

# St. Bernard Lodge Hiking Guide to Lassen Volcanic National Park





# LASSEN VACATION HIKING GUIDE

## Brought to you by St. Bernard Lodge...

St. Bernard Lodge is an historic and affordable B&B in an ideal location just south of Lassen Volcanic National Park and just west of Lake Almanor. Explore the beautiful surroundings and then relax in our comfortable rooms and enjoy our delicious food. Call us at 530-258-3382 with any questions, visit our webpage ([StBernardLodge.com](http://StBernardLodge.com)), or just stop by to say hello and look at our extensive assortment of regional maps, brochures, and guidebooks.

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This Lassen Vacation Hiking Guide shares the best hiking opportunities in and around Lassen Volcanic National Park.

The Lassen region has everything you could possibly want for your vacation: high mountain lakes for fishing and boating, extensive road systems for both street riding and mountain biking, many opportunities for winter snowshoeing...

But most visitors to Lassen country do a lot of hiking. Lassen Volcanic National Park is the prime destination: dozens of miles of trails wander through forest and meadow to waterfalls and alpine lakes, and some trails climb steeply to the highest points in the park, including Brokeoff Mountain and Lassen Peak. The region surrounding the park also contains many hiking trails, all very beautiful and all less crowded than the park trails.

## Hiking Safety

**1. Know where you're going.** This means having a map, especially if your route involves multiple trail intersections.

**2. Bring the right supplies:**

- map
- ample food and water
- first-aid kit
- rain protection
- map
- headlamp or flashlight with extra bulbs and batteries
- extra clothes
- toilet paper
- sunscreen

Always check the weather report before you go. If thunderstorms threaten, immediately get away from all exposed areas and into the forest. Get to your vehicle as soon as possible.

## About the Hike Descriptions

Each hike description starts with the following information:

**Round-trip distance.** This is the total distance you walk.

**High point.** The highest point of the trip.

**Elevation gain.** The total amount of “up” you do on the trip, taking into account all ups and downs.

**Season.** The approximate period when the trail is free of snow. This can vary greatly from year to year, especially at the higher elevations.

**Difficulty.** A 1-5 scale, with 1 being easy (fairly short with little elevation gain) and 5 being very difficult (longer with a lot of elevation gain).

**Contact.** The name of the agency in charge of the trail. Ask them any questions, including the current status of the trail.

**Driving directions.** These tell you how to get to the trailhead.

**Driving time.** This is how long it takes you to get to the trailhead from the St. Bernard Lodge.

After this info, you’ll find more detailed discussion of how to follow the trail and what you’ll see.

**Dogs.** Dogs are prohibited on all trails in Lassen Volcanic National Park. They are allowed on the other trails described here, except for Subway Cave. Always have a leash with you, make sure your dog is under voice control when off-leash, and, of course, always pick up after your dog.

## Lassen Volcanic National Park Hikes

When you enter the park you’ll pay an entrance fee (good for 7 days) and you’ll get a brochure that contains a map of the park that shows all the trails, lakes, and major landmarks. This should be all you need to do the hikes described here.

There are two visitor centers in the park: the Kom Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center near the south entrance and the Loomis Museum Visitor Center near the north entrance. Both have interesting exhibits explaining the area, and both sell maps, hiking guidebooks, and nature guidebooks covering the park. The Kom Yah-mah-nee visitor center also has a restaurant. Definitely plan to spend time at both during your explorations. If you need food or gas, head to the store in the Manzanita Lake Campground by the Loomis Museum Visitor Center (also deli sandwiches).

## Brokeoff Mountain

**Round-trip distance:** 7.0 miles

**High point:** 9235 feet

**Elevation gain:** 2550 feet

**Season:** mid-July to October

**Difficulty:** 5

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** The trailhead is on the east side of the park highway 5.0 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 29.0 miles south of the junction of Highways 44 and 89.

**Driving time:** 25 minutes

The trail to Brokeoff Mountain passes a wide variety of habitats: willow-lined creeks, small ponds, a lake, red fir forest, and open areas filled with summer wildflowers. The summit of Brokeoff offers views very similar to the much more famous Lassen Peak just to the north, but it sees only a small fraction of the visitors. It's a stiff climb to the top, but you'll be glad you made the effort to do one of the premier hikes in Northern California.



**Brokeoff Mountain**

Cross to the west side of the road to find the trail. It quickly crosses a tributary of Mill Creek that's bordered by mountain alder and willow before traversing a mixed forest of red fir and western white pine. It reaches a pond at 0.8 mile and then rises through lush meadows with a rainbow of wildflowers in late summer.

