

Hiyaking Hawai'i: On the march over infernal Hulopo'e-Huawai.

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Date: 5/19/2007
Word Count: 3269

Note: Pictures were taken with my Canon SD700.



Just behind me holding my hand, Natasha froze in terror as she spotted two palm-sized spiders hanging in large webs a few inches from my face. She pulled me to a stop.

“Daddy.” Her voice trembled.

Seeing what she saw I tightened my grip. “Come on. Don’t stop.”

Turning sideways to slip between the webs, bending low to avoid the tangled hau branches above and stepping high over the 2” thorns of kiawe trees, I forcefully pulled her along with me. Something stung me on the side of my right knee as I pushed forward and was just about to emerge from the jumbled hau/kiawe bramble. I looked down to see a line of blood dribbling down my leg. I stopped. Natasha plowed into my back.

Oddly, to me this place was a lot better than out there, beyond the shade of the trees, where the energy sapping sun awaited. Under here, with the spiders and thorns, it was pleasantly cool. What a choice. Having already used my walking stick to clear a path through the cobwebs, Andy our hiking buddy, stood waiting on us. And with my daughter shoving me in the back, it was two votes to one not to stay. How the heck had we ended up in this predicament? I thought.

Being in a stare-down with two spiders (16 eyes vs. 2) had started out with an early morning 30 minute flight from O’ahu to Lana’i. Outside tiny Lana’i Airport, not much bigger than my home and yard on O’ahu, we climbed aboard a shuttle to Dollar Rent-A-Car. Lana’i City (an exemplary misnomer) located in the center of the island, held the island’s only car rental business.

Colorful rows of 4WD jeeps filled its compact parking lot. But I opted instead for their cheapest rental, a large white delivery van, since we weren't doing any off-roading using wheels. With Andy navigating we quickly ran out of island at Hulopo'e Beach at the end of Kaumalapau Road (Highway?) in about 15 minutes.

After parking in a sandy lot we walked west along the road looking for the start of the Fisherman's Trail. We quickly encountered guests and employees of Manele Bay Hotel. We followed an obvious path that began to veer away from the beach and realized we were now paralleling the well manicured lawn and Mediterranean style ocean villas of the luxury resort. Keeping the hotel to our right and passing some sunbathers on our left we soon reached a weathered platform under a tree. From there we got good views of crescent shaped Hulopo'e Beach on our left. Below we spotted the trail heading right. We quickly started down to the rock lined path, and turning hard right, began to trudge towards the cliffs and deep-blue ocean in the distance. Above us cloudless cyan skies seared our retinas.

Kiawe shrubs, some impenetrably head high, many dried out grey dead skeletons, dotted both sides of the trail with their thin long branches packed with deadly 2" spikes. The trail meandered along mostly level, but climbing sharply sometimes. Our first close encounter with coastal cliffs, also known as pali in Hawaiian, was some gray twenty footers. Rocky beaches filled the base of some and the occasional tidal pools glistened in the midmorning sun. As we followed the path we sometimes descended steeply and then just as quickly climbed. These mini-gulches along with the scorching sun slowed me down,

but Andy and Natasha surged ahead. To catch them I was forced to quick time it.

I climbed a craggy section to see a sign ahead.

“Caution. Stay back from cliff.”

There on the edge of the creamy colored precipice Andy and Natasha stood staring down at the ocean. Leaving the path I joined them. We stood above a roiling bay channeled by two rocky shelves with some tidal pools. Andy peered over the side.

“I see why they don’t want us on the cliff,” said Andy. He walked further along the edge as we tagged along and looked back to where we had stood. Pointing at the area below the cliff’s top, we saw the pali was undercut badly, leaving a thin shelf upon which we had stood just minutes before.

“Whoa!” I said shaking my head in disbelief as scary thoughts filled my mind. We quickly returned to the trail.

