

# Painted Hills and Fossil Beds

The Painted Hills Unit of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument gained some fame last year when it was named one of the “7 Wonders of Oregon” by Travel Oregon.

Sweeping bands of colors in pink, red, orange and gold show off nature’s paintbrush on these rolling hills.

The changing light throughout the day dramatically affects the hues, but visitors can expect the best conditions for photography in the late afternoon.

The Painted Hills Unit is located nine miles northwest of Mitchell with entrance on Burnt Ranch Road, six miles north of its junction with Highway 26.

While there is no visitor center at this unit, there is a picnic area and several trails, including the Painted Cove Trail.

John Day Fossil Beds National Monument is divided into three units: Sheep Rock in Grant County, and Clarno and Painted Hills in Wheeler County.

The Thomas Condon Paleontology Center is the perfect jumpoff site when exploring the wonders of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument. It is located in the Sheep Rock Unit.

To find the visitor center from Dayville, travel seven miles west on Highway 26. In Picture Gorge, turn north onto Highway 19 and travel about two miles to the center.

This visitors center offers an extensive fossil collection with the feel of prehistoric times brought to life with murals and animal sounds.

A paleontologist can usually be seen at work in the laboratory, chipping carefully away at embedded fossils – zoomed in, on a widescreen TV mounted on the wall.

Across the highway from the visitor center is the historic Cant Ranch Museum, which also serves as the Fossil Beds headquarters.

The museum was once the home of James and Elizabeth Cant, who bought the land, approximately 700 acres, from the Officer family in 1910. The museum displays many of the family’s original furnishings, as well as other artifacts. The property features the River Trail and Sheep Rock Overlook Trail.

A fascinating Story in Stone hike, three miles north of the visitors center, offers breathtaking views of blue-green claystone formations which contain fossils. The trail is 1/4 mile, round trip.

Visitor Center hours are 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. seven days a week. On Sept. 2, after Labor Day, the hours change to 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Cant Ranch Museum is usually open Monday through Thursday, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. For more information, call 541-987-2333 or visit [www.nps.gov/joda](http://www.nps.gov/joda).

The Fossil Beds are located in a sparsely populated region of Oregon; many areas have no cell service, and gas stations are few and far between. Carry maps, plenty of food and water, and fill your gas tank at every opportunity.



A visitor walks through the Blue Basin near the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center at the John Day Fossil Beds.

NPS Photo/Scott Rimer

The Painted Hills, displaying nature’s paint brush, are now recognized as one of the Seven Wonders of Oregon by Travel Oregon.