If you want to visit aptly named Forest Lake, follow the stream you meet at 1.3 miles upslope for a few hundred feet. You won't have any views, but it's a good place to take a rest.

The route now gets steeper as it leaves most of the trees behind, giving you better and better views that extend farther and farther. Ascend along the southern side of Brokeoff Mountain, eventually reaching elevations where only a few whitebark pines and mountain hemlocks can survive.

Reach the summit, elevation 9235 feet, 3.5 miles from the trailhead. As the second-highest peak in Lassen Volcanic National Park, Brokeoff Mountain has outstanding views. A dramatic ridge stretches north to Lassen Peak, with Mount Shasta far beyond. The rest of Lassen Volcanic National Park is to the northeast, with Lake Almanor to the east, the Sierra Nevada to the south, and the Sacramento Valley to the west.

## Mill Creek Falls

**Round-trip distance:** 3.2 miles

**High point:** 6750 feet

**Elevation gain:** 350 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** The trailhead is in the parking lot for the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center and Southwest Campground, on the east side of the park highway 6.0 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 28.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44 and 89. The trail starts on the northeast side of the parking lot, so park near the Visitor Center.

**Driving time:** 25 minutes

Mill Creek Falls is one of the prettiest in Lassen Volcanic National Park: two streams drop down smaller waterfalls to join and create Mill Creek Falls, which then drops 50 feet into a pool. The stream soon becomes part of Mill Creek proper, which is one of the major streams draining the southern Cascades and the northern Sierra Nevada.

This is a great time to explore the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center. There's the gift store and cafe, of course, but there are also numerous exhibits that discuss key natural features of Lassen Volcanic National Park, along with interesting aspects of the region's human history. Don't miss the 20 minute video about the park.



**Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center**

When you're ready to hike, find the trail's beginning near campsite 19. Red firs and lodgepole pines provide shade as you drop gently 0.3 mile to a wooden bridge crossing of West Sulphur Creek, which drains through Sulphur Works upstream (see the next hike below for more on Sulphur Works).

You now ascend past yellow mule ears, a common and beautiful flower in the region that begins blooming in late June, and you'll also see large western white pines (look for the long cones hanging off upper branches). The trail gently rises and falls as it runs easterly; stop occasionally to look behind you at Brokeoff Mountain and Mount Diller, and keep your eyes open for northward views of Mount Conard and Diamond Peak. You'll hear the falls first, but then you'll see them in full glory from the vista point, which you reach at 1.6 miles.

## **Sulphur Works and Ridge Lakes**

**Round-trip distance:** 2.2 miles

**High point:** 8000 feet

**Elevation gain:** 1000 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 4

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park



**Driving directions:** The trailhead is at Sulphur Works, which is 7.0 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 27.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44 and 89, and a mile north of the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center.

**Driving time:** 30 minutes

This is a short and steep hike for those who like a physical challenge and want more solitude. The rewards are substantial: you'll visit two small yet beautiful lakes and you'll have a full view of the most impressive summits in Lassen Volcanic National Park, from Brokeoff Mountain to Lassen Peak.



**Ridge Lakes**

Before you begin the hike, follow your nose the short distance to the fumaroles and mudpots at Sulphur Works. A series of interpretive panels describes how surface water penetrates down to hot rock far below the surface; there it's heated and pressurized before it rises back up to create the surreal landscape around you. Sulphur Works is near the central vent of ancient Mount Tehama, a volcano that once rose over 11,000 feet. Glaciers have eroded most of it; Brokeoff Mountain to the west is the highest and most prominent remaining feature.

Find the Ridge Lakes Trail on the north side of the parking lot. The route rises steeply between two branches of West Sulphur Creek, up, up, up, and more up. You'll soon look down on Sulphur Works, and then later you'll see Brokeoff Mountain. You can also gaze easterly across

the southern portion of the park, and southeasterly at the northern Sierra Nevada.

Continue up past ferns, lupines, mule ears, and spicy scented coyote mint and soon enter a forest of red fir and western white pine, eventually joined by mountain hemlock. Pass through a small open area filled with flowers and then enjoy a view of Mount Diller straight ahead.

Reach the Ridge Lakes 1.0 mile from the trailhead, although it feels farther. The two lakes are connected until late summer, when lowering water levels separate them. The lakes are beautiful, but it's the vista that will captivate you. To the south, Brokeoff Mountain rises to 9235 feet, anchoring a series of mountains stretching north to include Mount Diller, Pilot Peak, Eagle Peak, and finally Lassen Peak, the highest point in the park at 10,457 feet.

