

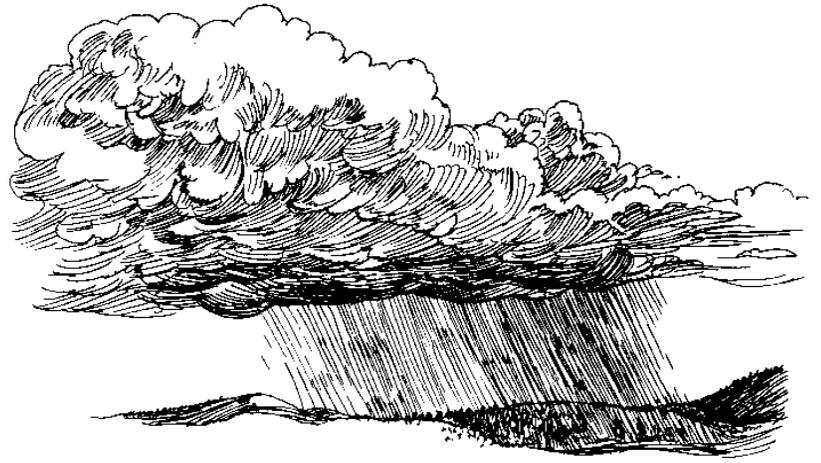
# Craters of the Moon

National Park Service  
Bureau of Land Management  
U.S. Department of the Interior



Craters of the Moon National  
Monument and Preserve

## Weather & Climate



### Weather at Craters of the Moon

At Craters of the Moon a harsh volcanic landscape is matched by an equally punishing climate. Intense summer sun sears the black lava, generating surface temperatures up to 170 °F (76 °C) and air temperatures in the 90s (mid 30s °C). An elevation of 6,000 feet (1,829 m) offers some relief from the heat of high summer, making mornings and evenings a comfortable time to explore more extensively.

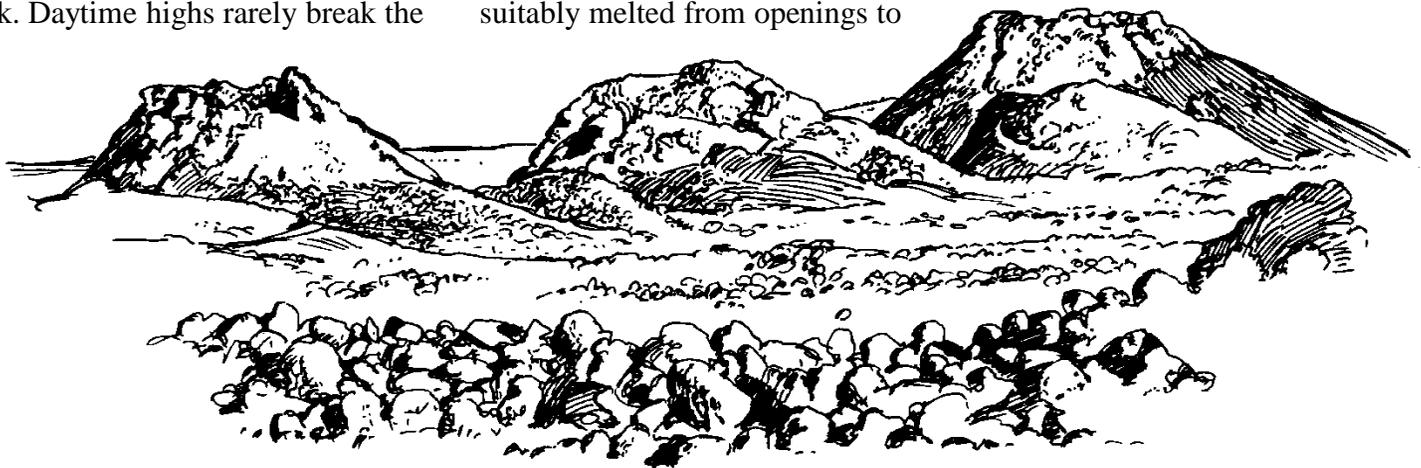
Winter at Craters of the Moon is the opposite extreme, with a soft blanket of white punctuated by jagged black rock. Daytime highs rarely break the

freezing mark in December and January, with subzero lows common. When snow conditions permit—typically December through late March—the loop road becomes a groomed trail for those on skis or snowshoes to experience the silence of the snow-covered lava fields.

