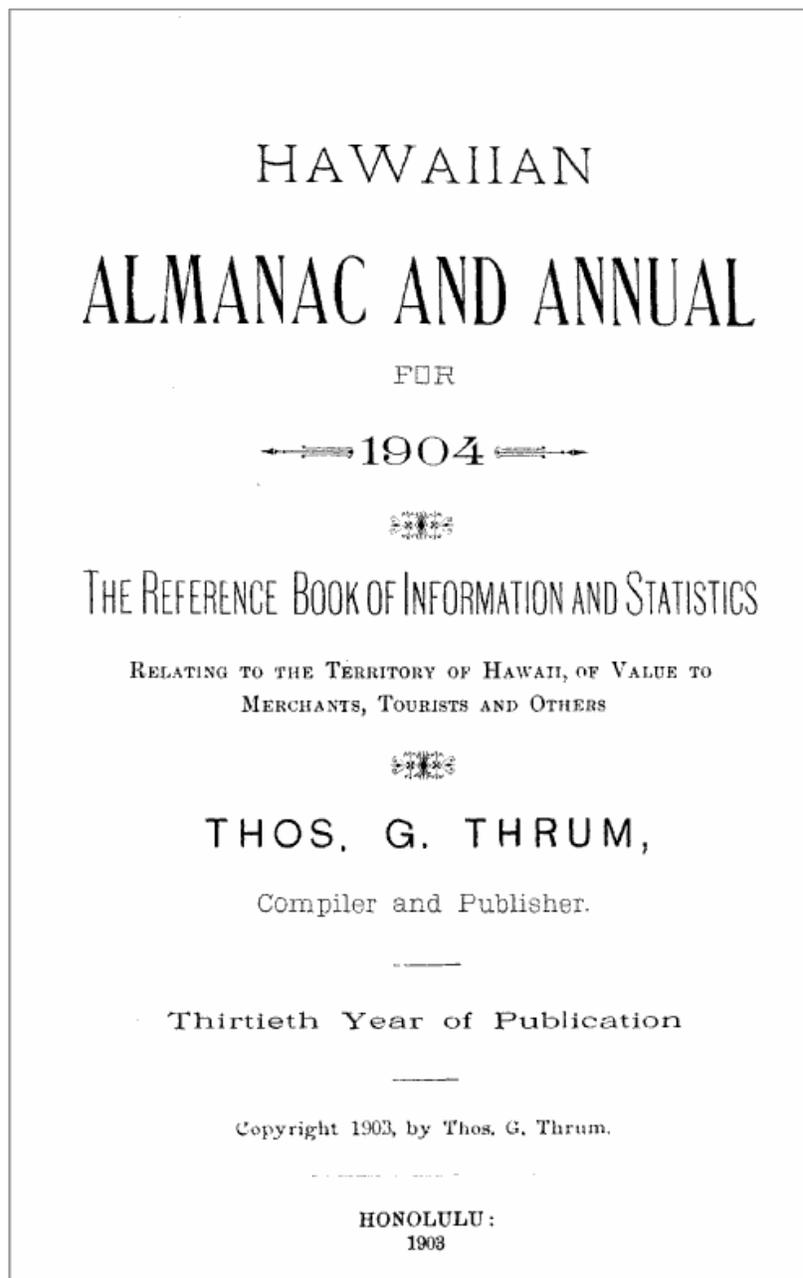


“Activity of Mauna Loa’s Summit Crater”
(Descriptions of the 1903 eruption)

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“MADAM PELE, without premonition, resumed possession of her abode at Mokuaweoweo, the summit crater of Mauna Loa, on the Island of Hawaii, in all her splendor, October 6th, 1903, to the delight and wonderment of beholders at all points around the island and on vessels far at sea. Honolulu's first news of the outbreak was received October 7th from the officers of the "Ormsery," who saw the rising column of smoke and steam and the brightening glare of spouting lava at noon time of the day before, accompanied by a peculiar commotion of the water in their vicinity as of a submarine explosion. Tidal phenomena was also experienced after the outbreak along the Kau coast, and at Hilo. At Punaluu, during the night of the 8th, the tide ran out and did not return again till the night following when it came back with a rush, flooding the wharf but fortunately without effecting any damage.

Confirmatory news of Mokuaweoweo's activity was also received during the 7th by wireless telegraph, and shortly afterward by the regular steamers, with conflicting rumors of one or more flows having broken out high up on the mountain, like that of 1899, but in the direction of Kahuku.

Several parties for observation and investigation from this city [Honolulu] followed each other by successive steamers, and like parties from Hilo and other points on Hawaii quickly formed and set out for the scene of action. The first company leaving Honolulu sailed on the 9th, taking the leeward route, some of whom landed to form a party from Honoapo, Kona, under the guidance of John Gaspar, others by way of the Kapapala Ranch in Kau. Hilo parties also found the journey by way of the Volcano and this latter course as the best from their side.