If you still have energy and are confident in your hiking skills, head to the northwest side of the lakes and climb 0.3 mile to the ridge. From here you have a full view to the north and west, from Mount Shasta to the Klamath Mountains to the distant Coast Range on the far side of the Sacramento Valley.

## **Bumpass Hell**

**Round-trip distance:** 3.0 miles

**High point:** 8400 feet

**Elevation gain:** 450 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** Find the trailhead on the east side of the park highway, 11.0 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 23.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44 and 89.

**Driving time:** 40 minutes

The large number of cars at the parking lot lets you know that this is a popular hike. There are two good reasons for that: the first is the great views on the way to Bumpass Hell, and the second is the stark volcanic landscape of Bumpass Hell itself, which features boiling pools of water, mud pots, and fumaroles, all accessible by an extensive boardwalk. Bumpass Hell is the largest hydrothermal area west of Yellowstone.

Begin the hike with a full view of Lassen Peak. The path then starts a long southwesterly run. It quickly encounters a vista point. From here you'll see Brokeoff Mountain to the west, with the Coast Range far, far beyond. Mount Conard rises just 3 miles to the south, with the Sierra Nevada farther to the south.

Cross the ridge at 1.0 mile to get the first view of Bumpass Hell below you, and you'll likely smell the acrid scent of hydrogen sulfide. Drop down to a trail fork, where you go left to begin your explorations. Always stay on the boardwalks and watch children very carefully.





**Bumpass Hell**

The 16-acre expanse of Bumpass Hell is created by steam that rises from hot rock deep below. The steam rises through a series of cracks to emerge here as mudpots, fumaroles, and bubbling pools, also staining rocks an impressive array of colors. A series of interpretive signboards explains the whole process.

## **Lassen Peak**

**Round-trip distance:** 5.0 miles

**High point:** 10,457 feet

**Elevation gain:** 2000 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 5

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** Find the large parking area on the west side of the park highway, 12.0 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 22.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44 and 89.

**Driving time:** 50 minutes

Lassen Peak is the major landmark in Lassen Volcanic National Park, and, indeed, is second only to Mount Shasta in far Northern California. This is a challenging hike. The trail rises steadily at a moderate gradient, but it is frequently covered with snow: always hike on the trail, or on the

snow; never walk on bare ground away from the trail. Bring warm clothes to ward off cold air and high winds.



**Lassen Peak from Helen Lake**

The start of the path is obvious. You'll pass some mountain hemlock trees, and then a few stunted whitebark pines. After that, the conditions are too harsh for most plant life, although you will see a few wildflowers later in summer.

Find a steady hiking rhythm and rest when you need to. You'll have excellent long-range views that just get better and better until you finally arrive at the eastern rim of Lassen Peak. The path leads to the right, allowing you a full view of the crater and the ability to scramble the last steep bit to the actual summit.

Lassen Peak had its birth around 27,000 years ago. It erupted spectacularly in May of 1914, first with ash and steam, later with lava chunks. A year later, lava surged out of the crater and down the northeast and west sides, followed a few days later by an ash cloud that descended northeast to finalize the destruction in the Devastated Area far below.

The views from the summit are stupendous. To the near south are Brokeoff Mountain and the northern Sierra Nevada. Lake Almanor is to the southeast, with all of the lakes, ridges, and peaks of Lassen Volcanic National Park to the east. Mount Shasta rises to the far north beyond Crater and Magee peaks, while to the northwest you'll see the distant Klamath Mountains. Forested mountains descend west to the upper Sacramento Valley.

## Terrace, Shadow, and Cliff Lakes

**Round-trip distance:** 3.4 miles

**High point:** 8050 feet

**Elevation gain:** 700 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** Start on the north side of the park highway, 14.0 miles northeast of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 20.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44/89.

**Driving time:** 55 minutes

This hike takes you to three of the prettiest lakes in Lassen Volcanic National Park. Along the route you'll walk through a mixed forest and see Lassen Peak and other nearby mountains.

Start downhill in a mountain hemlock forest and go south 0.2 mile to a trail fork. Turn right and east to continue the easy downhill walking another 0.3 mile to Terrace Lake. The south side of the lake has a grassy area that makes it easy to get into the water, if it's warm enough for swimming, which usually doesn't happen until mid- to late August.

The trail continues its descent to quickly reach deep-blue Shadow Lake. You'll find four kinds of trees here: red firs, mountain hemlocks, western white pines, and lodgepole pines. When you reach the east side of the lake, be sure to look west at Lassen Peak looming just 2 miles away.

