

# Hiyaking Hawai'i: Staying calm on exciting Makapu'u Tom-Tom.

By Richard Bailey  
Email: [da\\_baileys@hawaiiantel.net](mailto:da_baileys@hawaiiantel.net)

Date: 07/26/2009  
Word Count: 2620

Note: Pictures were taken with my Canon SX110.



Indescribable, yet chock-full of scenic views aching to be described. A short trail as the crow flies, yet a long trail with so many steep ups and downs as the crow walks. It requires bravery, but apprehensiveness is necessary. Stories abound of people being injured and even dying on this trail.

Using his pickup, my buddy Darryl shuttled several of us from the HTMC (Hawaiian Trail and Mountain Club) clubhouse to the trailhead at the Makapu'u Lookout. We quickly crossed the road and began shuttling up the rocky uneven incline coated in early morning sunshine. Once past a fence on the right we reached a high point from which views extended seawards. Rabbit Island and Kaohikaipu Island lay serenely asleep in a sparkling ocean bed of green, blue and white linings.

Our group of about 20 hikers was all still packed together. Soon though as we continued on and up and over several smaller hills, Darryl and I in the rear began to lose touch with them. A short time later we suddenly came upon several hikers on an unusually flat spot. They were taking turns snapping pictures with Rabbit Island providing a spectacular backdrop. Once Darryl and I did the same we moved on leaving behind two hikers, Patrick and Mia, so now we were not the last anymore.

Still Darryl and I did not rush, in fact we lingered. Darryl was recovering from a fractured ankle and I was concerned about keeping my stamina up for the many climbs ahead. Soon we were far behind the sweep hiker Larry. Occasionally I would spot him climbing or descending ahead. This hike forced you to do both constantly. Rare and short were the level places. We savored those like expensive caviar.

After a long time I looked back from atop a hill and saw we hadn't traveled that far horizontally from our starting point at Makapu'u Lookout. The obvious reasons why it had taken so long to reach this vantage point were the many ups and downs in between.

Another understandable reason was the many wonderful views. I stopped often to take pictures as each subsequent view seemed better than the last. Karen the hike leader had told us that this hike was really two hikes. The Makapu'u Trail followed the spine of the Ko'olau Mountain range until we reached a junction with the Tom-Tom Trail. This was a very steep descent into Waimanalo and then a short road walk back to the HTMC clubhouse.

I led mostly with Darryl bobbing in and out of sight behind me whenever I checked. Occasionally when I didn't see him for a while I stopped and waited. I tried to stop in shady spots but there were few and far. At one such spot as I waited for Darryl, I spotted Patrick and Mia just behind him. They soon caught up to us and began telling us of a spot just ahead with a *puka*, Hawaiian for hole, in a rock formation. Darryl knew about it and said he'd seen it before from the highway way below. I quicken my pace in anticipation of viewing this odd geological feature. At each vertical rock outcropping I searched for the *puka* but only after maybe four or five searches did I suddenly see it.

Large enough for a man to crawl through, the plunge down the side of the cliff afterwards would prevent any sane person from testing its size. We took turns taking pictures of the hole as we sat beside it. Patrick said if you

positioned yourself correctly you could get a picture with the offshore islands in the middle of the *puka*. We tried various angles till we got it right.

Darryl and I resumed hiking leaving Patrick and Mia at the *puka*. After several smaller hills we saw a large menacing cliff ahead. I spotted a few tiny hikers far atop it. Looming above I knew it would be hard to climb. Patrick and Mia appeared again. Soon they passed us and were tackling the beast. With Darryl in tow I tackled it with positive thoughts.



No longer were we hiking but mountain climbing hand over hand ever upwards. My heart raced both from the effort of climbing and finding secure handholds and footholds. Darryl and I stopped often. The views were too mesmerizing not to, but mostly we stopped from exhaustion. The blue horizon stretched as far as we could see. We felt tiny.

A brisk breeze kept us cool and I silently thanked the sky above. Eventually I topped the menace and once I realized I was at the peak I released

a holler of joy. Looking back I saw Darryl several yards below and shouted encouragement for him to continue. He smiled up at me and continued climbing.

