

LIBERTY CALL



The majestic peak of Haleakala on the island of Maui rises to a summit of 10,023 feet. The word Haleakala means "House of the Sun." According to Hawaiian legend, the sun rose from Haleakala every morning, tracking light and heat across the sky. Many people refer to the summit's cinder landscape as a "crater", but it is actually a valley carved into the volcano by thousands of years of erosion during a period of dormancy. However, renewed volcanic activity has partially filled in the valley with cinder cones and lava flows. These can be viewed from the Haleakala Visitor Center, weather permitting.

Millennium Adventure: Haleakala National Park offers challenging hiking experience

By Ken Cornia
MWR Pearl Harbor

Haleakala National Park is located on the island of Maui, Hawaii, and stretches from the rugged Kipahulu coastline up through the rainforest and shrubland to the summit of the volcano at 10,023 ft.

Though many people refer to the summit's cinder landscape as a "crater", it is actually a valley carved into the volcano by thousands of years of erosion during a period of dormancy. Renewed volcanic activity has partially filled in the valley with cinder cones and lava flows, which can be viewed from the Haleakala Visitor Center when weather permits.

The weather was quite nice on April 28, 2000, as our 10 member MWR Liberty/Outdoor Recreation sponsored group from Pearl Harbor began the 2500 ft descent from the Haleakala Visitor Center at 9740 ft. through a cinder desert to the valley floor.

The infamous Sliding Sands trail used by hikers and mule riding tourists alike, provided us with the numerous switchbacks required to make such a steep descent possible.

Dust filled the air as we plodded downward, but it was easy to swallow when confronted with the option of trading places with the gasping hikers climbing out of the valley that we passed along the way. It is nothing short of hard work when fighting gravity at high elevation, not to mention the added weight of a backpack.

Much of the seven and a half miles of terrain we encountered on our first day was similar to that of the desert Southwest of the United States, and at times it seemed we had wandered into Death Valley, or onto the "Mission to Mars" movie set.

Our water bottles and camel backs were slowly emptied, as we marched down and across this lunar landscape, but we endured to reach our first night's destination, the cabin at Holua, at 6940 ft.

Packs off our backs and boots removed, replenishing our water supply and preparing dinner was the priority. Non-potable water is available at the cabin, so it must be filtered, treated with iodine, or boiled before drinking or mixing with food.

We awoke the following day to sore muscles and glorious sunshine. The word Haleakala means "House of the Sun." According to Hawaiian legend, the sun rose from Haleakala every morning, tracking light and heat across the sky. The

problem was that the sun was racing across the sky too quickly.

Crops were not ripening and the people did not have enough light to finish their work. The mythical fisherman Maui decided to ensnare the sun using sixteen ropes, and helpless, the sun was forced to agree to slow down. They agreed that the sun could slow down half the year, causing summer, and speed up the other half, causing winter.

We thanked Maui for the sunshine and set out for our much anticipated up close and personal encounter with the Goddess of fire and volcano herself, Pele. Since the very first people settled in Hawaii, they have revered and feared the volcanoes and tried to appease their mistress, the fickle goddess Pele.

On this day we decided to explore the realm of Pele, the lava tube located near the Holua cabin. Lava tubes are usually formed in flows that are confined, such as in a gully. The top and edges of the flow cool and crust over, while the lava inside continues to flow through the resulting tunnel.

Eventually, the flow diminishes and stops, leaving a tube. Headlamps on and flashlights in hand, our subterranean pilgrimage took some of us completely through the lava tube and to the other side while those of us not wanting to wake a sleeping goddess opted for turning around at the halfway point.

Leaving Pele to rest in peace, we continued hiking slowly up to the second cabin of Kapalaoa, at 7250 ft. Along the way we took a side trail called the Silversword loop, where Haleakala's legendary Silversword is in relative abundance.

The Silversword usually grows for 15-20 years before flowering. The flower stalks often appear in summer or early fall and have purple blossoms. After the seeds develop, the entire plant dies.

The Silversword plants themselves are small to large rounded balls of silver, and as Tim Vincelette, one of the trips organizers said, "They appear almost surreal" against the vast background of dark volcanic rock.

The bottomless pit was our next stop, said to be dug by Pele herself, with a magic digging tool. None of us got close enough to question the validity of the bottomless theme and with more of Pele's handiwork looming over us in the form of cinder cones, we decided to move on.

Our hike this second day was close to four miles and when we arrived at Kapalaoa we were welcomed by a nene, the Hawaiian goose. The nene has a black face and head, with

a gray brown body. Because it lives on dry and rugged lava flows at high elevation, it has lost much of the webbing on its feet.

Like its Canadian counterpart, the nene is a strong flyer and often honks in mid-flight. The nene is an endangered species and inclusive in the one-third of plants and birds listed or considered for listing on the Federal Endangered Species List, all residing in Hawaii.

Day three began with tired eyes and lots of coffee as our bodies began to make known their displeasure with the hiking that our minds had insisted upon over the previous two days.

The benefit of it being day three was the fact that our packs were becoming lighter as we had now devoured a substantial portion of our food. But the best part of this day was knowing that only a short 3.3 mile hike separated us from our destination, the cabin at Paliku.

In the span of but a few miles, the harsh terrain that Pele had so proudly branded was slowly giving way to yellow flowers and green shrubbery. As we continued on the trail, so did the transition from bleak to beautiful. By the time we had arrived at Paliku, elevation 6,380 ft. the transition was complete, and simply stated, it was Paradise.

Pele may have scorched the surface near the cabins of Holua and Kapalaoa, but her wrath fell short of the beauty at Paliku. Everyone was in agreement that the lush green shrubs and trees surrounding the cabin at Paliku, meaning vertical cliff in Hawaiian, were heaven sent.

These same sheer cliffs created by Pele that surround Paliku cause precipitation to occur as they are breached by the approaching moisture-rich trade winds that spill over from the northeast side of the island. This barrier alone provides rainfall of approximately 100 inches per year.

The final day out was a long 10 mile hike, but with our early departure we were able to take our time. The hike was relatively easy as we made our way back to the cabin at Holua, but the final three miles between Holua and our second van parked at the Halemau'u trailhead, elevation 8,000 ft. was switchback hell.

Yet, as the trail continued to climb, one could not help but ponder over our weekend of friendship and discovery. Soon the zigzagging of switchbacks was behind us and the end of the trail was in sight. Walking those final steps, we slowly glanced over our shoulders and shared a smile with the Goddess Pele, creator of Haleakala!



Photos by Ken Cornia

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