Continue descending easterly from Shadow Lake. You'll spot small ponds on the left at 1.3 miles; this is a good place to turn around for another good vista of Lassen Peak. Turn right at a trail fork at 1.5 miles and walk 0.2 mile south to Cliff Lake. The lake is aptly named: from the lake's south shore, a talus-clad steep slope rises up to the summit of Reading Peak, elevation 8701 feet. This is the prettiest and most secluded lake, so plan on spending most of your time here, keeping in mind that you have an uphill climb to get back to the trailhead.

## King's Creek Falls and Sifford Lakes

**Round-trip distance:** 6.3 miles

**High point:** 7280 feet

**Elevation gain:** 500 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** The trailhead is 17.0 miles northeast of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 17.0 miles southeast of the junction of Highways 44 and 89. Park in the lot on the north side of the pavement; the trailhead is on the south side.

**Driving time:** 55 minutes



Kings Creek is perhaps the most beautiful stream in the park. It starts in lush and extensive meadows upstream of the trail before traveling down to sumptuous Kings Creek Falls. This hike takes you to the waterfall before heading to the Sifford Lakes in the park's backcountry. Few people visit the Sifford Lakes, so you're more likely to find some solitude, and the lakes warm up for (chilly) swimming by late summer.

Start on the south side of the road and head east near Kings Creek through meadow and a mixed forest of western white pines, red firs, mountain hemlocks, and lodgepole pines. Reach a trail fork at 0.5 mile and go left (noting that you'll return via the right fork, if you do the entire journey). Go right at 0.7 mile to tread near cascading Kings Creek.

Reach another fork at 1.0 mile. You'll soon go right, but for now go left to quickly reach the viewpoint for Kings Creek Falls, where the white water drops 50 feet with a noisy roar.

Head back to the last fork and go left to explore the Sifford Lakes. (A right takes you back to the trailhead.) Climb 0.6 mile to reach shallow Bench Lake, which often dries up by late summer.

Go another 0.4 mile and turn right at a trail fork, and then go another 0.3 mile and turn left at a second trail fork. Reach the first of the Sifford Lakes after another 0.5 mile. A faint trail continues another 0.5 mile to the second Sifford Lake. Exploring the other lakes requires cross-country travel.

To return, walk back to the trail fork that's 0.5 mile before the first Sifford Lake, where you go left. Go 1.5 miles, cross Kings Creek, and go left again for the last 0.5 mile to the trailhead.

## **Manzanita Lake and Lily Pond**

**Round-trip distance:** 2.9 miles

**High point:** 5925 feet

**Elevation gain:** 100 feet

**Season:** June to October

**Difficulty:** 1

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** Take the turnoff for the Manzanita Lake Campground, which is on the park highway 32.8 miles north of the junction of Highways 36 and 89, and 1.2 miles southeast of the junctions of Highways 44 and 89. Go 0.4 mile and then turn right to the picnic area and the trailhead.

**Driving time:** 1.5 hours

Manzanita Lake is one of the true icons of Lassen Volcanic National Park. Pictures of the lake, with Lassen Peak and Chaos Crags rising starkly beyond, are a staple of magazine articles about the park. This popular trail around the lake is easy and beautiful, and the Lily Pond nature trail is

a logical extension of the excursion. Of course, Loomis Museum is also right there, allowing you to explore its many interesting exhibits.



**Lassen Peak viewed from Manzanita Lake**

Once you find the 1.8-mile-long trail, go left and begin circling the lake clockwise. Quickly leave the boat launch and developed areas behind and start enjoying the natural beauty. As it goes around the lake, the path occasionally enters a forest consisting of Jeffrey pine, sugar pine, lodgepole pine, and white fir, but much of the time you'll be near the water, where black cottonwoods, willows, and mountain alder flourish.

The northwest edge of the lake has the best vista; this is where you'll see Chaos Crags and Lassen Peak reflected in the lake's surface, and it's also an excellent spot to observe the ducks, geese, and the other birds that live here.

On the north shore 1.5 miles into the walk you'll reach a trail fork. A right leads 0.3 mile back to the trailhead. Instead, go left to the parking lot at the Loomis Museum. Spend some time in the museum and then head across the park highway to the Lily Pond nature trail, where you'll find the brochure that describes local natural history. The 0.9-mile loop goes clockwise, first along the shore of Reflection Lake and then to Lily Pond. When you're done, return to the parking lot and beyond to the previous trail fork. Go left for the 0.3 mile level walk to the trailhead.