Ahead I could see Patrick and Mia disappearing down another hill much further on. Atop the summit we had grand views in all directions.



“This is worth the effort to get here,” huffed Darryl. I agreed in between my constant picture taking. The surprise of being able to see both sides of the island at once was awe-inspiring. A short steep descent and we reached a level spot with a wooden platform extending beyond the cliff.

“So the paragliders can jump off,” said Darryl. I had often seen them gracefully sailing around the cliffs of Makapu‘u in the past and now I knew from where they launched. As I looked over the edge I had to admire anyone who would willingly throw themselves off a platform a thousand feet up and hope a strong breeze would keep them afloat.

We moved on and after a while came across another platform, this one covered in green carpet. Further inland were a series of buildings that look occupied with even clothes being dried on a clothesline.



Neither Darryl nor I could accurately recall the instructions Karen the hike coordinator had explained to us at the start of the hike earlier that morning. But she had done such a good job with the pink ribbons used to mark the trail we were able to follow the path away from the cliff and down a

series of steps to an asphalt road. We turned uphill and struggled upwards until we reached a locked gate.

We continued on past but soon were stopped by a rock wall beyond which lay a cliff. We turned around and on our second try we spotted a ribbon to the left of the gate in some tall grass. The path led around the compound until we reached a part of the fence that had collapsed. No obvious path existed through the bramble ahead and I speculated we had to enter the compound to continue on. Ignoring the no trespassing signs we walked the road again.



Several cell phone towers were present bristling with antennas. Finally the road ended and we were at the final building. I looked around unsure where to go when Darryl spotted a ribbon on a fence post. Past the post a trail had been hacked into grass several feet taller than either of us. Weaving this way and that it suddenly emerged at the base of a small hill. Atop the hill we

had grand views of the way ahead. The ocean views beyond, the clouds and sky above and the cliffs below all contrasted extraordinarily.



I searched for signs of life and eventually saw on a tall hill far ahead toy hikers moving against the bright sky. Anxious to catch up I pressured Darryl to move on. We descended steeply on the edge of precipitous cliffs with the feeling of vertigo ever present. When it got too strong I sat down and scooted down on my butt not caring how silly I must have looked.

Abruptly we came to a spot where the trail ended. I stopped since another step would have ended me. I searched and could see no way down other than by falling to my death. Darryl arrived behind me.



“I don’t see how to get down,” I lamented.

Darryl walked past to my right and I saw him jerk to a stop. Then visibly shaken he slowly backed up.

“It’s this way,” stammered Darryl.

I walked over and saw a vertical drop with a blue electrical cord hanging down several yards.

“You go first,” said Darryl.

Trying not to think much I sat down and held the cord with one hand stabilizing myself and tried to negotiate my way down on my behind. Stretching for heel-holds I edged down bit by bit. It seemed to take forever and eventually I reached the end of the cord but the trail was still sandy and steep. I continued

scooting down till I found a level spot to stand on. Even here one misstep would have been a quick death.

“Okay!” I shouted. “I’m off the rope. You can come down.”

Darryl came down backwards putting his weight on the cord as I waited. I prayed the cord would not break. After a long spell he made it to my spot and we continued on slowly. This section was especially treacherous with an angled trail, loose sand and a sheer drop waiting gleefully on the right. Finally we made it safely to the lowest point and into a group of scraggly plants and bushes.



Atop the next few hills I scanned for signs of other hikers but saw none. We were calmed by the wondrous views of colorful ocean and bright sky. Finally we spotted a tall hill ahead covered in a sweptback Mohawk of ironwood trees.

“That must be the lunch spot Karen talked about,” I said happily. As if on cue I saw tiny figures leaving the tuff of trees and heading further on down the ridge.



We took our time heading to the next steep hill. But first we stopped in a saddle under welcome shade of a small grove of ironwoods. We were still far from the lunch spot but decided to stop anyway and have a snack. Once we felt ready we tackled the hill leading up to the lunch spot. Darryl at this point seemed worn out and struggled to keep up. I stopped several times on the climb to wait on him. When I focused on the trail I didn't look up. So I thought I still had a ways to go when I heard my name suddenly.