For a little while the trail stayed away from the pali and then turned back to the ocean. We climbed down to a rock strewn beach. Contrasting large white and black rocks littered the shore. We gingerly crossed to the other side of the bay until we spotted the path leading back up to the pali above. Back on the grassy top we traveled under the scorching sun until we reached an area with a good view. Looking back we saw Hulopo‘e Beach, now just a tiny creamy sliver. Beyond it, a long sloping pali separated by a large gap with a towering rock jutting skyward further offshore, as if the area between had been cut away by a giant shovel.

“Sweetheart Rock,” I said pointing. “Pu‘u Pehe as it’s called in Hawaiian.

Legend has it a warrior captured a princess on Maui and brought her back here. She was so beautiful that he feared others would steal her from him so he hid her in a cave in the rock. One day when he was away a raging storm drowned her in the cave. The warrior carried her body to the top of the pu'u and buried her there. Then overcome with grief he threw himself off to his death.”

“Romeo and Juliet,” said Andy. “Hawaiian style.”

We continued along for a while atop the rocky pali. Another descent ensued where we climbed down to a small beach filled with mostly bleached rocks. We passed a small cave on the way down. Once we crossed the rocks and regained the height on the other side we paused a little further along. A sweeping view of sea and sky shamelessly spread herself out before us. To me we seemed to have been hiking for a while. Yet looking back at Hulopo'e Beach it appeared we hadn't gone far. No wind blew and the oppressive humidity summoned hell around us. After several minutes we escaped from purgatory.

Against a seaward slant we hiked with waves crashing into the dark rocks below. On the steep sections rocks were our friends as we grabbed them for support as we climbed up and down. After a long hot hike we rounded a peninsula to see more spectacular sea pali. As the trail contoured along the cliff we found the way barred. Someone had cut down groves of kiawe, left them on the trail and their thorny branches created a trail of nails. Andy unsuccessfully tried to plow through before retreating. He returned to sit on a nearby low wall and remove a thorn that had painfully penetrated his boot. I looked behind him to see a house. A path led next to the house out to what

seemed a street.

“How about we go that way,” I suggested.

Though he did not reply I could see Andy feared trespassing, but unable to go forward he instead investigated a hau grove next to the house. As he pushed in he suddenly stopped.

“Spiders!”

“Andy!” said Natasha. “You have a spider web on your cap.”

I brushed it off.

“Here take my stick and clear the way,” I said handing him my hiking stick.

Crouched low to get under the branches, he began to wave it ahead of him to clear the huge cobwebs. Several long minutes later he had made it almost to the other side. Then I saw him stepping high to avoid kiawe thorns. Finally he trampled some high grass and disappeared behind the dense foliage.

I followed in his footsteps cajoling Natasha to follow. She fears spiders. Who can blame as these were huge fellows. Fat yellow and black abdomens, with pairs of legs grouped together to fool you into thinking they had only four. After being poked bloody by a kiawe thorn and standing mere inches from two large and eye-level spiders, I paused. The relentless sun beat down on a delightfully lush green lawn where Andy stood waiting. Natasha shoved me to move on. Reluctantly, I left the shade and emerged onto the edge of a putting area of a well maintained lawn. The acclaimed Challenge at Manele Bay golf course.

We walked along the edge of the golf course and found a scrawny tree

under which we could have a shady rest after the arduous passage through Hau Spider's Alley. Andy returned my stick. Natasha flopped onto the grass. I wiped the blood off my leg. Andy pointed to some huge white mushrooms growing nearby. Natasha and he talked about the edibility of them.

But soon we pressed on, edging along the putting green until we were back on rocky withered-shrub terrain and found a useable trail again. The boundary between the artificial golf course and the natural vegetation was like a distinct horizon. Way in the distance on faraway sloping cliffs we could see more putting greens, golf carts and tiny golfers. We hiked over baked rocks and through dead kiawe brambles bordered by sheer pali to our left and a verdant green golfer's paradise to the right. Another short steep climb and we topped a point. The lack of sea breezes was repressive.

