

Painted Hills live up to billing

National monument offers stunning vistas

By Kathy Aney
EO Media Group

The Painted Hills have beckoned to me for years.

I just never seemed to get to that part of Central Oregon. When my husband, Bill, started planning a fishing trip on the John Day River, however, I realized the national monument was just down the road. We arrived at our campsite last Saturday and pitched our tents, and then Bill and our son-in-law, Anton, set out to the river where they would launch our drift boat and happily hook smallmouth bass for much of the afternoon.

My daughter Lindsay and I set out for a half-hour drive to the Painted Hills, 9 miles north of Mitchell. On the way, I asked Lindsay to describe the hills since she'd seen them on another trip. They are beautiful and colorful, she said, and almost cartoonish in their exaggerated hues, lumps and swirls.

"Cartoonish," I mused.

I rolled the word around in my brain, but it wasn't until I saw my first painted hill that her description actually made sense. The otherworldly land-



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Millions of years of geologic history are on display in the multi-hued layers of the Painted Hills near Mitchell.

scape seemed as if Mother Nature had dialed up the vibrancy and saturation of the yellow, red and golden layers of stratified clay. Mounds and moguls filled the scene, some appearing as whipping cream just as it gets thick and

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The otherworldly Painted Hills attracted about 75,000 visitors last year, up 61 percent since Travel Oregon named the site one of the Seven Wonders of Oregon.



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Flowers wave in the breeze at the fringe of the Painted Hills.



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A tourist sets up a shot of the Painted Hills in Central Oregon near Mitchell.

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