

History of Modoc County, California

Early Inhabitants & Native Peoples

The Modoc people lived in what is now northeastern California (along Lost River, Tule Lake) prior to European contact. npshistory.com

Other tribes in the area included the Achomawi (Pit River Indians), Paiute, and Klamath. en.wikipedia.org

Contact, Treaties, & Conflict

In 1846, John C. Frémont (with Kit Carson) was among the first European-American explorers in the region. en.wikipedia.org

In 1864, the Modoc, Klamath, and Yahooskin bands signed a treaty ceding land and were placed on the Klamath Reservation. en.wikipedia.org

Captain Jack (Kintpuash) later led a band of Modoc back to their traditional territory. modocnation.com

The Modoc War (1872–1873)

The Modoc, under Captain Jack, used the rugged lava beds (now part of Lava Beds National Monument) for defense. en.wikipedia.org

The First Battle of the Stronghold saw the Modoc win a tactical victory using terrain advantage and fog. en.wikipedia.org

In 1873, during peace talks, Captain Jack and others killed General Edward Canby and Reverend Eleazer Thomas, leading to increased U.S. Army action, capture, and exile of many Modoc people. en.wikipedia.org

Formation of Modoc County

Modoc County was officially formed by the California Legislature on February 17, 1874, from the eastern part of Siskiyou County. [en.wikipedia.org](#)

The name 'Modoc' honors the Modoc people. Other proposed names included 'Canby' and 'Summit'. [en.wikipedia.org](#)

The county seat was first Dorris Bridge (renamed Alturas in 1876). Alturas was incorporated as a city in 1901.

Later Historical Highlights

During World War II, the Tule Lake area in Modoc County was the site of the Tule Lake War Relocation Center, one of the Japanese-American internment camps. [en.wikipedia.org](#)

The county's landscape—lava fields, volcanic features, and remote wilderness—shaped both Native history and settler-era ranching, mining, and timber industries. [en.wikipedia.org](#)