Suddenly, we noticed the trail ahead littered with gas tanks. The red portable kinds. I stared perplexed at them as we passed by. We soon knew why. Two gardeners were using chain saws and cutting down large kiawe bushes. However, they had not cleared the debris as yet and their makeshift impassable kiawe hedges forced us off the path. As we intrepid three went by pushing thorny branches out of the way, the workers stared at us like we were idiots. We gingerly worked our way around the unnatural obstacle they had created until we were back on the path. As we continued on thinking we were now okay, another mass of cut down kiawe appeared. Again we edged closer to the cliff's rim on shaky rocks to get by. I was concerned for Natasha, but she made it through.

A short while later, on arriving at yet another manmade thorny bramble

of kiawe tree cuttings, we looked further along the trail to see the golf course about the cliff's edge. There seemed no path past it. I nodded to the pali ahead.

"The trail seems to end there," I said to Andy who agreed.

"Go on without me then," said Natasha resting on a large rock and lifting her thick brown hair off her neck to help cool off.

"No," I said forcefully. "I want you in front of me, so I can always see where you are."

She refused to move insisting if I found more trail further on to wave at her and she would come. We argued for a while. Meanwhile, Andy continued on and when I looked for him he was atop a slight prominence a ways off.

"Okay," I said finally. "I will catch up with Andy and if we find a trail I'll call you."

For many yards I edged past the prickly left over trimmings no more than a few feet from the cliff's edge. Finally I could step back on the rocky trail. I caught up with Andy as he began to head down into a small gully. Turning around I waved to Natasha to come. Even from afar I could see her roll her eyes. But she lifted herself and began to approach. I returned to meet her at the kiawe covered part of the trail and helped guide her across. We then continued on again and once at the top of the prominence she stopped again.

In déjà vu fashion we repeated our arguments from ten minutes before.

"Okay take a break," I said and headed down the steep descent to find Andy at the bottom staring across at a rocky precipice. No obvious path appeared.

“I’ll head towards the golf course and walk over to the other side,” suggested Andy. “You wait here.”

Climbing inland he disappeared in the direction of the well maintained golfing greens. A little later I spotted him above me crossing the putting protrusion. I sat down to eat a snack. Looking behind me I could see Natasha’s outline atop the hill behind me. A brisk wind began to blow. I lifted my shirt to allow every pore equal opportunity coolness.

“Daddy! Cover yourself!” Her shouts fought the breezes.

I laughed. Looking around I saw the cliff’s nooks and crannies filled with white golf balls. I wondered how many were on the wave washed rocks below. I admired the curling waves rush onto the dark shore far below, linger whitely over them and then slink back into the blue to leave the rocks frothing.

“Over here!”

I looked up to see Andy standing on a narrow ledge across the chasm.

“There’s a path here,” he shouted. “If you can climb up here.”

Turning, I shouted and waved to Natasha. “Natasha!”

She grudgingly hiked down the hill towards me. When she reached me I led the way across the small valley and then hand over hand climbed up several vertical yards to a level spot where Andy stood. With mountain goat prowess Natasha easily scaled the same spot behind me. Andy led the way around the peninsula. Only a few feet away was a sheer drop to our left and a few feet higher to our right was the edge of the putting green for a golf hole. As we rounded the neck of land Andy suddenly veered off the trail and through a short stretch of desiccated brush to stand on the edge of the pali. Below us

vertical cliff walls plunged into the rocks below. A massive, dark and foreboding cave occupied the base of one cliff. But Andy pointed at something directly beneath us.

I edged as close to the pali as I dared. Natasha came up behind me and grabbed my arm scaring me.

“Don’t do that!”

“Sorry.”

I leaned over. A section of shore shaped like a gaping mouth eagerly swallowed a wave in slow motion. Immediately, a bright white column shot skywards maybe fifty feet. It teetered on a dime, and then collapsed seawards splattering the blue ocean with white diamonds.

“Wow!”