“Richard! You made it!”

Surprised I looked up to see Mia in the trees above. I laughed with joy. Rejuvenated by the sight of another person I bounded up the last few yards

and playfully rested by head on Mia's shoulder. Nearby I saw Patrick and he laughed at my antics.

"Darryl!" I shouted down the hill. "You're almost there. Just a little more."



I saw him force a smile as he continued his labor upwards. Finally when he reached us his mood improved as we chatted happily with Patrick and Mia. They assured us we were now more than halfway done and the worse was over for the rest of the hike, though there were a few "hard" spots. We were glad to hear this.

Not long after they departed and Darryl and I finished devouring whatever food we had left. A cool breeze blew through the trees and we soaked up every bit of bliss it brought to our lungs. We didn't linger much after lunch and headed out after Patrick and Mia. But we never saw them again.

There were many more hills subsequently but none were steep or long. The views as we edged along the cliffs were amazing. Immense cyan sky and ocean blues carpeted the void to our right. Verdant greens filled the way ahead. And earthy browns of Koko Crater lay to our left.



When the trade-winds blew it revitalized my body as the fresh air filled my lungs and brought a spring to my step. Not a worrisome thought dared enter my mind.

“Smell how fresh that air is,” I told Darryl as I loudly sucked in another lungful of the additive oxygen laden intoxicant.

Yet my hope the trail would end soon were dashed when at the top of one tall hill I could see far ahead and not a sign of other hikers could be found. We staggered on, both of us saying we would never attempt this hike again over and over. Once was enough for a lifetime.

Sometimes the trail skirted the base of a rocky peak which was actually more dangerous as one slip would send you tumbling. I preferred to climb up and over the peaks as it was more direct and not as treacherous. But it was harder on my muscles.

After far too many ups and downs we finally saw three electrical poles ahead in the distance. I thought I saw someone heading down to the right past the furthest pole but wasn't sure.

"That must be the pole where Karen said we have to head right to go down," I told Darryl. "They're still a long ways off."

"We can do it," said Darryl optimistically.

It took a long time but eventually we reached the climb to the final pole. It was steep and rocky. Many spots were difficult to negotiate and I sometimes hauled myself up onto my knees and crawled to the next level. We rested only rarely as the anticipation of nearing the Tom-Tom Trail spurred us on.

When we reached the top we rested finally. Darryl was out of water and I shared half of what I had left with him. We were both dragging, with Darryl complaining of his knees and I starting to feel cramps in my thighs. I decided to call Karen.

I left her know Darryl and I were safe and about to head down the Tom-Tom Trail. She was glad to hear that. I then asked if she was willing once we reached the bottom of the trail to drive and pick us up and take us back to the clubhouse. She thought I was joking at first but when I explained I wasn't she seemed hesitant to come for us. I cajoled her a bit and finally she said okay

and to call her once we reached the road. I pledged my first born to her. She thought I was joking.

The descent was intense. Steep drop-offs lay on one side or the other. Often I scooted down on my butt to avoid the unsteadiness of standing so near to a precipice.



The worse spot was a rocky cliff with a thick yellow rope. I could not reach any footholds below and ended up jumping down as I held the rope for dear life. After that things got easier. Still it seemed this last section was the

longest as we continued down forever. Gradually the gorgeous views disappeared and we stumbled down into a forest where we emerged onto a street.

Darryl found a lady who filled our water bottles with her garden hose. Meanwhile I called Karen and she sent over another hiker named Doug to pick us up. After he dropped us off at the clubhouse I paid him \$5 for his trouble.

Using the clubhouse's bathrooms Darryl and I changed into swimsuits and walked the block to Waimanalo Beach. I ran into the water like a lost child to his mother. The ocean melted away my aches and pains. I felt I was in heaven. Massaged by waves, I pointed to the tall steep cliffs behind the trees on the beach.

"Crazy to imagine we were just up there," I joked excitedly.

"Crazy," echoed Darryl way too calmly.



The End.