



Columns carved out of the soft, volcanic rock that lines the shore of Crowley Lake in some sections of its southeastern shore. Photo/Wendilyn Grasseschi



Off the trail

The columns of Crowley Lake

By Wendilyn Grasseschi
Times Staff Writer

The backside of Crowley Lake—the eastern and southern shore—has never been a very popular place, but it should be.

There, carved by wind and water into the soft pumice cliffs of the shore, a series of small, shallow caves and soaring stand-alone columns of white and pink volcanic rock create a wonderland of water and crazily-sculpted stone.

The tall, white, plentiful columns alone are worth the short drive; they look like nothing so much as a small version of the architecture that characterized classical Greece.

Twenty-foot tall, slender as a pencil and just as straight, they rise from the shore of Crowley Lake like something out of another world; the place would be at home in a Star Wars movie set.

There are caves here, too, carved into the white volcanic rock; short, cool, dark fissures in the cliffs that can be seen from the peopled side of the lake (to the west and north) but are visited by only a few hardy boaters and drivers.

In any place other than the Eastern Sierra, the weird and wild formations would be in a state park, complete with interpretive signs, parking and nature walks—but this is Mono County, where superlatives are common and only the greatest of natural wonders gets attention.

Go on.

Get out there.

The drive:

Length: About 28 miles, one way

Road condition: Paved for all but the last 3.7 miles where it's mostly an easy gravel road except one short, steep section that might need SUV-like clearance and lower gears.



The view from inside one of the caves along this section of the lakeshore.

Getting there:

Take U.S. 395 south about six miles to the Green Church and then go left on the Benton Crossing Road toward the Owens River and another five miles to Browns Town campground along the river.

Cross the river and continue driving, heading mostly south and east.

Reach the end of the lake at about 18-20 miles from S.R. 203/U.S. 395 and begin to swing toward the east and the White Mountains on the horizon. Climb out of the lake's basin and in another few miles, begin to watch for a sharp, short turn on the right, soon after you leave the lake behind and can no longer see it.

The road is called 35151 and if you are not looking, you will miss it.

It's an abrupt entrance and the road angles back toward the way you came, making it hard to see if you are driving fast.

Take this right turn and follow it for about 0.3 miles to 35151A. Go right on this road and continue on it another 3.4 miles.

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2013 MAMMOTH LAKES TRAIL SYSTEM
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MAINTENANCE DAY!**

Saturday, July 20

8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

WHAT: Join the Mammoth Mountain Community Foundation, and Mammoth Outdoor Sports for the long overdue Mountain View Trail Maintenance Day!

WHERE: Meet at the Earthquake Fault Trailhead for a free bagel breakfast, safety talk and work assignments. Free lunch and lots of giveaways will be hosted on site!

WHO: Volunteers needed! Dress for trail work: sturdy, close-toed shoes, long pants and a long-sleeve shirt. Gloves and tools provided.



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