Valles Caldera Tours

On September 24, 2009 twenty brave and warmly dressed Foundation members attended a general archaeology tour of the Valles Caldera. The day started out with the Caldera covered in a veil of fog and snow. As the sun rose, the fog and snow cover cleared and we set off in the vans for our first site.

We visited a prehistoric "work camp" at the base of a hill containing an obsidian mine. The work camp was used as a site for reducing larger pieces of obsidian into smaller transportable pieces and cutting tools. We examined different pieces of obsidian, obsidian tools and native rhyolite.

Our next stop was to visit a hunting blind and hunting camp. The hunting blind was built with rocks to take advantage of a hillside with a commanding view of the surrounding area. At the top of the hill we made an exciting find - the middle portion of a projectile point made of quartzite!

![Valles Caldera Hunting Blind. Photo by Beth Parisi.](image)

Next we visited a very interesting “game drive site”. This site showed evidence of being used from Paleo times through historic Spanish sheepherders. On the top of hill the game drive site was located we visited two rock shelters.
One day in the Caldera showed us many of the varied resources the area has offered people over time - from the natural landscape; water and fish; rocks and minerals; trees and plants for shelter, medicine and food; and native animals including wild turkeys, elk, hawks, and coyotes.

We would like to thank our very knowledgeable and welcoming hosts – Ana Steffen, Jeremy Decker, Jackie Sharp and Paul Tsosie.

Valles Caldera Tour Sunday, August 30, 2009

The large dome near the center of the Valles Caldera named Cerro del Medio is the source of some of the finest quality obsidian in the western United States. Obsidian from the Valles Caldera was widely transported across North America in the prehistoric past for use as spear points, arrowheads and cutting tools. 2 vans transported 20 Foundation members to the source – the vast quarries of Cerro del Medio. Our tour guides, a Valles Caldera Trust archaeologist and Jemez Pueblo historian were very informative.

Foundation members prepare to visit obsidian sites. Photo by Gary Newgent
Exposed surface obsidian site. Photo by Gary Newgent

Uprooted obsidian. Photo by Gary Newgent
Suggested Reading:


Rocky Mountain Research Station On-Line Publication - RMRS-GTR-196