## Cinder Cone, Painted Dunes, and Snag Lake

**Round-trip distance:** 8.2 miles

**High point:** 6907 feet

**Elevation gain:** 1000 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 4

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** From Highway 36 in Westwood, take Mooney Road (County Road A21). Go 18 miles to Highway 44 and go left. Continue 17 miles and then turn left (south) onto Forest Road 32N21. Drive 6.0 miles to Butte Lake Campground and park near the boat launch area.

**Driving time:** 1.5 hours

Cinder Cone is the prime destination for this hike. After the ascent of its steep flanks, you'll have broad views over much of the park, including the strikingly colored Painted Dunes just below. Most people head back from the summit, but if you have the time and energy, continue on to Snag Lake. Note that this is not a good hike on a hot day: it's exposed to the sun and the ground reflects and radiates a lot of heat. Make sure to bring plenty of water and a good hat.



**Hikers descend into the pit of Cinder Cone**



At the trailhead, take the brochure for the nature trail portion of the initial part of the hike; it describes important details of local and natural history, including the fact that you're walking on the Nobles Emigrant Trail, a route to California for emigrants in the 1850s and 1860s.

Walk beside the edge of basaltic Fantastic Lava Beds and stay to the left at 0.4 mile when a trail heads right to Prospect Peak. Stroll another 0.9 mile to another fork just below Cinder Cone. The longer version of this hike will bring you back by the right-hand path, but now you have to grunt your way up to the top of Cinder Cone, which is not an easy undertaking: just take it one step at a time for the entire 750-foot elevation gain and always stay on the official trail.

The views from the 6907-foot summit make all the effort worthwhile. You'll see all the major peaks in the park, including Prospect Peak, Chaos Crags, Lassen Peak, Brokeoff Mountain, Mount Conard, Reading Peak, and Mount Harkness. Just below are the Fantastic Lava Beds and the Painted Dunes, along with Butte Lake and Snag Lake.

For the longer journey, continue down the south (far) side of Cinder Cone. Go left at 2 trail forks that are close together (a right at either one will lead you to the north side of Cinder Cone and back to the trailhead), and then left again at a third fork that's 0.4 mile south. From here it's a 1.5-mile southeasterly hoof next to Fantastic Lava Beds and the Painted Dunes to the northwest corner of Snag Lake, where you'll find good spots to sit and gaze at the lake and surrounding forested mountains.

When you're ready to return, head back the way you came toward Cinder Cone, going right at the first trail fork and then left at either of the next two trail forks, both of which quickly bring you to the Nobles Emigrant Trail, where you go right for the final 1.9 miles to the trailhead at Butte Lake.

## **Devil's Kitchen and Boiling Springs Lake**

**Round-trip distance:** 5.2 miles

**High point:** 6100 feet

**Elevation gain:** 700 feet

**Season:** June to October

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** First get to Chester on Highway 36. Once there, head north on Feather River Drive, which leaves Highway 36 about 100 feet east of the North Fork Feather River Bridge. Follow signs for Drakesbad from here on out. Turn left onto County Road 312 at 0.7 mile. Bear right at 6.2 miles and continue on CR 312 for 10.4 miles more. When you enter Warner Valley Campground, look for the trailhead for Pacific Crest Trail northbound.

**Driving time:** 1 hour

Want the geothermal theatrics of Bumpass Hell without the crowds? Then this is the hike for you. Devil's Kitchen is a long, long drive from Bumpass Hell, even though the two are separated

by only 6 miles. Though not as spectacular, Devil's Kitchen also has bubbling mud pots, steam jets, and fumaroles. This hike takes you to Devil's Kitchen after it visits nearby Boiling Springs Lake. Note that both destinations have very hot water and surfaces that can badly burn you; always stay on the trail and watch children very closely.

From the trailhead, go west to Hot Springs Creek, which comes from Devil's Kitchen. Pass a meadow full of summer wildflowers before entering a forest of white fir, red fir, Jeffrey pine, lodgepole pine, and incense cedar. You reach two trail forks in quick succession; go left at both, noting that you'll take the right-hand trail at the first fork when you later go to Devil's Kitchen.

At 0.9 mile the smell of hydrogen sulfide coincides with your arrival at Boiling Springs Lake. Steam from the bottom of the lake heats the water to 125 degrees; definitely stay on the trail and well away from the water. You'll also find a fumarole and mud pots, along with a view of Lassen Peak.

