



Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

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Visitor Information

Hiking Journals

Mauna Loa - Observatory Trail - July 3-4, 2004

As America celebrated its 228th Birthday on the mainland, 3 Postal employees and son hiked to the top of Mauna Loa to fly "Old Glory" on the highest known "Sea Mountain" on the planet.



Hikers on the Mauna Loa Observatory Trail.

The adventure began with a drive to the Mauna Loa Observatory on July 3, 2004, where Joel Michaelson, Larry Morris, Tom O'toole and Adam Morris spent the night acclimating to the 10,000 ft elevation. It was a perfectly clear evening, with a awesome sunset witnessed by sister volcano Mauna Kea, the summit of Hualalai peaking above the clouds and cousin Haleakala volcano approvingly standing to the northwest. Temperature was a comfortable high 40's with a clear starry night until the arrival of a nearly full moon stole the sky away from the stars.

At 07:40, July 4th, our team heading up the trail, with lots of sunscreen and not a cloud in the sky. The first stages of Pahoehoe trail were a bear for 3 guys over 50 and we took 10 minute breaks each 20 minutes of hiking. This kept us on a steady pace with lots of time for water replenishment or a snack. Sitting on the north side on ML allowed us breath taking views of the Saddle, and all the Kona "Gold Coast" from Makalewena to Upolo Pt. We could see Lanai and Molokai clear to the northwest. Temperature stayed in the low 50's with a lite NE breeze to keeping us in lightweight layered clothes all the day.

By the time we approached the midpoint cinder base trail we were breaking each 30 minutes and even encountered a happy couple decending from a night at the summit cabin, where they reported a crisp clear quiet evening all to themselves and a full water tank awaits us.

Alittle over 4 hrs on the trail, unbelievable beauty , the skin of Pele surrounds us. We share snacks and stories during our break. We're now about 1200 + feet and getting our second wind. Nearing the top of the flows the degree of climb becomes easier, now we break about every 40 minutes. Alas we approach the North end of Makuaweoweo caldera, we can see the lava flow that spilled to the northwest and we also witness small patches of cottonball snow on the southeast walls and looking into cracks and creveces, we realize these are snow packed too. A young man

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greet us traveling from the east to the summit and then descending on the same day, wow, that's a full hard day hike for a solo climb, but he seems content and able.

Climbing over the highs and lows of caldera east wall ledge we come upon a crater dropping an easy 300 ft below to our east, but our adrenaline pulls us toward the cabin and the well deserved break . It's just 6 hrs and 10 minutes since we started our ascent, the cabin is empty and well cleaned by those before us, with 12 bunks to choose from we each claim a middle berth.

We all take a 30 minute "Body break" and rest in our bunks. We suffer very little effect from the altitude, a few sore muscles and occasional headache, but overall just the pure high of being atop of the world.

During midday we all sat on the edge of Makuaweoweo caldera and marveled at it's beauty. The colors and skin of past eruptions layer all the bottom of the pit. It seems to be as alive as the skin on our own bodies. Truly this is the home of the most honored Goddess "Pele", her presence is felt and we respect the "Aina" as her guest.

At 1400, July 4th, 2004, the Stars and Stripes are hung from a monitoring pole just east of the cabin. Mission Accomplished. Happy Birthday America!!

We enjoyed our day, with conversations, stories and even a challenge throwing lava rocks at a water bottle perched on top of a rock about 70 feet away. Five tries each, and Tom hits the bottle "Dead on", on the second rock.

We dined on "MRE's"(Meals ready to eat) and each being different, passed them around the table to taste and enjoy. By 2100 we called it a night and awoke to another perfectly clear sky and satisfying breakfast of fruit and oatmeal. Adam brought his H2O purifying kit and provided us all with newly filled bottles to have at our sides. By 0745 we headed back down the trail we came up, fewer breaks, but another perspective with a new view in our scope. We laughed, we shared, we cared for each other as a team. Our descent only took us 3 hrs and 50 minutes, but our memory of that two days will last our lives.

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Contact: HAVO_interpretation@nps.gov