During the progress of these pioneer explorers there was little change in the evidence of activity, night scenes of indescribable grandeur in the glare and cloud reflections being observable from nearly all points of the island, and even from Lahaina and more distant Molokai.

These parties found no flow as had been reported, the activity being confined to the summit crater of Mokuaweoweo. The first party to reach the summit comprised some thirteen persons, mostly from Hilo. This party remained over night at the crater witnessing the continual changes, eruptions and explosions of the liquid formative mass. The first party from the Kona side unfortunately experienced great hardship in their journey through severity of weather in addition to the discomforts of mountain sickness and rough trail, and having to leave their animals some distance from the top to finish the ascent afoot. In the grandeur of the volcanic display which met their view they expressed themselves amply repaid for the fatigue and discomforture experienced, though they were not able to remain at the summit but a few hours. Subsequent parties were more fortunate in meeting no such electric storm to increase the cold and dangers of the journey, more especially as several ladies were among those of each company to brave the hardships of the trip.

The following descriptive accounts¹ summarizes the various reports given by eye witnesses in the several parties above referred to.

While the exact location of the outbreak confirmed what was first reported, it is not surprising that there were so many mistaken ideas on the subject. The summit of Mauna Loa is very extensive and flat. The activity is in the center. This flatness deceives people from all sides and gives the impression that the eruption must be further down the mountain on the opposite side from them.

The first Hilo party² already mentioned, set out from the Volcano House for Mokuaweoweo via Monsarrat's ranch, mounted on horses and mules, with pack animals and supplies. Leaving this latter point early in the day they reached the 10,000 foot level by 2 p.m., where they camped until 7 a.m. the following day when they set forth on their journey over a stretch of lava of intense blackness. Though under a tropic sun the temperature kept

falling as the party mounted higher and higher in altitude, the mercury standing several degrees below zero when they reached the summit. The rarified air in the ascent induced mountain sickness with every member of the party, though the excitement enabled each to extra exertion to reach the goal, which they did at 2 p.m. and while before them was spread a scene of awesome grandeur they all threw themselves down on the cold lava at the brink of the crater, rolled up in blankets and suffered tortures of the brain.

Under such difficulties tents were pitched and things made as comfortable as possible. All that night the animals pawed the lava crust within a few yards of the crater's brink, nibbling at times at the food brought along for them, but whinnying continuously for water of which they were deprived three days by the trip.

With the roar as of a tempest at sea, the crater at Mauna Loa greeted the first visitors who stood on the mountain top that night and looked down upon the lake of fire. The roar and pounding of a heavy surf came from the deep cavernous pit of Mokuaweoweo. It was the dashing of a score of fire geysers. They shot their giant columns from two to six hundred feet in height, the whole enormous weight of uphurled lava, red hot boulders falling back again into the seething, white hot lake, with a rumble and a crash that was appalling.

The scene before the party of spectators was one constructed on immense lines. The crater of Mokuaweoweo is about two by three and a half miles in dimension. Its floor is something like a thousand feet from the upper rim. About a mile from where the observers sat with their feet dangling over the lofty rim, was a small inner crater, judged to be one-fourth of a mile in diameter. Within this narrower circle is the lake of fire which does not rest. From its surface shoots the geysers of lava, illuminating the vast crater and the distant walls. These jets of fire play constantly. There is no intermission. The commotion of light, and sound, reflection and echo fills the soul of the beholder with bewildering enchantment. Mountain sickness and the pinching cold are almost forgotten in the presence of the plutonian pyrotechnics.

Over the rim of the small inner crater, the lava has broken and flows out into the larger area, still hundreds of feet below the summit, in a broad red and yellow stream, extending for a mile over the large crater bed. From this moving molten mass all colors are given out from that of yellow molten gold to the fading pink of iron, cooling under the hammering of the forge. Out of the deep abyss, rolling and tossing emerges a steady column of smoke and vapor rising high above the heads of the watchers and losing itself in the clouds. The fierce fires below illuminate these tossing billows of smoke thousands of feet in height. This light is reflected back to the broad black plateau of lava which extends for miles in a flat tableland around the crater. It is this upper illumination that can be seen from Hilo, the Volcano House and nearly all points on the island. This is the spectacle free to nearly all the inhabitants of Hawaii from their doorsteps and visible, from ships that sail the coasts of the island.

The fiery fountains which are the source of the light are hidden within the confines of the great amphitheater of Mokuaweoweo and cannot be seen except by those who brave the trail and climb to the brow of Mauna Loa, over 13,000 feet high.

