4 miles down the road on the west side of the valley.

Maroon Lake was formed by mud and debris slides from Sievers Mountain (to the west). These massive earth slides dammed West Maroon Creek, forming the lake. Debris slides still occur in the upper valley. The most recent slide, in 1989, destroyed two campsites in the old Maroon Lake Campground. Unlike avalanches, which are primarily snow, and which generally occur before the road is opened in May, debris slides can occur during any prolonged period of moisture. You can see evidence of these slides as parallel ridges of earth running down to the road. Hikers on the West Maroon Trail will see many of these ridges as they head back toward the West Maroon Parking area.

WHY ARE THEY CALLED THE MAROON BELLS?

Bells refer to their shape. Maroon refers to their color when the light is right.

WHY ARE THE BELLS MAROON?

The rock that forms most of the Maroon Bells is soft red shale and a paler siltstone, called the “Maroon Formation.” The red color comes from tiny iron particles that have been oxidized, or rusted. The Maroon Formation is ancient sea bed deposits (more than 290 million years old) that were compressed under great pressure, then lifted up along with the rest of the Rockies. The formation is more than 3 miles thick in this area! The shale is very soft and can easily break under pressure. Hiking on this type of rock can be very dangerous!! Many people have died or been severely injured by mistaking the fragility of this rock. Please be careful when you hike in the Aspen area.

WHAT IS THE ROCK WITH BIG PINK CRYSTALS?

Underneath the Maroon Formation are some igneous rocks (formed from hot liquids). The large pink crystals (or “phenocrysts”) in the speckled matrix are feldspars that formed slowly- over thousands of years- within the liquid which eventually became the dappled crystalline matrix. Geologists, who are always fond of specific terms, call this type of rock “phenocrystic granodiorite.” This very hard rock underlying the Maroon Formation is why the Bells and nearby Pyramid Peak are so high (all three peaks are more than 14,000’ tall).

ARE THERE FISH IN THE LAKES?

Maroon Lake is stocked by the Colorado Division of Wildlife. To the best of anyone’s knowledge, there are no fish in Crater Lake- it is a “dead” lake.

DID YOU KNOW???? If you decide to hike along the Maroon Creek Trail to West Maroon or East Maroon, the RFTA bus drivers will pick you up as they are headed down valley. Just flag them down. However, please note that the RFTA buses run on a daily basis only during the summer months.