Return to the first trail fork, go left, and walk west 1.7 miles to Devil's Kitchen. Follow signs and stay left when a trail comes in from Drakesbad Guest Ranch, and right when a trail heads south to Drake Lake.

A loop trail guides you through the stark wonderland of Devil's Kitchen, where you'll see mudpots, fumaroles, and steam vents. These surface phenomena are caused by steam rising from hot rock far below the surface.

## **Mount Harkness**

**Round-trip distance:** 5.4 miles

**High point:** 8048 feet

**Elevation gain:** 1350 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 3

**Contact:** Lassen Volcanic National Park

**Driving directions:** First get to Chester on Highway 36. Once there, head north on Feather River Drive, which leaves Highway 36 about 100 feet east of the North Fork Feather River Bridge. At 0.7 mile go right onto County Road 318. The pavement lasts for 5.5 miles before CR 318 becomes rough dirt. Reach Juniper Lake Campground at 12.0 miles. Enter the campground and park in the lot on the right. Walk through the campground to find the trailhead beside site 5.

**Driving time:** 1 hour

The Juniper Lake area in the southeast corner of Lassen Volcanic National Park is well worth exploration, and Mount Harkness is its premier hike. It's definitely an effort to make the climb, but the summit views are definitely rewarding. There's also a major wildflower display along the mountain's slopes.

Don't get fooled by your first steps on the path: it starts level but soon begins a substantial climb that doesn't end until you reach the top. You initially walk through forest of white and red firs; higher up you'll see mountain hemlocks and the white firs drop away.

At 1.1 miles you enter an open area with the first broad vistas of the hike; after more forest walking, the trees disappear and you're in open country from here on up. This is where you'll find the most flowers: look for blue lupines and yellow goldenbush, among others.

Reach a trail fork at 1.5 miles and go left. Climb past basalt flows until you reach the cinder cone and the fire lookout at the summit of Mount Harkness at 1.8 miles. To the south you'll see Lake Almanor and the northern Sierra Nevada; to the east are Brokeoff Mountain, Lassen Peak, and Chaos Crags; to the northwest are Hat Mountain, Magee Peak, Burney Mountain, and distant Mount Shasta; to the north is Juniper Lake, with Cinder Cone and Prospect Peak beyond; to the east are the peaks and forests of the Caribou Wilderness.

When you're ready to head down, return to the trail fork. Turn left and drop steeply through forest to a trail junction 1.6 miles from the summit. Go right and northeast along the southern shore of Juniper Lake for the last 1.8 miles back to the Juniper Lake Campground.

## Hikes Near Lassen Volcanic National Park

While Lassen Volcanic National Park is the region's main attraction, there are many other beautiful hiking trails surrounding the park, most at lower elevations that make them accessible much earlier in spring or summer.

There are no entrance fees for any of the hikes described here. Contact the agency in charge for information on obtaining a map; in many instances you can find maps online.

### Subway Cave

**Round-trip distance:** 0.6 mile

**High point:** 4350 feet

**Elevation gain:** 50 feet

**Season:** April to November

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Hat Creek Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

**Driving directions:** Find the Subway Cave access road on the east side of Highway 89 about 0.3 mile north of the junction of Highways 89 and 44 East (across from Cave Campground) and go 0.2 mile to the parking area.

**Driving time:** 1 hour, 40 minutes

Subway Cave is one of the best examples of a lava tube in Northern California. You'll walk 1300 feet through the cave, with the option to either return the way you came or take two different



trails. You must follow all posted rules for entering the cave. In addition, bring warm clothes (it's cold in there, even in summer) and bring at least two flashlights or headlamps per person. Also watch your head, especially if you're tall.



**Entrance to Subway Cave**

Descend the steps to enter the cave. Numerous lighted signs explain how the cave formed and other interesting aspects of natural history. As you progress, you'll pass features with intriguing names like Stubtoe Hall and Lucifer's Cul-de-Sac.

Come out of the cave's southeast end at Rattlesnake Collapse. You now have three options. First, you can return back through the cave. Second, you can take the trail to the right that travels above the cave to the cave entrance. Third, you can take the slightly longer path to the left that loops clockwise back to the parking area. Both the aboveground options give good views of surrounding mountains, including the Hat Creek Rim to the east.

## Spencer Meadow National Recreation Trail

**Round-trip distance:** 13.0 miles

**High point:** 6600 feet

**Elevation gain:** 2150 feet

**Season:** June to October

**Difficulty:** 4

**Contact:** Almanor Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

**Driving directions:** Find the trailhead and its large parking area on the north side of CA Highway 36 about 5.0 miles east of junction of Highways 36 and 89, 0.3 mile east of Childs Meadows Resort, and 7.2 miles northwest of the junction of Highways 36 and 32.

