

VISTAS

Continued from Page C8

the beaters make ripples and folds.

I could imagine a Dr. Seuss character such as the Lorax, Sam-I-Am or Horton the Elephant sauntering into the scene. Cartoonish and stunningly beautiful.

We learned that the bands of color represent changes in climate in the last 32-35 million years. The red strata came from more tropical times, and the yellows indicate a drier and cooler climate. Black streaks and stains indicated manganese, likely left by plants. The colors intensify during rainstorms.

We pulled out our cameras and stayed absorbed in photographing the scene as we slowly walked the half mile Painted Hills Overlook Trail out and back. We passed knots of other gawkers who seemed mesmerized by the view. Judging by the accents, many were foreign. A large group from India was visiting this day.

The superintendent of the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument (which contains the Painted Hills and is administered by the National Park Service) said tourist numbers jumped at the Painted Hills after Travel Oregon in 2013 named the site as one of the Seven Wonders of Oregon.

"Visitation has gone up significantly since then," said Superintendent Shelley Hall.

She said the number of visitors rose from 45,849 people to 74,873 in 2015. Hall attributed some of the spike to mild winters and the low price of gas, but suspects that the Travel Oregon designation spurred much of the gain. She has noticed a definite increase in both domestic and foreign visitors.

The superintendent said increased visitor traffic has created challenges at the national monument. Her staff worries more about the fragile environment, but acknowledged that people are generally pretty respectful. It's really the little things that cause extra angst, she said. The toilet paper in the visitor center bathroom, for example, now must be resupplied multiple times each day, whereas before once every day or two was enough. Visitors can remain happily oblivious to the logistics and the extra expense, though — they get to gaze at the magnificent scene free of



Lindsay Chiono strolls a short boardwalk that is part of the Painted Cove Trail in the Painted Hills Unit near Mitchell.

EO Media Group photos/Kathy Aney



A tourist sits on a bench and gazes at the Painted Hills in Central Oregon.

charge. They must merely heed signs that instruct hikers to stick to the trail and not put pressure on the delicate ecosystem.

Lindsay and I hiked up the 1.6-mile Carroll Rim Trail, navigating a series of switchbacks to a high place where we got a panoramic view of the Painted Hills, Sutton Mountain and a large swath of the area. We weren't alone, but I didn't really care. I felt strangely bonded with all these other visitors in our appreciation of this jewel of Oregon.

Our last micro hike was the Painted Cove Trail, a quarter-mile loop that allows walkers to get close enough to eyeball the pockmarked surface of the colorful rock. Two other short hikes include the Leaf Hill Trail, the site of paleontological research, and the Red Scar Knoll Trail, an out-and-back trek to a multi-colored knoll.

As we drove back to our camp site to sip wine and listen to stories of bass, I marinated in our recent adventure. Yes, I thought, the Painted Hills had lived up to their billing.



The Painted Hills have colorful layers of stratification that correspond to different geological periods.



The late afternoon sun casts long shadows as Kathy Aney and Lindsay Chiono get a close-up look at the colorful multi-layered rock as they follow a boardwalk trail.

**Log Cabin ESPRESSO**

Open Mon - Fri 6:30-5 • Sat 8-2  
Closed Sun

Drive up window at John Day Polaris  
821 W Hwy., 26 • 541-575-5778

**Burnt River MARKET & MOTEL**

**Welcome Travelers!**

Cafe with full menu  
Breakfast, Lunch & Dinner  
Served Daily!  
Groceries • Snacks • Non-ethanol fuel & more

304 Main St., Unity • 541-446-3660  
Mon - Sat 7am -7pm • Sun 8am -6pm

**MARIA'S Traditional Mexican Food**

Open Tue - Sat  
Noon to 9 p.m.

295 S CANYON CITY BLVD.,  
CANYON CITY • 541-575-0777

**The Corner Cup**

Open Late  
Free WiFi

- Coffee • Hot Drinks • Smoothies
- Tea • Cold Drinks • Baked Goods

100 E Main at stoplight, John Day • 541-792-0425

**ROUND BARN VISITOR CENTER**

51955 Lava Bed Rd. • Diamond, OR  
888-493-2420

- Area Information
- Family Museum
- Drinks & Snacks
- Saddle Pads
- Team Roping Ropes
- Roping Gloves

**Spectacular Gift Shop**

**Do you have an upcoming event?**  
Rent the Canyon City Community Hall for birthdays, wedding receptions or family get-togethers!

For more information, call City Hall at 541-575-0509

101 S Canyon City Blvd., Canyon City  
541-575-0362

**Come get a glimpse of Canyon City's past at the Grant County Historical Museum**

Located downtown, steps away from restaurants, shops & antiques.

**HISTORIC HOTEL PRAIRIE**

112 Front St. • Prairie City • 541-820-4800  
www.hotelprairie.com • hotelprairie@ortelco.net

- Charming Affordable Rooms
- Free Secure Wi-Fi
- Cable TV • A/C
- Beer and Wine Bar
- Tesla and Universal Charging Stations

**YOU LOVE OUR LUNCH, SO COME TRY OUR BREAKFAST!**

**SUBWAY** eat fresh.

Subway of John Day • 121 S Canyon Blvd.  
Phone: 541-575-0782 • Order online at subway.com

**OUTDOOR HEADQUARTERS**

No matter what your game is, we've got it covered!

**ACE Hardware**

The helpful place.

652 W Main, John Day • 541-575-0549