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THIS AERIAL photo by Staff Photographer Dave Falconer was taken from a height of about 500 feet and shows the 20-

foot wide, 70-foot deep fissure in Eastern Oregon left by an earsplitting earthquake some 1,000 or more years ago.

Oregon's Crack-In-The-Ground Stands Alone As Scenic Wonder

By LEVERETT RICHARDS
Staff Writer, The Oregonian

CHRISTMAS LAKE (Special) — Eastern Oregon is just miles and miles of miles and miles — unless you are an eagle, a hawk or an aerial geologist.

Then it becomes a veritable museum of natural wonders — the last known of which is a cataclysmic crack in the ground two miles long, 15 to 20 feet wide and as much as 70 feet deep.

In-The-Ground at a distance of about 1,000 feet.

The crack actually extends under the old lake bed, the floor of the valley and extends northeastward to the Four Craters lava field. Here four volcanic cones 250 to 400 feet high, look like they quit vomiting lava yesterday.

The lava flow actually tum-

bles into and hides the crack at its northeastern end, said Peterson, who first investigated the phenomenon.

As the craters erupted, they apparently emptied a reservoir of magma or hot lava, allowing the surface to sag to form a shallow valley about two miles wide extending from the craters to the old lake bed.

As the crust settled it ripped open the ancient basalt along its western edge, forming Crack-In-The-Ground, Peterson explained.

Tide Floods Into Venice

Some earsplitting earthquake ripped the solid rock apart some 1,000 years ago or more, leaving the classic kind of chasm always associated with major earthquakes.

The difference is that this one never closed up or filled up. It looks as if it had been opened only yesterday — by mistake.

Crack Stands Alone

There is nothing quite like it anywhere in Oregon so far as known, points out Norman Peterson, geologist of Oregon's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries.

There are other cracks, tension cracks made in lava flows like those of Diamond Craters, 100 miles further east, but nothing of this magnitude or origin.

In any other state Crack-In-The-Ground, as it is officially named would be a state park and a tourist attraction full of beer cans and gum wrappers but this unique natural wonder is lost in Oregon's museum of natural wonders.

Aside from the few dryland ranchers in the area few persons have seen it. Between routes 31 and 395, it can be reached by truck or other vehicle with high clearance, but not by a low-slung Detroit car.

From Christmas Lake Lodge drive one mile east on a gravel road, then four miles north on a graded dirt road.

Then a rough truck track takes off diagonally up a hill from the prehistoric lake bed onto the juniper and sagebrush covered old basalt and winds northeastward for about two miles, paralleling Crack-

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Piazza San Marco Square and other low-lying regions of this historic canal city were flooded Sunday by the first high tide of the fall.

The area was covered by up to eight inches of water and fears are growing for the ultimate fate of the unique city. Venice is slowly settling and becomes more affected each year by tidal waters.

Floods and earth slides followed torrential rain in southern and eastern Switzerland Saturday night. Heavy damage was reported, but there were no casualties.

Mountain pass roads and railroads were blocked and villages were threatened by swollen rivers.

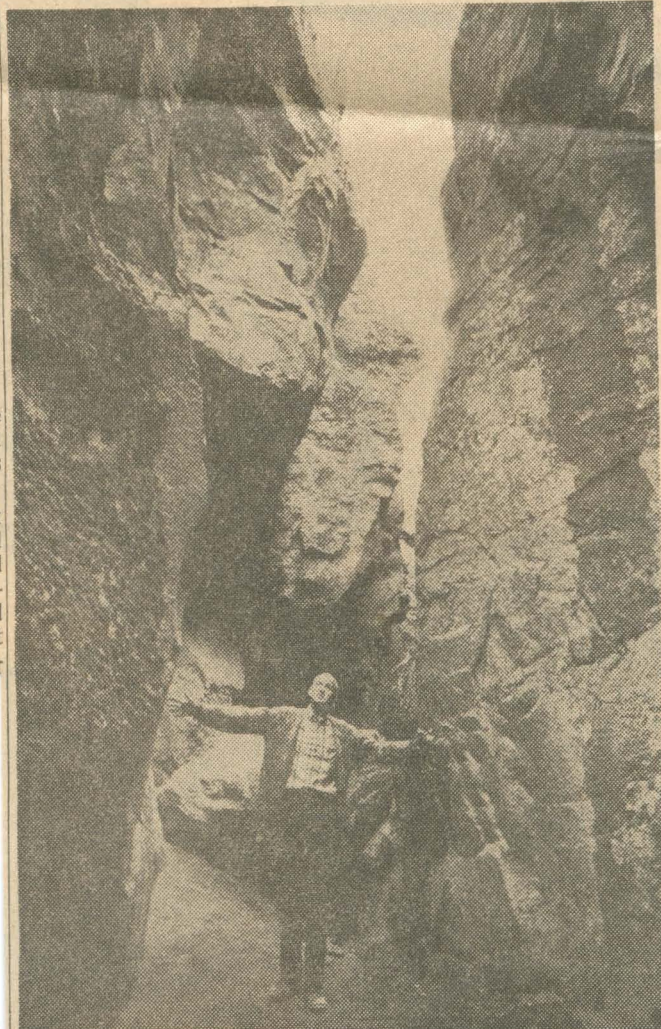
Technically it is a tension crack along a hingeline.

Reuben Long, most famous old-time resident of Fort Rock, 20 miles due west of Crack-In-The-Ground, remembers exploring "The Crack" when he was a kid.

The homesteaders used to go there to hold picnics and make ice cream, using the ice they found deep in the caves of the chasm.

Ice can still be found there in July — along with hawks and other birds of prey, which nest on the sheer, inaccessible walls.

It is an odd bit of Oregon lore, one place where Mother Nature neglected to cover up her tracks when she was busy cooking up a new look for old Oregon.



NORMAN PETERSON, geologist with Oregon's Department of Geology and Mineral Industries, stands like a latter-day Sampson 35 feet down inside the huge two-mile crack left in the earth's crust by an ancient earthquake.