

Tufa—A Symbol in their Own Right

The 50-mile Yosemite spiritual walk has traditionally drawn participants from an integrated band of indigenous groups, the Miwok, the Mono and the Pauite, bringing together stalwart souls, from one-year-olds to octogenarians. They walked in a given summer from Yosemite to Mono Lake, returning in the reverse direction the following year. Due to the spiritual purity required for the ceremonies and the stamina needed for the rigorous hike over the 10,000-foot Mono Pass, the practice was not open to the public.

However, even as you explore on your own, you will find the entire region replete with mystical beauty. For example, an underground hot spring rich in calcium created the limestone deposits known as the Tufa Towers, accessible through the Mono Lake South Tufa area. The Old Mono Lake Trail also offers views of the lake from a three-quarter mile trail, which departs from the Marina parking lot, a mile south of Lee Vining on Highway 395.

A habitat for seabirds, the craggy underwater spires existed for millions of years until suddenly exposed by diversions of stream water for anthropogenic purposes in 1941. Think about the plight of coral reefs around the world. Similarly, the limestone formations cannot grow once exposed, so they represent an ironic symbol of hidden secrets stagnant because their exposure resulted from degenerative rather than regenerative processes. Watershed restoration thus began in the 1980s. You can nevertheless explore these

wonders whenever the lake water levels allow you permission.