The party broke their vigil at the edge of the crater the next morning at 7 o'clock and by evening were at the Volcano House, relating their stories. On the down trip, the mountain sickness left every one rapidly, though it stayed with a few until below the 10,000 foot level.

One describes the sight from the summit into the great crater as beyond description. The roar of the mighty fire geysers sounded like the smashing of heavy seas against the rocks. The spouting columns of white hot lava arose in great incandescent geysers to heights of several hundred feet and would fall back as blackened boulders and huge chunks of congealed cinder. The impressive grandeur of the scene was

overwhelming. Speechless we stood and gazed. Indescribable feelings kept pace with the indescribable scene before us. As for myself, I did not attempt to control the emotions stirred by the mighty panorama of fire before me. The sublimity and awful power of the scene brought the tears to my eyes. I cannot attempt to describe it.

The trip is not thought by some to be a hard one, as one of the party was a lad only eleven years old who stood the trip as well as any. If a horse is able to stand the trip, you can mount at the Volcano House and ride to within six feet of the edge of the crater without getting off. A lady who can ride a horse can make the trip as well as a man. From Monsarrat's place up and back the party made the trip at a cost of only \$35 each. Each man had a horse. Two pack animals carried provisions and extra blankets. At the very, verge of the crater we procured good ice water from the lava cracks and if we had had buckets, we could have watered our horses.

One of the most impressive things of a trip to Mauna Loa is the absolute desolation and isolation of a man at the summit. Around you is the black disc of the lava plateau. The world is beneath the clouds which are beneath you and invisible below the blackened circumference of the plateau edge. Only our outlook proved to us that we had not been transported to a black island floating through cold space. Through a jagged fissure to the north of us we could see the tip of the bald head of Mauna Kea which is a few feet higher than the mountain of fire. This evidence that we were still on Hawaii was comforting.

The present eruption is further north in the bed of the big crater than the last one. The lava is flowing in large quantities over the rim of the inner crater and new cones form, disappear and reform again while you watch it.

The first Kona party, consisting of six, with their guides, give the following account of their experiences and observations: Starting at 8:30 a.m. from Napoopoo, the government road was left a little before reaching the Bruner place, taking the trail leading mauka [inland], passing through dairy land of J. D. Paris and J. Greenwell. The first day brought us to the last Greenwell's dairy, where camp was pitched. Very little ground was covered the first day.

From there, the next morning, the party proceeded mauka, reaching 11,000 feet of altitude at 3 p.m. A heavy dense fog overtook us here so that it was impossible to make much headway. Darker and darker it became, and a terrific hailstorm began to beat down pitilessly. It was so dark from the dense fog that one could not see more than five feet ahead. This caused the guide to follow a wrong pahoehoe flow which before 30 minutes had been traveled landed us into an aa flow. Here the tent was pitched to avoid further unpleasantness and an effort made to regain the right trail but without success. Again and again a pahoehoe flow was followed up but only to land us in aa. Exhaustion overtook one of the party and the tent had to be pitched. Those sufficiently strong, after making everything as comfortable as circumstances would permit, made another endeavor to locate the trail but without success, returning to the camp to seek shelter from the hail that was falling and the cutting wind that was blowing. The reflection of the glow was at all times visible and looked deceptively close. The next morning those who had not been affected by mountain sickness started out on foot shortly after 4:30 o'clock to make the crater.

Retracking with the chances of running into another aa flow which is impassible by animals was not considered wise. What seemed to be but a mile or two proved to be six miles. Those able, leaving the sick ones to mind the mules, reached the top after the most fatiguing walk experienced. Ridge after ridge of pahoehoe was climbed only to see another rise and with no apparent result. The crater, judging from the smoke

visible, looked as far away as ever. A last and final attempt was decided on to mount that ridge and no further as all were nearly exhausted. There was the sight to behold. The crater had been reached at last. Those trailing picked up courage at the words "At Last," and there we were. We made the southeast top after two and one-half hours of extremely hard traveling.

The sight was simply indescribable. Columns of fire from 40 to 100 feet were playing, now here, now there. We counted about thirty fountains; one fully formed cone nearly 75 feet high in about the center of the crater and one forming a little to the southwest of it. There was smoke and steam every where in the crater, but the principal eruption was in a line running through the center of the crater of Mokuaweoweo from the southeast to northwest. The entire crater was bubbling and the molten lava covered the entire floor of the crater which has risen from the thousand foot mark to the seven hundred, thus filling in 300 feet.

The greatest sight was after the fully formed cone, which only spit fire from the center, caved in. Here and there, the volume of fire would be greatest in turn, lessening that of the other fountains. Finally the fully built cone showed more activity and before appreciation of the grand display could be voiced, it crashed the northwest portion causing an awful rumbling and trembling. The spectacle seemed to be arranged especially for us. Many cave-ins must have occurred lately as there are still evidences of land slides. Cracks two to three feet wide run from 20 to 30 feet away from the top and will soon have to fall in as the foundation below is disturbed.

