



Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park

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Visitor Information

Hiking Journals

Napau Trail - Sept. 6 & 7, 2003

by David Hoover

This was Zane's first real backpacking trip.

He's been camping with me since he was four and has been on everything from beach camping here in Hawai'i to a week of tenting in late October at Grand Teton National Park, Wyoming.

But he's never been more than 20 feet from the vehicle overnight and I thought he was ready.

I also had to get ready; it's one thing to throw some gear in a bag and head off into the "woods" alone, but with a youngster you have to take the extra time to make sure they're going to be comfortable out there away from CartoonNetwork, electricity and indoor plumbing.

They also need to understand that sometimes you can't go home in the middle of the night.

We got an early start out of Kaliua-Kona and after checking in at the HVNP headquarters to get our backcountry permit, Zane and I started out from the Mauna Ulu trailhead at 10:45 am with him wearing a full set of rain gear while the sun was shining.

I was laughing and told him to take it off till it started to rain, but he said it felt like



Zane's 1st backpacking trip



Ahu (cairns) mark the trail

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rain to him and he was going to wear it.

So off we went, with he and I doing our first real backpacking trip together!

The hike to Pu'u Huluhulu was mostly level walking across pahoehoe, with a number of "nene berries" along the way.



Zane stops to look at ohelo berries along the trail

Soon after skirting along the south base of Pu'u Huluhulu, with Mauna Ulu steaming on our left, the wind/rain started.

Zane said, "I told you so", as he was still in his full rain suit and dry.

I, of course, didn't put my rain gear on till it was too late (I always think storms will pass) and was pretty wet.

The trail wandered east along newer flows of pahoehoe from Mauna Ulu, which we hiked accompanied by the horizontal rain.

This was how the hike went for the next two hours while we passed some pit craters to our right then over the summit ridge at around 3290 feet.

We took a break for a wet lunch, at 1:42 pm, on the lava plain on our way to Makaopuhi Crater.



Lunch break!

By now the rain was part of our hike, but, at this point, we were still having fun walking in the rain.

We passed a few day hikers coming out that had no rain gear and they looked pretty miserable.

By the time we got to the Makaopuhi Crater at 2:10 pm, the rain was starting to get old and even with rain gear on we were getting pretty wet.

Although the weather hid most of the crater view, we could still see down the 350 feet to the bottom, but not the half a mile to the other side.

At the crater we hit the area that was untouched by the lava flows; a lush ohia and hapu fern setting that blocked us from the wind.



Rainy weather at Makaopuhi

The trail followed the edge of the crater for eight tenths of a mile then continued another mile or so, passing an old hapu`u fern gathering site to the trail junction where we got at 4:00pm.

Zane was getting pretty cold so we hightailed it to the campsite in the fog and rain where I set up the tent as fast as I could, got him inside, into dry clothes and had him eat a hot meal, after which he decided to take a little rest around 5:30pm.

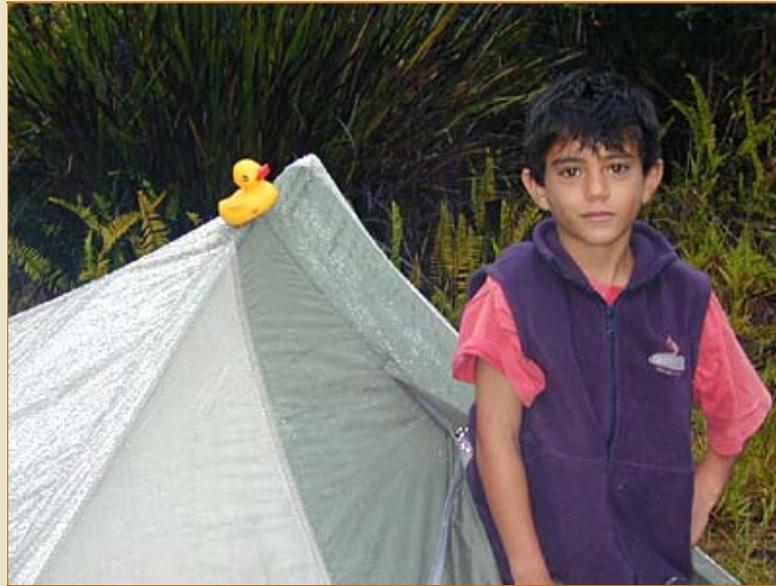
Just before dark there was a break in the weather so we got out of the tent for awhile to stretch our legs.

The next morning, after a night of listening to the rain drops hitting the sides of the tent, we slogged through the forest to get a fogged-up camera photo of Zane and Napau Crater.

Then hiking back to the trailhead with Zane's first backpacking trip under his belt and a promise from me of a drier outing next time.



The rain forest at Napau



Hmmmm ... Great weather ... if you're a duck!

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