**Driving time:** 10 minutes

Beautiful forest, lush meadows, a waterfall: there's a lot to love about this hike, especially if you enjoy vigorous climbing. Because the trailhead is on Highway 36 at a relatively low elevation, you can do at least the lower reaches even in late fall and early spring, as long as there's no snow.



**Child's Meadow viewed from the Spencer Meadows Trail**

Start climbing in a mixed forest of ponderosa pine, incense cedar, and white fir, along with a few sugar pine and black oak. At 0.6 mile you'll cross a seasonal stream and then reach a trail

fork at 1.8 miles near another seasonal stream. The right fork is the return route; for now go left and begin a clockwise loop. At 2.3 miles enjoy a viewpoint that allows an excellent view of verdant Childs Meadow and many nearby mountains.

Continue up past a meadow and enjoy views of Brokeoff Mountain and Mount Diller in Lassen Volcanic National Park. When you hear the roar of water at 5.4 miles, take the short side trail on the left to view a 50-foot waterfall on Canyon Creek. Push farther up to arrive at a trail fork at 6.8 miles and go another 300 yards to broad Spencer Meadow. In addition to the lush grass and a few flowers, you'll also see Mount Conard and the upper portion of Lassen Peak.

Head back to the trail fork and go left. Reach a meadow at 8.1 miles, go right at a trail fork at 8.6 miles, pass another meadow, and then reach another trail fork at 11.2 miles, the first you encountered on the hike. Go left for the last 1.8 miles to Highway 36 and your vehicle.

## Deer Creek

**Round-trip distance:** 4.6 miles

**High point:** 3250 feet

**Elevation gain:** 650 feet

**Season:** March to November

**Difficulty:** 2

**Contact:** Almanor Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

**Driving directions:** From the intersection of Highways 36 and 32 between Mineral and Chester, drive south on Highway 32 for 11 miles. Park in the lot on the left side just before Highway 32 crosses Deer Creek on a bridge (1.6 miles southwest of Potato Patch Campground). If you're coming from Chico, take Highway 32 for 40 miles.

**Driving time:** 15 minutes

This is a beautiful hike that's accessible nearly year-round, being only occasionally covered by snow in winter. Spring is the best time to catch the wildflowers, while autumn has beautiful colors. Summer can be hot, but allows you to take a swim in the clear and cold waters. You'll find numerous side trails down to the creek so you can sit or swim or fish.

Carefully cross Highway 32 to find the trailhead. Begin the journey in a forest of Douglas fir, ponderosa pine, incense cedar, and canyon live oak. You soon cross the first of several attractive streams that empty into Deer Creek, just before reaching a rock outcropping with a good view of the stream and the canyon.

At 0.4 mile you'll pass a small cave and then walk a relatively level stretch near a set of small waterfalls at 1.1 miles. The main highlight of the hike arrives at 1.6 miles: Lower Deer Creek Falls. Take either of two short trails to get a full view of the 15-foot cataract and the steep volcanic canyon walls rising on both sides.



The path continues past canyon live oak and spicy-scented California laurel. It eventually drops steeply to end at Forest Road 27N08 at 2.3 miles.

## Lake Almanor Recreation Trail

**Round-trip distance:** up to 19 miles

**High point:** 4570 feet

**Elevation gain:** 50 feet

**Season:** March to November

**Difficulty:** 1

**Contact:** Almanor Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

**Driving directions:** First reach the intersection of Highways 36 and 89 west of Chester. Turn south on Highway 89 and drive 4.3 miles to where you see Humbug-Humboldt Road on the right. Instead turn left to quickly reach the first of several access points to the trail.

**Driving time:** 15 minutes

This paved and level path along and near the western shore of Lake Almanor is popular with hikers, bikers, bird watchers, and people who like to fish. There are also excellent opportunities for summer swimming.



Lake Almanor

There are several good places to access the Lake Almanor Recreation Trail that you'll find by continuing south on Highway 89. Look for roads to the left that go to campgrounds and day-use areas; all will get you to the trail, and they typically start at or very near the lakeshore.

Wherever you begin, you'll experience two main habitats. The first is a mixed forest of ponderosa pine, white fir, and incense cedar that often comes right down to the shore of the lake. The second is the lakeshore itself, where you'll have open views of the water, Dyer Mountain to the northeast, Lassen Peak to the northwest, and forested ridges in all directions. The shoreline is also a great place to watch a variety of birds. You'll see ducks and geese, of course, but you'll also spy osprey and even bald eagles looking to snatch a fish from the lake.

