

GEOLOGY: Sisters Country is a living laboratory

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shadow of the North Sister, one of Central Oregon's most impressive volcanoes. As some of his pupils enjoyed a refreshing swim in the mountain lake, Cribb commented, "Most of these students have never seen a volcano before. After they go back, they are better students for having been here."

Graduate assistant Tyler Smith echoed Cribb's feelings about the importance of seeing geology in the real world, not just in textbooks. "The best geologists are the ones who have seen the most rocks!" he said. Smith, from Franklin, Tennessee, is immersed in graduate studies that focus on environmental geosystems.

One student on the trip who had seen a volcano before is Emily Cunningham, of Knoxville, Tennessee. This is her second trip to Oregon, and she is doing an undergraduate thesis on three volcanic buttes between Mt. Hood and Mt. Jefferson. She was clearly enthusiastic about this summer's learning opportunity and her ongoing studies of Olallie, Clear Lake, and Pinhead Buttes in the northern part of Oregon's Cascade mountains.

Of these, Olallie Butte is the largest of the three. At more than 7,000 feet in elevation, it is also the tallest volcano between Mt. Hood and Mt. Jefferson, the two highest volcanoes in Oregon.

Olallie Butte is a shield volcano. Shield volcanoes are formed from highly liquid lava flows rather than



PHOTO PROVIDED

Led by Prof. Warner Cribb (far right), aspiring vulcanologists from Middle Tennessee State University learn about the volcanoes of Central Oregon.

explosive ones. As a result, a shield volcano typically has gently sloping flanks, giving it the appearance of a shield lying on the ground. Olallie Butte, however, is an exception in that it is unusually steep-sided. During the high-country snow season, Olallie Butte is the snow-covered knob-like peak visible north of Mt. Jefferson. The peak is mostly on the Warm Springs Indian Reservation.

Referred to as a geology field course, this educational program gives MTSU students the opportunity to earn undergraduate credits toward their degrees. The three-week course started in Portland; and the class's first stop was at Mt. Hood, followed by visits to the areas surrounding Mt. Jefferson and the Three Sisters. Those visits were to be followed by a stop at Newberry National Volcanic Monument and, of course, Crater Lake National Park. The students have had the additional experience of camping amidst the very mountains they came to study.

The course will continue with a trip to Mount St.

Helens, where the students will have the unique opportunity to observe that volcano's more recent activity and have the opportunity to climb the south rim of the mountain. The last stop on the vulcanology tour will be at Mount Rainier, and the students will have one last day in the Northwest in Portland before returning to Tennessee.

MTSU was established in 1911 as a teachers college in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. Today, the school is organized into eight colleges that serve more than 20,000 undergraduate students. Additionally, a graduate college offers programs in nearly 40 fields.

For his part, Prof. Cribb seems to have a special affinity for Sisters, and he indicated that he hopes to log even more Sisters time in the future. He also related an interesting encounter while visiting his daughter, a senior — and geology major, of course — at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He was wearing a Sisters T-shirt, and a Vanderbilt student came up to tell him that she graduated from Sisters High School.

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