

Hawaii – 2-16 February 2006 A Trip Report by Bruce Bohm

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Twelve members of the Vancouver Natural History Society spent two weeks in Hawaii - one week on the island of Hawaii (the Big Island) and one on Kauai - enjoying some of the biological and geological wonders of the most isolated archipelago on the planet. Following are some of the high points of the trip.

February 3, Friday

The youngest volcano in the Hawaiian Islands, active now for several hundred thousand years, is Kilauea. In September 1959, a vent opened in Kilauea Iki, a smaller crater adjacent to the main vent system. Our group examined the results of this eruption during a hike around the western rim, down onto the crater floor at its southern end, across the floor, and up the steep northern wall on a switchback trail, an overall distance of about five and a half miles. The original fern and ohia (*Metrosideros polymorpha*) forest on the northern and western sides of the crater stands in stark contrast to the cinder fields on the eastern side. The cinder fields are being colonized by endemic pioneer plants, principally species of blueberry (*Vaccinium reticulatum*) and one of the silversword alliance members (*Dubautia scabra*). This represents an early phase in the return of vegetation to its pre-eruption state. Rain, heavy at times, accompanied us across the crater floor but did not dampen the group's spirits, a good sign indeed!

February 4, Saturday

The expedition stayed in hotels but was self-catering, with each set of roommates cooking or eating out as desired. As today was Farmers' Market Day in Hilo, the group bought a supply of locally grown produce and fresh fish for the week's cooking. The work of many craftspeople - woodcarving, fabrics, and local jewelry - was also of interest to many. The group swam in the thermal pool at Issac Hale State Beach in the afternoon.

February 5, Sunday

The day started with a long drive to the Saddle Area which lies at about 7,000' (2,100 m) elevation between the two major volcanic mountains, Mauna Kea (the white mountain, which, true to its name, was snow-covered) to the north, and Mauna Loa (the long mountain) to the south. Our destination was an area near Hale Pohaku (literally, the House of Stone, a park facility associated with the observatories at Mauna Kea's summit). At this 9,200' (2,800 m) elevation, we found golden-flowered mamane (*Sophora chrysophylla*) growing entangled with a species of the Hawaiian endemic mint genus *Stenogyne*; an endemic Geranium; and the only known woody chenopod, *Chenopodium oahuense*. We also visited the silversword preserve at Hale Pohaku.

For lunch we returned to the lower elevation to explore Pu`u Huluhulu, a kapuka (island within a lava flow) that is home to several out-planted (i.e., restored) Hawaiian plant species including a sandalwood species (*Santalum* sp.); the so-called bastard sandalwood (naio, *Myoporum sandwicense*); and several herbaceous species. Stops along the Saddle Road provided opportunities to see the white lichen *Stereocaulon vulcanicum* and the endemic fern *Polypodium pellucidum* var. *vulcanicum* in their natural habitat.

The trip was never intended to be an all-work-and-no-play affair! So as it was Sunday, we enjoyed dinner in Hilo at Uncle Billy's Restaurant - about as South Pacific as it gets. The restaurant features authentic Hawaiian hula music nightly. The performance that night was by the very entertaining Kekauoha-Masoe family. We were treated to no fewer than four generations of performers; the one-and-a-half-year-old was a little unsteady on his feet, but his mother, father, and great grandmother provided a wonderful show (the little one's grandparents provided the guitar music but didn't dance).

February 6, Monday

A visit to the rare plant nursery at the town of Volcano gave the group a chance to see the cultivation of rare and endangered Hawaiian species for eventual out-planting in the wild. Patty Moriyasu, who runs the nursery program, gave a general talk about the program, answered questions, and showed us around the nursery collections. Following this introduction to the project, we drove to the Mauna Loa Trailhead and hiked a short distance (the trail goes to the summit above 13,500' (4,000 m)) to one of the out-planting sites to see the Ka`u silversword (*Argyroxiphium kauense*). The Ka`u silversword has been re-established in its native habitat where it is protected by secure fencing from feral goats and pigs.

February 7, Tuesday

Today, we took the long drive to the west or Kona (lee) coast to visit the site of the historical City of Refuge. This was followed by lunch at the snorkeling beach nearby, where several members went in search of reef fish. On the return drive we visited South Point, the southernmost point in the United States, and watched locals leaping into the ocean from the 50' (15 m) high cliffs. Our group declined to join in the activity.

