Craters of the Moon: Points of Interest

1. **Visitor Center, Loop Road and Campground** – Located 18 miles west of Arco on U.S. Highway 20/26/93 the NPS Visitor Center is open 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. daily, with extended summer hours and closed on winter holidays. It is an ideal place to begin your visit with films, exhibits, and staff to orient you and explain the volcanic origins of the outstanding natural features. Explore dark lava tube caves, gaping craters, and steep-sided spatter cones along the scenic 7-mile Loop Road. There are excellent short hikes and educational signs along the route. A variety of ranger-led walks and talks are offered throughout the year including cave tours in the summer and snowshoe walks in the winter. The Loop Road is open to vehicles from May into November and becomes a cross-country ski trail in the winter. Fifty-one NPS campsites are open from May into November. Some are ADA-accessible. Camping is available on a first-come, first-served basis.

2. **Blue Dragon Flow** – When magma rose from the Earth’s mantle creating lava flows, the mineral titanium may have separated and surfaced as the iridescent cobalt blue color on certain flows. Early visitors to the Great Rift claimed this marvel resembled the scales of a dragon’s back, hence the name Blue Dragon Flow. The Craters of the Moon lava field is the only place in the world where the Blue Dragon phenomenon is known to occur.

3. **Bear Trap Cave** – an easy stop along the Arco-Minidoka Road. Bear Trap Cave is a major lava tube system. It is one of several systems that originated northeast of the Kings Bowl Rift. The tube can be traced for more than 15 miles westward until it is buried by lava flows. The total cave length at this stop is about 150 feet.

4. **Kings Bowl** – the magnificent Great Rift up close. Here the character of this deep volcanic fissure has been revealed on the surface by a violent explosion that resulted from the interaction of hot lava and ground water. Interpretive signs at the site describe the volcanic events that led to the creation of this young feature and the Wapi lava field. NPS permits are required to enter this extremely dangerous rift cave.

5. **Wapi Park** – a good place to camp providing an access to Pillar Butte and Old Juniper Kipuka. This narrow strip of shrub land is surrounded by fingers of lava from the Wapi Flow. At about 2,200 years in age, the Wapi Volcano is the youngest shield volcano on the Snake River Plain. Wapi Park can be reached from the road to Kings Bowl, and requires a four-wheel drive vehicle.

6. **Pillar Butte** – the summit for the Wapi Flow. Most of the low shield volcanoes making up the Snake River Plain are capped with a summit crater. Pillar Butte’s eleven distinct eruptive enters are identified by pit craters and former lava lakes. The Butte is a one-mile hike from Wapi Park.

7. **Laidlaw Volcano** – rises 800 feet above the surrounding terrain and is typical of many of the low-angle shield volcanoes that make up the Snake River Plain. Shield volcanoes form when fluid lava erupts and travels long distances over the surface and through lava tubes.
8. **Snowdrift Crater** – a summit crater of a low shield volcano. At 150 feet deep and three-quarters of a mile long, Snowdrift Crater supports a stand of quaking aspen on the southern end.

9. **Big Southern Butte** – the largest of the three most prominent volcanic features rising boldly from the desert floor on the Eastern Snake River Plain. Although not inside the Monument and Preserve, Big Southern Butte has an elevation of 7550 feet. It stands 2500 feet above the surrounding plain and can be seen for nearly 100 miles. Estimated at 300,000 years old, Big Southern Butte is a dome of highly silicious rhyolite that pushed large basalt blocks up from beneath the Plain. During the late 1800s “Big Butte” was a landmark for a stage stop. Hikers who trek to the top of this summit are rewarded with an astounding view of the Snake River Plain.