## **Hay Meadow and the Caribou Wilderness**

**Round-trip distance:** 7.1 miles

**High point:** 7050 feet

**Elevation gain:** 750 feet

**Season:** July to October

**Difficulty:** 3

**Contact:** Almanor Ranger District, Lassen National Forest

**Driving directions:** Go east from Chester on Highway 36. Once you reach the eastern edge of Lake Almanor, go 3.5 miles and then turn left onto paved Forest Road 10 (County Road A13 is on the other side of 36). When the pavement ends, turn left onto FR 30N25. Follow this road 1.6 miles to the Hay Meadow trailhead.

**Driving time:** 50 minutes

If you want to get away from the crowds in Lassen Volcanic National Park, this is the hike for you. The route travels through old-growth forest as it passes by of lakes large and small in the Caribou Wilderness.

Start in flower-dotted Hay Meadow and head northwest to Indian Meadow. The trail then enters a forest of red fir, white fir, western white pine, and lodgepole pine, the common tree species at this elevation.

Arrive at a trail fork at 1.2 miles, where you start a clockwise loop. The right-hand trail is the return route, but for now you go left, and then left again at 1.5 miles. Continue north and arrive at 1.7 miles at the first of the dozen or so beautiful lakes of the trek, this one aptly named Beauty Lake. Reach Evelyn Lake at 2.4 miles and Posey Lake at 3.1 miles.

Head downhill and east to another trail junction at 3.7 miles. A short jaunt to the north (left) quickly brings you to Long Lake, which has good views of Caribou Wilderness ridges and summits, including North Caribou Peak and South Caribou Peak.

Back at the trail fork, head east to complete the loop, staying to the left at another trail fork that appears shortly after this one. Coast downhill to encounter the first of the Hidden Lakes at

4.2 miles; side paths lead from the main trail to several of the unseen lakes. Complete the loop at 5.8 miles when you reach the first trail fork of the hike. Turn left and descend south 1.2 miles back to the trailhead.

## **Bizz Johnson Trail**

**Round-trip distance:** 13.4 miles

**High point:** 4660 feet

**Elevation gain:** 450 feet

**Season:** April to October

**Difficulty:** 1

**Contact:** Lassen Land and Trail Trust (530-257-3252); Eagle Lake Field Office, Bureau of Land Management

**Driving directions:** Reach the Devil's Corral trailhead on the south side of Highway 36, 14 miles east of Westwood and 7 miles west of Susanville (and just a bit east of the Susan River bridge). To find the trailhead in Susanville, go south on Weatherlow Street, which turns into Richmond Road and leads to the Susanville railroad depot, which has a visitor center and informational displays. Lassen Rural Bus ([www.lassentransportation.org/a/Lassen-Rural-Bus-LRB.php](http://www.lassentransportation.org/a/Lassen-Rural-Bus-LRB.php)) runs Monday through Saturday and allows you to set up a one-way trip.

**Driving time:** 35-50 minutes, depending on trailhead

Explore the beautiful canyon of the Susan River on this wide trail on an old railroad bed. This hike is described as beginning at Devil's Corral, but you can also do it from the other direction by starting in Susanville at the railroad depot. Note that this is also a great ride for cyclists, so expect to share the route with them. The trail is especially beautiful in the fall when the leaves turn vibrant colors.

The Bizz Johnson Trail is named after the California congressional representative who spearheaded turning this abandoned section of the Fernley and Lassen Railroad into the broad and flat path you see before you. As you walk, you'll pass through areas that are essentially high desert, with western juniper, antelopebrush, and sage brush, and also through areas that get more moisture and have typical forest trees like Douglas fir, white fir, and ponderosa pine. The abundance of water beside the river explains the presence of willows and cottonwoods there.

Reach the first of several bridges across the Susan River at 1.3 miles. Pass the first good swimming hole just before entering the first of two short tunnels at 1.7 miles. The path continues east to reach the outskirts of Susanville at 6.0 miles and then the Susanville railroad depot at 6.7 miles.

Note that the Bizz Johnson Trail has a total length of 25.4 miles. In addition to the segment described above, you can access the western terminus of the trail at Mason Station by taking Highway 36 to Westwood and turning left (north) onto Mooney Road (County Road A21). Go



2.9 miles and then turn right onto McCoy Road for the final 0.4 mile. The segment of the trail from here to the Devil's Corral trailhead has the same gentle 3% grade.