February 8, Wednesday

A visit to Kalopa State Park on the northeastern coast of Big Island gave us a chance to visit a middle-elevation forest. The afternoon was spent visiting the spectacular "pools" on the eastern coast of the island where swimmers enjoyed beautiful coral formations and an assortment of colourful fish. So moved by the site was one of the group that she left a blood offering on the lava (involuntarily).

February 9, Thursday

This was our flight day to Kauai, which involved a thorough security examination of the entire group (a threatening lot indeed!) in the Hilo airport. Arrival at our hotel in Kapa`a was followed by shopping, eating, and a meeting to prepare the group for the next day's trek.

February 10, Friday

The day started with a long drive to the western part of Kauai to visit the Alakai Swamp. On the way, we stopped at the Iliau Loop Trail to visit a large population of a Kauai endemic member of the silversword group, *Wilkesia gymnoxiphium* (in Hawaiian, iliau). Access to the Alakai Swamp involves a mile-long walk on the road (blocked to cars in an effort to discourage overuse by tourists), but along which are several interesting plants. The trail itself features the spectacular Kalalau Valley Lookout and a variety of endemic plants. Rewards for getting to the boardwalk (only fully appreciated by those of us who have gone there before the boardwalk was built!) included flowering *Trematolobelia kauaiense* and *Clermontia faurei*, both spectacular members of the unique *Hawaiian lobelioids*; *Pittosporum gayanum*, a Kauai endemic that the leaders had never before seen flowering; an anise-scented *Melicope* (syn. *Pelea*) species; *Peperomia* sp. (pepper family); and the yellow *Scaevola glabra*, one of the naupakas; and another endemic blueberry (*Vaccinium dentatum*).

February 11, Saturday

After a brief visit to a craft fair near the Poipu Beach parking lot, we headed to “Louise’s Beach” at the southeastern end of the island for water sports, lunch, and car-alarm testing. Later, we visited the Spouting Horn and looked at more craft displays.

February 12, Sunday

On Sunday morning we visited the Limahuli Botanical Garden on Kauai’s north coast. The garden, part of the U.S. National Tropical Botanical Garden specializing in endemic Kauaian species, is situated on an original Hawaiian village site with taro paddies that are at least a thousand years old. The day started out very wet but cleared to offer wonderful views of whales from the hillside for those who had brought their binoculars. Our flock of birders was at a real advantage here! The rest of the day was spent at Ke`e Beach, or back up the road at the seabird-viewing site near Kilauea Lighthouse.

February 13, Monday

We started the day with a hike along the Kalalau Trail to Hanakapiai Beach, the first two miles of the famous 11-mile (18 k) trail along the Na Pali on Kauai’s stormy north coast. A few turned back (two of whom later saw the tree-climbing mouse), one or two crossed the stream at the beach, and the rest waited on the “dry” side for the others to return. The trail, although graced by beautiful views of the ocean, is rocky at the outset, often wet and slippery, and considered dangerous beyond the beach. Botanically, the area is badly overrun by alien weeds, although the indigenous screwpine (*Pandanus*) and ti (*Cordyline*) are common. The hike was followed by swimming and snorkeling at Ke`e Beach.

February 14, Tuesday

Valentine’s Day activities included another visit to the Poipu Beach area, where we saw a monk seal napping on the sand; visited the orchid and cactus gardens at the nearby Kiahuna Plantation Resort; snorkeled; swam; had lunch; and dispersed to other places, including a visit to Hanapepe for Kauai Pie.

February 15, Wednesday

Hikers did the Kuilau Ridge Trail, which provided panoramic views of lush valleys featuring some natural vegetation as well as a lot of invasive species. Hardly a high point of the trip, but interesting nonetheless, was finding freshly disturbed ground, work of a feral pig. Lunch at one of the trailside shelters followed by a walk back to the cars ended the day’s not-too-vigorous activities. A free hula show at the Coconut Marketplace presented by children from a local hula school followed by our trip-ending dinner at Kintaro’s Japanese restaurant completed a very successful adventure.

Bruce Bohm, leader of the Hawaiian expedition, received his doctorate in organic chemistry from the University of Rhode Island in 1960, and did post-doctoral research in botany at McGill University. After further research on potentially useful drugs in plants, he accepted a post at UBC, where he worked for 33 years before retiring in 1999. During his last years at UBC, he taught a course on Plant Geography with a strong element of island biogeography; hence his strong interest in the Hawaiian Islands. Since 1969, he has collected and photographed Hawaiian plants and has published many scientific articles. Among his four books is Hawaii's Native Plants (2004), Mutual Publishing, Honolulu.