

This Day in History... May 22, 1902

Crater Lake National Park

Oregon's Crater Lake National Park was established on May 22, 1902. It's America's fifth-oldest national park, the only national park in Oregon, and is home to the deepest lake in the country – Crater Lake.

Crater Lake was once an enormous volcano called Mount Mazama. It began forming 400,000 years ago, around the same time as the rest of the Cascade volcanic range. Mount Mazama's frequent eruptions caused it to grow to a height of 11,000 feet, until around 5700 BC.



1935 special printing issued imperforate with no gum

Geologists estimate it was around this time that a major eruption took place, causing Mount Mazama to implode. The volcano had erupted with a blast 42 times more powerful than the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens. The top 5,000 feet of volcano collapsed, and the bottom was sealed by lava flows. A massive caldera (crater) was left behind and filled with about 4.6 trillion gallons rainwater and snowmelt over the course of about 740 years, creating Crater Lake.

Local Native American tribes witnessed Mount Mazama's collapse and included it in their legends. The Klamath Indians believed that Crater Lake was the home of the spirits and that the lake's waters had healing qualities.

The lake first became known to non-natives on June 12, 1853. Three gold prospectors found the long, sloping mountain while searching for food. They were surprised by the lake's vibrant blue color and named it Deep Blue Lake. The site where they first laid eyes on the lake became known as Discovery Point. However, the search for gold held higher priority for the settlers at the time and the discovery was largely forgotten. In time, it came to be called Crater Lake.

William Gladstone Steel is credited as one of the park's greatest champions. He first came to the lake in 1870 and spent the rest of his life and fortune in efforts to make Crater Lake a national park. He encouraged scientific lake surveys and named many of the surrounding landmarks, including Wizard Island, Llao Rock, and Skell Head.



From the 2018 O Beautiful sheet

Crater Lake as America's fifth national park.

Crater Lake is known for the clarity, purity, and intense blue color of its water. The lake is six miles across at its widest point and covers twenty square miles. Because the lake is so deep, its temperature remains fairly constant throughout the year. It rarely freezes over and makes for striking views in all four seasons. Visitors can see clearly 134 feet into its depths. Today Crater Lake is the second-deepest lake in North America and the ninth-deepest in the world. It is surrounded by miles of unbroken cliffs ranging from over five hundred to nearly two thousand feet in height.

One neat feature of Crater Lake is the "Old Man of the Lake." The "Old Man" is a 30-foot-tall tree stump that has been bobbing vertically in the lake since it was first noticed in 1896. The "Old Man" wanders around – it has been found floating in all parts of the lake. Geologists have tracked its movements all over the lake, and boaters report its location, for both reasons of safety and curiosity.



From the 1934 National Parks issue



Crater Lake was honored on the Wonders of America sheet for being the nation's deepest lake.

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