We watched this natural spectacle over and over. Studying the shadeless cliffs in the distance, I realized I knew where we were. Our destination, Huawai Bay was still a ways off. Above us the sun was at its zenith. Heat waves shimmered off the rocks.

“According to the maps I saw,” I said. “These caves are only half way to Huawai Bay.”

“I think we should turn back then,” said Andy after some thought.

My sun-fried and beacon-crisp skin agreed. “Yeah, good idea.”

Natasha liked the sound of that too. Her demeanor perked up.

As we hiked back over the hot rocks and down into the steep gully Andy warned me about several golfers teeing up in the distance. I hustled forward as one of them lined up a shot. He swung. Vainly, I stared skyward.

Crack!

A ball struck the rocks several yards to my left and ballooned backwards to clatter into the ravine below.

“Learn to golf!” I shouted.

His ball obviously lost, we saw the same golfer place another ball and begin to tee up again. I swore under my breath.

“Come on!” I hurried down the rest of the way into the ravine hoping to be protected by it. Andy picked up a ball near the trail.

“Let’s mess with them,” he laughed. He threw the ball up and back onto the putting area. I smirked.

“Now they’ll be aiming for us,” I said.

As we climbed out the steep gully I paused to check on the golfers and was relieved to see them milling around. I urged the others forward hoping to close the gap and hence be out of the line of fire. Then as we neared the part of the trail blocked with kiawe trimmings, I broached the idea with Andy to cut across the golf course and hike on the narrow walkway used by the golf carts. He agreed. I turned off the trail and negotiated uneven ground until I reached the vivid green of the golf course. A quick trot and we were safe.

On the paved surface we made quick time and were surprised that even though there were many golf carts around none seemed to pass us. For several long minutes we hiked until a lone tree created a shady spot on the cart way. I asked for a rest stop. Natasha and Andy joined me as I sat on the high curb and fanned myself. Once I had cooled off we returned to the path and followed it for quite a ways until we reached a recognizable cul-de-sac.

We were at the tree with the mushrooms. Before I could say anything, Andy attacked the same spot we had crawled through with difficulty earlier. Natasha and I followed more cautiously. Eventually, we two made it to the other side where Andy stood waiting. We found the trail from here to be more to our liking.

“That saved us a whole lot of time and trouble,” I said.

With the sun now scorching the back of my neck we quickly hiked back to Hulopo‘e Beach. Sweetheart Rock dominated the horizon. For the most part Natasha and Andy kept ahead of me. But once when they stopped to admire some view I came up to them and pressured them to get moving. The intense heat seemed to force me to keep moving. I felt if I stopped I would melt. Another time they stopped I plowed past them and kept going with only a cursory holler about keeping moving.

When I found a meager shady spot next to a tall kiawe tree I took it and stopped. A little while later Andy and Natasha passed me with nary a word. By the time I got going they were lost to the trail. It was several long minutes before I saw them again. They were sitting on some rocks near a sign.

“Guess what we found,” said Andy.

I read the sign. It indicated this was the start of the Lana‘i Fisherman’s Trail. At the end we had found the start. At the bottom of the rocks we encountered the soft sands of Hulopo‘e Beach. With our aching feet sinking under us we hiked past sunbathers and swimmers for a while until we reached the sandy parking lot. The person who invented vehicular air-conditioning should have won the Nobel Automotive Design Prize in my humble opinion. No

greater discovery has there ever been. We delivered our delivery van an hour early. As we sat outside Dollar Rent-A-Car, next to the lone gas station on the small island, awaiting our shuttle to the airport, Andy, Natasha and I marveled at the small town lazy Sunday afternoon atmosphere of Lana'i City. Quiet filled the streets. Cars were few and far. A solitary woman walked past carrying groceries.

As we intrepid three continued talking and laughing, I noticed our voices echoed around and filled downtown Lana'i City. And oddly, that is now what sticks in my mind when I remember our Hulopo'e-Hauwai hike. Peaceful time relaxing in the blessed shade talking story with my two favorite hiking partners.



The End.