Spring and fall offer moderate temperatures with variable weather. The loop road usually opens to vehicle traffic in mid-April, with most trails becoming snow-free shortly after. The Cave Area opens in May, once snow and ice have suitably melted from openings to

allow safe access. Late May or June offer the best times to see wildflowers, bursting forth from black cinder slopes in an array of pinks, whites, yellows, and more.

Fall is perhaps the most comfortable time of year to visit, with warm days, cool nights, and few crowds. As periodic snows in spring and fall can close the loop road temporarily, it is advisable to contact the visitor center at (208) 527-1335 for current conditions.



### Weather Averages

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Annual
Average High Temperature (°F)	29	34	42	54	65	75	85	83	72	59	41	30	<b>56</b>
(°C)	-1.8	0.9	5.4	11.9	18.3	23.7	29.4	28.3	22.1	15	4.8	-1.7	<b>13.1</b>
Average Low Temperature (°F)	10	14	21	29	37	45	53	51	41	31	21	12	<b>30</b>
(°C)	-12	-10	-6.3	-1.9	2.8	7.1	11.4	10.3	5.1	-0.3	-6.2	-11	<b>-0.9</b>
Average Total Precipitation (in)	2.1	1.6	1.2	1.1	1.7	1.2	0.7	0.8	0.8	0.9	1.3	2	<b>15.4</b>
(cm)	5.4	4	3.1	2.7	4.2	3	1.7	2	2.1	2.4	3.3	5.1	<b>39.1</b>
Average Total Snowfall (in)	22.6	17.3	9.2	4.9	2	0	0	0	0.4	1.7	10.1	21.4	<b>89.6</b>
(cm)	57.4	43.9	23.4	12.4	5.1	0	0	0	1	4.3	25.7	54.4	<b>227.6</b>
Average Snow Depth (in)	20	25	18	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	11	<b>7</b>
(cm)	50.8	63.5	45.7	7.6	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.1	27.9	<b>17.8</b>

The figures above reflect the 50-year average ending in 2008.

## Climate

Although weather may influence visits to Craters of the Moon, climate is responsible for the land and life found here. The monument's dry climate is typical of the high desert, with most precipitation coming through winter snows.

Year-round aridity preserves the delicate lava features, as moisture has little chance to erode the rock into

soil for plants. The result is a landscape largely free of plant life on 2,000 year old lava flows that appear startlingly fresh.



*Remains of the Triple Twist Tree along North Crater Flow Trail.*

## Life in an Extreme Environment

Little precipitation. Drying winds. Extreme temperatures. It all seems like a recipe for a lifeless landscape. Yet a variety of plants and animals eke out a living provided they find some way to tolerate, avoid, or overcome these obstacles.

