

Volcano on Hawaii full of lava, legend

By Bill Glovin

Most people consider an active volcano something to flee. But on the Big Island of Hawaii, the islanders swarm to experience an eruption firsthand.

Kilauea has been nicknamed the "drive-in volcano" because of its easy access. There, the story of how the Earth evolved is presented in graphic terms.

The drive around its crater up to the Hawaiian Volcanic Observatory offers views not unlike that of the Grand Canyon. The observatory offers the best look at the Halemaumau pit, which is the main vent of the volcano, connecting to a reservoir of molten magma two miles below. Scenic contrasts vary from tropical rain forests to desolate lava deserts that resemble cooked fudge.

Natives refer to Kilauea's home — the island of Hawaii — as Big Island out of respect for the always-present threat of volcanic eruptions and tidal waves, its massive bulk, and its rich legends.

One legend that I was warned about was the one concerning removal of Kilauea's lava rocks. Howard, a longtime Hawaiian friend from Oahu who was traveling with me, said that it was considered very bad luck and in bad taste to take the rocks off the island. But as a souvenir hunter, I argued that they were light, shiny, and easy to transport. The legend was probably the figment of some ambitious tour guide, I said.

As I began to shove what seemed like natural souvenirs into my travel bag, Howard, who has always been a logical character and not superstitious by nature, said, "There's no way I'm going on any airplane with you and those rocks."

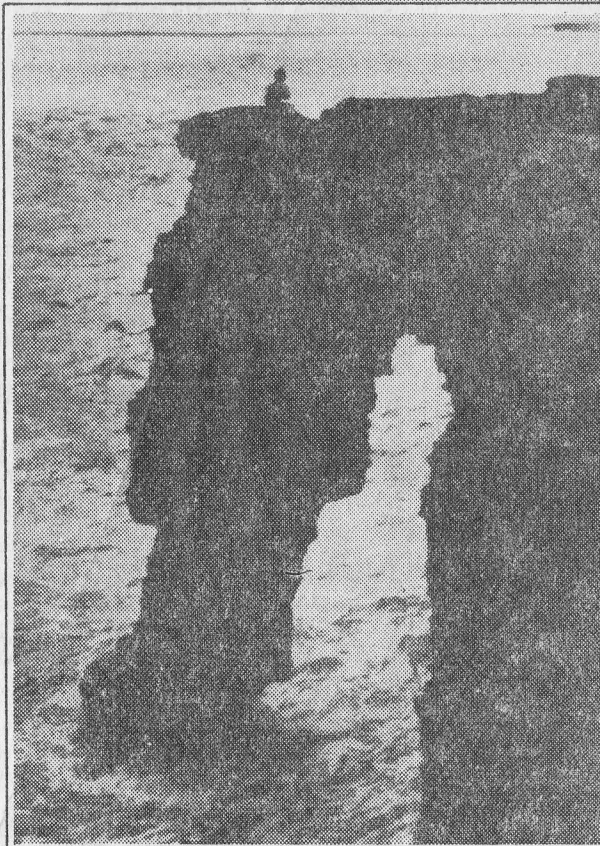
"If you took a rock from New Jersey, do you think I'd care?" I asked. "It might give off some radiation, but that's about it."

Howard wasn't about to change his mind. Strangely, my guidebooks on Big Island also warned against removing lava rocks.

The legend says that Madame Pele, the Hawaiian goddess of fire, resides in the Halemaumau Crater on Kilauea and will punish whoever takes her jewel-like lava rocks. Lava pieces are often returned to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park in the mail, some with notes saying that the previously skeptical visitor has had enough bad luck to make him believe in the legend.

The superstition originated as the result of a fight between two rival tribes around 1790. When Chief Keoua and his people were returning home to their village after the final battle of a war, Kilauea erupted, and the entire army, including women and chil-

Views of The Big Island: cliffs along Puna Coast and pumice cone on the road to summit of Mauna Kea.



Hawaiian Volcano

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dren, were killed in the Kau desert while trying to flee. Many of the footprints of those trying to escape can still be seen, stamped indelibly in the lava on a path marked "Footprints Trail" in the park.

"It isn't that the rock will necessarily do us harm," Howard said, after I tried to nip him down on his reasoning. "It's partly out of respect. When a local sees a foreigner take his land, it's a grave insult because land is so sacred. Perhaps it seems foolish, but it's something my ancestors passed on to me. And now I'm passing it on to you."

Indeed, it's easy to see why Hawaiians regard their land so preciously, especially Big Island. Almost the size of Connecticut, it is larger than all the other Hawaiian islands combined and is the youngest of the Hawaiian archipelago. We found the task of realistically capturing its broad and still-growing landscapes with our camera a formidable challenge.

In one hour's time, Howard, his New Jersey-born wife, Leslie, and I drove north through the green rolling hills of Parker's Ranch (the largest individually

Where to go, what to see on the 'Big Island.' Page 7.

ed ranch in the United States) and farther down the saw moonlike terrain at the volcano Mauna Kea, where the astronauts practiced lunar landings.

