

The Lassen Log

Lassen Volcanic National Park

1 July 2014

Happy Fourth of July



*A Day
at the
Beach*

Emily stands on the snow-covered shore of Lake Helen at an elevation of 8,500 feet before we climbed California's second-tallest volcano, Lassen Peak, on June 14.

Happy Fourth of July

Since I first climbed Lassen Peak in 2009 with Ken Henry, a backpacker who's pastor of our church, Emily and I have made recurring plans to climb the mountain together for a Fourth of July newsletter.

Death and snow got in the way.

Ken and I climbed the 10,457-foot volcano on July 6 that year, and for me it was an exhilarating experience hiking that high in the scenery of summer snow. But three weeks later, an 11-year-old boy was killed and his sister seriously injured when a stone retaining wall, built to protect the trail, collapsed while they were hiking with their parents.

The trail to the top of Lassen Volcanic National

Park's biggest volcano was closed for the rest of the summer and for most of the summers since, with the exception of three or four weekends each season, while a \$2.5 million trail rehabilitation project was undertaken by the park.

You can see a seven-minute YouTube video of the project shot in 2012 at <http://youtu.be/yIM5Xy5Mn3M> and download the most recent bulletin on progress at <http://www.nps.gov/lavo/parkmgmt/upload/Reach-the-Peak-site-bulletin-2014-web.pdf>.

The June 13-15 weekend when Emily and I hiked was the first of five weekends this summer that the trail is open to the peak. Unless snow comes early this fall to interrupt the work, the trail will be open full-time again next year.

In a normal winter, Lassen gets more than 40 feet of snow, and that kept the trail closed when we wanted to climb on the Fourth of July in 2010, forcing us to hike farther south in Sequoia National Park. There's a one-year time lapse video of the weather at Lassen headquarters from

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The key to climbing Lassen Peak is simply walking to the horizon and then hanging a left – or right – as circumstances dictate. This is a rebuilt section of trail showing a new retaining wall along the left edge.

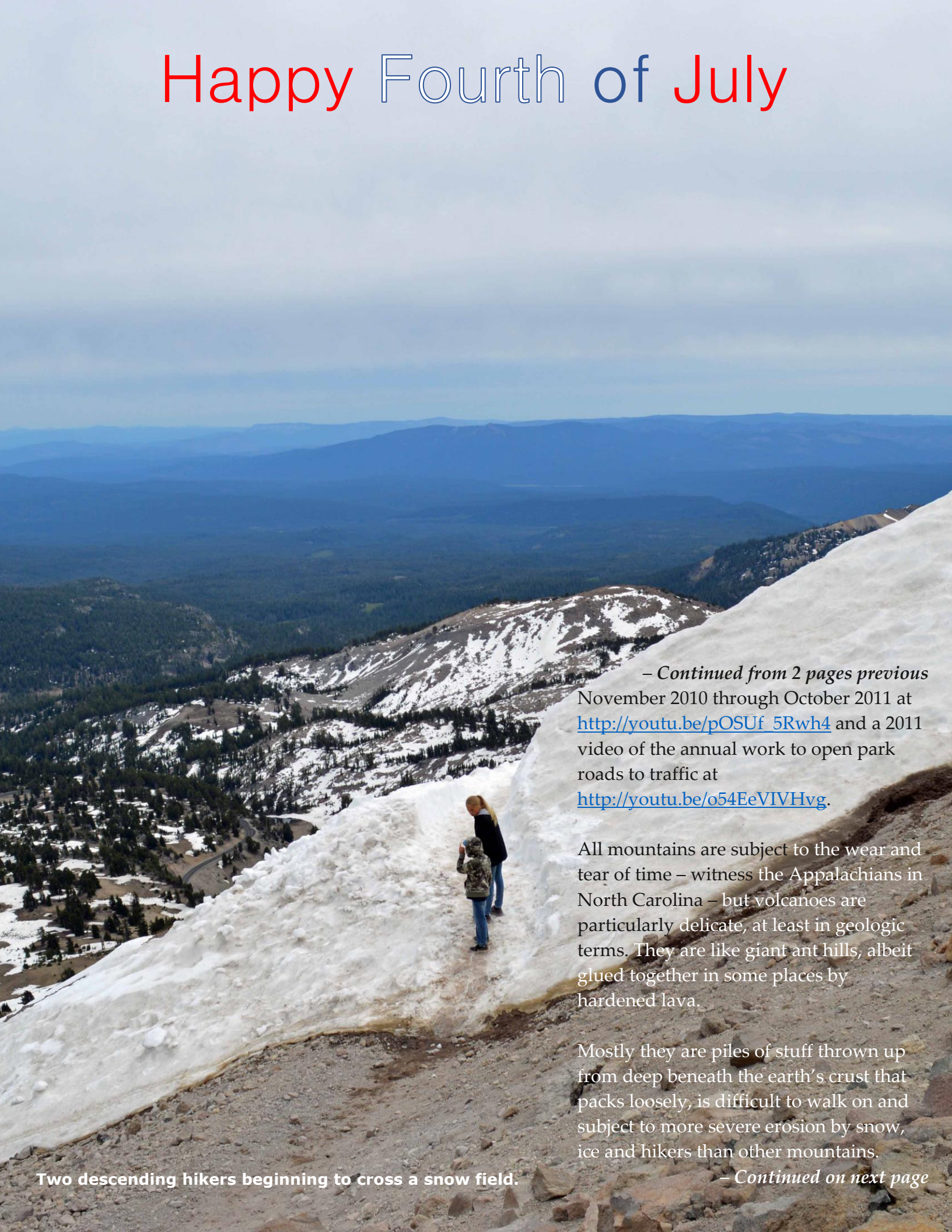


The steep uphill angle of this shot hides the trail as it zig-zags upward and across. But it shows the loose surface of the volcano and helps explain why it's so vulnerable to erosion from winter snow and ice as well as disturbance by hikers.



Trail refurbishment work in 2013
– National Park Service

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November 2010 through October 2011 at http://youtu.be/pOSUf_5Rwh4 and a 2011 video of the annual work to open park roads to traffic at <http://youtu.be/o54EeVIVHvg>.

All mountains are subject to the wear and tear of time – witness the Appalachians in North Carolina – but volcanoes are particularly delicate, at least in geologic terms. They are like giant ant hills, albeit glued together in some places by hardened lava.

Mostly they are piles of stuff thrown up from deep beneath the earth's crust that packs loosely, is difficult to walk on and subject to more severe erosion by snow, ice and hikers than other mountains.

Two descending hikers beginning to cross a snow field.

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On top of that, every eruption reshapes the pile, sometimes blasting away parts, sometimes building up the mountain.

Unlike last year's Fourth of July hike, when we did Yosemite's Panorama Trail in 107-degree heat, our Lassen climb began under a thin gray overcast and cool temperatures. It was in the 40s at the top, cold enough that Emily's hands were too stiff to screw the cap off her water bottle and nearly 70 degrees cooler than in 2013.

On the way up we met two guys in their 70s who carried their skis up the trail and slid down the mountain's eastern face from a spot near the peak.

Emily heads toward the final "zag" in our downhill hike. The trailhead parking lot is out of view at the bottom left and behind. Most of the trail to the peak follows the ridge line at the top right of this picture.

Goodbye from
Lassen Volcanic National Park



Atop Lassen Peak. The rocky right edge of the picture is the rim of the crater. In the background, just above the crater rim and 75 miles behind us, Mount Shasta, California's tallest volcano at more than 14,000 feet, pokes its snout into the overcast.