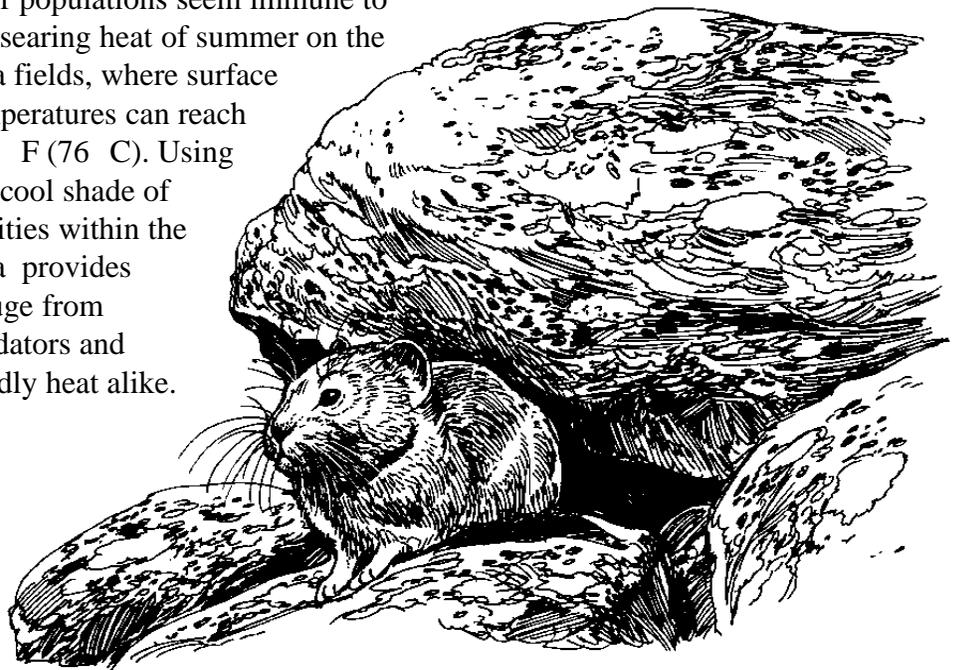
If any plant symbolizes the arid West, it is sagebrush. It and other drought-tolerant shrubs and grasses thrive at Craters of the Moon where rocky lava flows give way to cinder fields and hidden soil. Sagebrush employs a web of roots near the surface coupled with a few deep ones to supply water during periods of extended drought.

To reduce its demand for moisture the plant grows two very different sets of leaves, making the most of what little water is available. Large three-lobed leaves grown during moist springtime conditions are dropped by midsummer and replaced with smaller leaves to minimize water loss during the rest of the year.

On the other hand, the pika—a small cranny-dwelling cousin to the rabbit—thrives at Craters of the Moon despite climatic conditions that should drive the animal into the mountains. Pikas typically make their home in the small, safe crevices of rocky talus slopes high in the mountains. Unable to tolerate air temperatures above 80 F (27 C), their populations seem immune to the searing heat of summer on the lava fields, where surface temperatures can reach 170 F (76 C). Using the cool shade of cavities within the lava provides refuge from predators and deadly heat alike.

They venture out in search of food at dawn and dusk, when temperatures are milder.

Pikas at Craters of the Moon face an uncertain future as global warming may lead to an ever hotter and drier climate locally.



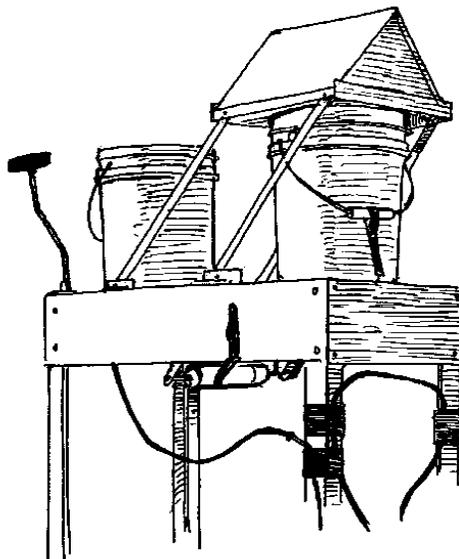
*A pika at home on the lava flows.*

## Scientific Monitoring

Though far from big cities, air quality at Craters of the Moon is influenced by pollution sources near and far. Pollution impairs everything from plant growth to scenic views.

Several programs currently study climate-related data at Craters of the Moon. Rain and air samples are collected weekly and tested to measure ozone, mercury, and acid precipitation levels within the monument.

Because of the relatively pristine environment found at Craters of the Moon, the monument recently became a host site for the US



*Monitoring equipment captures rain and snow samples that are analyzed for pollution in the atmosphere.*

Climate Reference Network program. Host sites collect a variety of weather-related data including temperature, precipitation, solar radiation, and surface winds. Spanning five decades and with sites located throughout the country, the data will provide scientists with the most accurate information to date on emerging climate trends across North America.

To learn more about ongoing climate monitoring at Craters of the Moon, visit [www.nps.gov/crmo/naturescience/climate.htm](http://www.nps.gov/crmo/naturescience/climate.htm).