To the south was the City of Refuge, an area ringed by a stone wall that once was a sanctuary for royalty and lawbreakers, and Mauna Loa, another of the world's most-active volcanoes. Magnificent coastal views, black-sand beaches, and high shoreline cliffs were practically everywhere.

We needed five days to visit the wide variety of sites that Big Island has to offer and at least two of those days to cover Kilauea. Anything less would have been frustrating.

We approached the volcano from Hilo, the island capital, which is about 30 miles away. Air travelers will probably land at either of the island's two main airports, Hilo International or Ke-ahole Airport in Kona, 76 miles apart on opposite sides of the island. Various rental-car companies have booths at the airports. A Honolulu travel agent's package from Oahu — including three nights at comfortable hotels in Kona and Hilo, air fare, and a rental car — was a reasonable \$140. From either small city, day trips can be made to all the sites.

The Kilauea Visitor Center was an excellent first stop. There, we saw a 10-minute movie of past eruptions, found some useful maps, and learned the latest news on eruptions. Experiencing an actual eruption is a safe and fairly common treat for visitors with good timing. Unfortunately, our timing was off, but there were so many other highlights that it hardly mattered.

For hikers, there are numerous three- and four-trails around and in the crater. We preferred a strenuous walk and took a 15-minute stroll along

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Devastation Trail, a narrow boardwalk on the crater's fringe that follows the path of a 1959 lava flow. That year, an enormous fountain eruption destroyed a forest and created a 400-foot-high cone of pumice and ash.

Thurston Lava Tube, a volcanic tunnel that allows you to walk underneath a giant treefern forest, is a 450-foot cylinder-shaped passageway that was burned through the earth by lava. Other lasting impressions of the crater rim included feeling the vapor from steam vents, smelling the odorous yellow sulfur deposits, and stopping at majestic lookout points on the crater-rim road.

From there, we headed for Chain of Craters Road, which looped for a little more than eight miles down to the scenic Kalapana Coast. The route passed several large craters and offered stops at lava flows that had almost entirely covered the road during the past decade. A new road costing more than \$2 million was opened in 1979.

The road's final few miles wound down a wall of cliffs that stretched off into the distance along the coastline. Nowhere else was the awesome power of the volcano more evident than at these cliffs, where 500 cubic yards of boiling lava had burned a four-mile red and black scar across the land before spilling down the cliffs and into the sea. More than 500 new acres at the base of the cliffs were created by lava as recently as 1959.

From the end of Chain of Craters Road, Highway 137 followed the coastline to Kalapana.

A partially reconstructed temple that was built by the Tahitian priest Pao may be seen at Wahaula Heiau, on the road heading back to Hilo. It is believed that the kapu (taboo) system and the practice of beheading were introduced by Pao to the Hawaiian Islands in the 13th Century. Like most of the other places of sacrifice in Hawaii, the temple grounds consist mostly of simple four-foot walls built of lava rocks.

Black sand

Our next stop on the coast road was Kalapana, where a beach created from lava has been ground into black sand by the waves. We swam here, though the sand was more pleasant to look at than to lay on. A prettier beach, Kaimu Black Sand Beach, was just up the road. We parked our car and joined residents to watch the surfers try to conquer the massive waves.

All of these sites along the stretch between Kilauea and Hilo are in a relatively uninhabited setting. Compared with the 600,000 who live in Honolulu alone, less than 100,000 people inhabit Big Island, which seemed worlds removed from the bustle of Waikiki. We saw several caretakers at visitor centers who had nothing to do and long stretches of road with no other automobiles besides ours. There aren't more than a half-dozen traffic lights on a land mass of 4,003 square miles. But there were enough fine hotels and restaurants in Kona and Hilo to even satisfy Leslie, Howard's sometimes-fussy wife.

"I always told you I was really a city boy," said Howard, who grew up in his parents' house, on a ridge overlooking Waikiki across the street from the University of Hawaii. "This would be a vacation for anyone living in Honolulu," he added. Leslie and I had met Howard while at George Washington University in Washington, D.C.

We continued back to our hotel near the shore of crescent-shaped Hilo Bay. Although Hilo itself is not a tourist resort, it has excellent modern hotels and fine seafood and steak restaurants. Many of the restaurants have clear streams that hold fresh fish. The beef comes

from the island's substantial cattle industry. mahi, the state's most-popular fish, is abundant.

The harbor, protected by a breakwater rimmed with businesses until 1946, when a typhoon destroyed great stretches along the bay. Howard has a story about tidal waves:

"There was a time when residents felt nervous about tidal waves," he said. "But that feeling faded in May 1960. Despite repeated warnings to evacuate, several people remained on a bridge to watch the waves. He said that 61 people were swept away by the waves that day. The force of the waves was so great that parking meters were later found bent to the ground."

The stories of the tidal wave and the volcanic eruptions of Madame Pele were enough to persuade a

from New Jersey that any remaining lava rocks would be better off left on the island. Before we left, I checked my bag to be sure that none remained from the accident.