Judson Dean (Judd) Howard (1875?-1961)

Judson Dean “Judd” Howard is remembered as “The Man Behind the Monument” for his role in the creation of Lava Beds National Monument, located just south of the Oregon-California state line.

Born in either 1875 or 1880 (reports disagree on the year), Howard worked as a millwright, miller, chemist, geologist, and mineralogist. He traveled extensively throughout the United States, mostly working in a succession of mills as a “troubleshooter.”

Howard moved to the Klamath Basin in 1916 to work as a miller at the Martin Brothers mills in Klamath Falls and Merrill. Later that year, he made his first visit to the lava beds, the site of many of the significant battles of the Modoc Indian War in 1872-1873. Howard is credited with naming more than 50 caves and 16 geologic features in the area, where there are more than 770 lava-tube caves. Although he never drove a car, he would walk to the lava beds—reportedly up to 60 miles a day—or catch rides with friends.

While keeping extensive journals of his explorations and observations, Howard spent two winters living in a tent and once used a 75-foot-long rope ladder to drop into some caves. He photographed cave interiors by setting a camera on a tripod, opening the shutter and igniting magnesium flare for illumination. The photographs were part of his effort to persuade officials to designate the area as a national monument. In one letter—sent in 1923 as part of a letter-writing campaign to U.S. Forest Service officials, legislators, and community leaders—he insisted: “This is the last of Park sites in the States, and is far Superior to all the others as it embraces enough phenomena to keep one busy for at least Three Month Sight Seeing with Cap Jack’s Stronghold to study on leisure hours.”

Howard is credited with spurring President Calvin Coolidge to create Lava Beds National Monument on November 21, 1925, under the 1906 Antiquities Act. He hoped to be named superintendent, but never was. In 1994, a brass plaque honoring Howard as the “Father of Lava Beds” was embedded on a rock at the Mushpot Cave entrance near the park’s visitor center.

Relatively little is known about Howard’s personal life. He never married, and friends, who regarded him a genius, said he lacked social skills. Bob Rock, a longtime friend, said: “Judd used to say the ones [women] he’d have would never have him, and the ones that would have him the devil wouldn’t have.”

When Howard died at his Klamath Falls home on December 15, 1961, a Lava Beds ranger was at his home. No family members attended his funeral, which was arranged by neighbors.

Written by Lee Juillerat

Further Reading:

"J.D. Howard: The Man Behind the Monument." In *The Devil's Homestead: Celebrating 75 Years of Lava Beds National Monument.* Klamath Falls, Ore.: Shaw Historical Library, 2000.

Howe, Carrol B. *Sagebrush to Shakespeare*.
[Location?]: Paul Tremaine Graphics & Pub., 1984.

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