

GUIDE TO THE MONO LAKE TUFA STATE NATURAL RESERVE
PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve, located in Mono County, is comprised of several discontinuous land parcels spaced at irregular intervals around the Mono Lake shoreline. Encompassed by the larger Inyo National Forest and directly adjacent to Mono Basin National Forest Scenic Area and Mono Lake County Park, the state park unit is less than two miles north of the census-designated place of Lee Vining. The park is accessible by car via Picnic Shortcut Road and U.S. Route 395.

Prior to the water-diversion activities of the City of Los Angeles and the conservation battle that followed, Mono Lake had existed for over one million years, fed by rich salt- and mineral-laden Sierra streams. The lake basin provided a seasonal home to the Kucadikadi, a band of Northern Paiute, for thousands of years. Their name translating to “eaters of the brine fly pupae,” the Kucadikadi also subsisted on several varieties of local waterfowl, jackrabbits, deer, mountain sheep, and an abundance of local plants, seeds, and roots. The area not only served the tribe as a summer home, but also as an embarkation point by which to trade with other groups across the Sierra mountain range. Today, many Kucadikadi members are formally enrolled in such federally recognized tribes as the Paiute, the Washoe, the Yokuts, the Miwok, and the Western Mono Tribe, while others seek recognition as the Sierra Southern Miwok and the Mono Lake Indian Community.

In 1913, the City of Los Angeles first diverted water from the Owens River into the Los Angeles Aqueduct to sustain the fast-growing metropolis. By 1941, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, requiring ever more water resources for its expansive population, extended the aqueduct into the Mono Basin. As a result, by 1982 the lake had reduced by nearly a third of its 1941 level, exposing roughly 17,000 acres of recessional lands—exposed lakebed land below the elevation of 6,417 feet above sea level. Concerned by the deleterious effects to the lake’s ecosystem, as well as the hazards of wind-blown alkali dust on local air quality, in 1978 the Mono Lake Committee formed and partnered with the National Audubon Society to wage legal conservation efforts to protect the steadily diminishing resource. In 1982, the State of California acquired the discontinuous shoreline parcels in order to preserve the rare tufa columns in the recessional lands; it classified the park unit a state reserve via legislation that year and later changed it to “state natural reserve” via legislation in 2004. On September 28, 1994, the State Water Resources Control Board issued an order to preserve Mono Lake and its tributary streams, a policy intended to raise the water level to its historic level.

California State Parks, in coordination with the U.S. Forest Service and the Friends of Mono Lake Reserve (a subsidiary of the Bodie Foundation), preserves and interprets valuable natural resources at Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve (**Figure 1**). To preserve and provide public access to the rare tufa columns, the park includes ranger-guided walks along a constructed boardwalk, as well as the jointly owned and

operated Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center. Camping facilities are available at nearby Inyo National Forest as the state park unit is day-use only.



Figure 1. Mono Lake South Tufa Area, August 24, 2011. Catalog # 090-P74788.

Scope and Content

The Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve Photographic Collection spans the years 1947-2013, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1964, 1983-1988, and 2011-2013. There is a total of 309 cataloged images, including 43 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 45 35mm slides, and 221 born-digital images. Photographs originated from California State Parks staff.

The collection primarily documents the natural landscapes and their contained resources within the park unit. Such natural features include Mono Lake, surrounding mountains, tufa columns, recessional lands, and nearby Mono Crater. Aerial and landscape images include shots taken at various locations: South Shore, Black Point, Paoha Island, the Old Marina, Mono Lake County Park, Lee Vining Creek, and South Navy Beach.

In addition to the park unit's natural features, the collection also documents the park's minimal built environment. Images depict exterior views of the Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center and the Ranger Station, in addition to the parking lot and wooden shoreline boardwalk.

The collection also depicts several visiting photographers enjoying the park's scenic qualities. Images span from the 1960s through the 2010s, illustrating the resources' lasting visual appeal for visitors.

Related Collections

Mono Lake Committee Collection, UC Riverside: Water Resources Collections and Archives.

Mono Lake Tufa State Natural Reserve Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Owens Valley Collection, Water Resources Collection, Claremont Colleges:
Honnold/Mudd Library.

State Water Rights Board Records, California State Archives.

Water Resources Control Board Records, California State Archives.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

Aerial view
Black Point
Boardwalk
Landscape view
Mono craters
Mono Lake
Old Marina
Paoha Island
South Shore
Tufa column(s)