The entire bottom of Mokuaweoweo which is about two miles across and three and a half miles long is one mass of molten, steaming lava. The center of activity is in a line running from southeast to northwest. Cones are constantly forming and keeling over, and in this process filling the crater. The bottom has risen to about the 700 foot level. During Dr. Guppy's visit in [1897] it was fully 1000 feet deep. The doctor was the English scientist who was sent out here to study the volcanic formation of these islands, and spent over three weeks on Mauna Loa. The crater was dead then and was fully explored by him.

The whole bottom is now one molten mass, for when preparing to take snap-shots we had the particular pleasure of seeing the cone at the southeast end which must have been forming for days cave in at the northwest side and the rushing lava seek its level with the rest. At times here and there, the fiery mass would be centered and shoot with giant effort hundreds of feet into the air. Of the thirty fountains playing at different times, all would lend help in this united effort and recede for the time being, then all would flare together, as it were. Many and loud were the explosions that were caused by the fierce snow fall as it fell the molten lava, was melted and burst into superheated steam. These explosions could be heard for miles.

Many land slides must have occurred. During our stay one was looked for, as there was about a 50-foot belt along the edge of the crater, separated from the crest by a crack about five to ten feet wide. The least disturbance below would have caused a cave-in.

The sulphur and smoke cloud hangs very heavy over the crater. A straight column rises many hundred feet high and then spreads, assuming the shape of an umbrella. There is no difficulty in making a descent into the crater, down to the bank formed in 1899, so far as the heat is concerned. It is said though that great danger accompanies such a descent. The column of smoke may be disturbed by a heavy wind or other disturbance and in such a case mean death to those enveloped.

We spent two and a half hours up at the top, always seeing something new. Many pictures were taken.

Our return was not so hard and camp was reached after an hour and a half of good traveling, though we found that in the fog we had gone too much to the right. On arrival one of the guides who had remained with the sick one at the camp had coffee ready for us and horses saddled and packed; no time was lost as we wished to make the edge of the woods below before dark. We left the 11,000 feet level at 11:30 a.m. and proceeded downward at a brisk walk, the animals feeling very cold and eager to walk. Hardly had we descended a thousand feet when the sky darkened and a most terrific snow and electrical storm was upon us. The hail was so pelting and heavy that it hurt our hands, although we wore woolen gloves. The mules refused to move and before many minutes the ground or lava was white with snow. The lightning was vivid and hissed dreadfully, followed almost instantly by tremendous thunder. We found no shelter and were almost frozen stiff. On and on we pushed and the lower we got the less of the storm we saw. Dangerous as the roads had become we made all possible speed. After an hour and a half the storm's fierceness was broken and from there the homeward journey was uneventful.

At the 8000 foot level those affected by mountain sickness recovered. The down trip took exactly 14 hours. No stops were made. We went from where we camped to Napoopoo, arriving this morning at 1 a.m. The entire trip took us three days and three nights. About fifty miles each way would be a fair estimate.

Here at Napoopoo the concensus of opinion is that the trip was remarkably fast and that we were, taking all in all, the most successful party that has attempted the trip. All was due though to the wise and clever guidance of John Gaspar and his son Joe. They know every inch of the territory and have been to the top seven times.

The last Kona party³ to be heard from at this writing, stated to be the largest that has yet made the ascent to the summit crater, comprised seven women and fifteen men. One of the party considers the sight at the crater unequalled by previous volcanic displays on this island. He says he has seen more fire in Kilauea, but not so much spurting and spouting. He never before saw so many fountains and lava geysers pounding the surface of the fire lake into a maelstrom of action. From the Kona side the fire fountains are much closer to the observer than from any other. The chief activity is about one-fourth the distance across the big crater from the Kona side.

The indications of an outbreak and flow on the side of the mountain, as in former eruptions, seems less likely now to occur than was at first anticipated. The activity at this writing, after a month's duration, being still confined to Mokuaweawea [sic] and with Pele's usual erratic moods intense in its evidence of volcanic grandeur at one time and diminishing splendor at another. The fact of there being no rent on the mountain side whereby the molten lava would be drawn away from the summit lake may account for the longer duration of Mauna Loa's activity.

This experience also gives us further evidence of the summit volcano having no connection with Kilauea, since the latter has remained quiescent throughout, and is satisfied apparently to simply indulge in one of her long smokes; at times dense in its blackness, but for the most part light and airy, and of varying hue.”

¹ From the *Hawaiian Star*, *Hilo Tribune*, and *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*

² From the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*

³ From the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*