USGS
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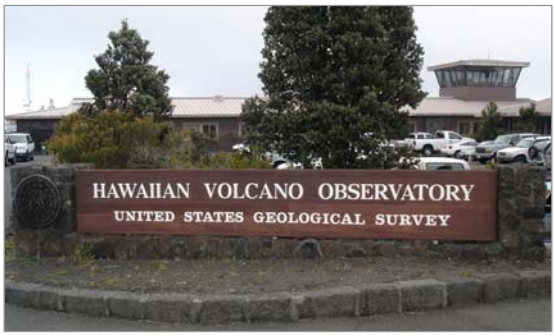
Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

Hawaiian Volcano Observatory History
100 Years of Volcano Watching



In January 2012, the USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory (HVO) will celebrate its 100th "birthday."

The history of HVO goes back to 1909, when a geologist named Thomas A. Jaggar began his efforts to establish a volcano observatory in Hawai'i. He believed that Kīlauea was the perfect place to study active volcanoes.

Jaggar was unable to move to Hawai'i right away. But, in 1911, he arranged for another scientist, Frank Perret, to observe and record Kīlauea's volcanic activity. Perret was in Hawai'i from July to October 1911.

A few months later, Jaggar arrived on Kīlauea and took over the continuous study of Hawai'i's active volcanoes. That month—January 1912—marked the founding of HVO and the beginning of 100 years of volcano watching in Hawai'i.

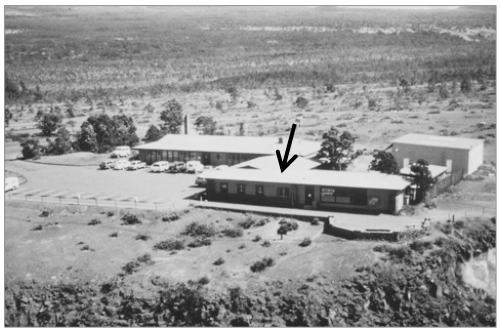
HVO in 1912

Jaggar was the Director of HVO until he retired in 1940. Since then, 18 other scientists have served as HVO's Director or "Scientist-in-Charge."

From 1912 to 1947, HVO was located near the present-day Volcano House Hotel in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. In 1948, HVO was moved into a building that is now the Park's Thomas A. Jaggar Museum, where it remained for almost 40 years.

In 1986, HVO moved to its current location—a building constructed next to Jaggar Museum—perched on the rim of Kīlauea's summit caldera.

In the beginning, HVO was funded by the Hawaiian Volcano Research Association (1912–1919). Through the years, other agencies funded HVO, including the U.S. Weather Bureau (1919–1924), the U.S. Geological Survey (1924–1935), and the National Park Service (1935–1947).



The building that housed HVO from 1948 to 1986 (marked by arrow) is now home to Jaggar Museum.

In 1947, the U.S. Geological Survey (USGS) became the permanent administrator of HVO.

Today, HVO is part of the USGS Volcano Hazards Program. Its mission is to monitor, conduct research on, and assess hazards from volcanic eruptions and earthquakes on Hawai'i's active volcanoes.

HVO's staff has grown from one geologist in 1912 (Jaggar) to a team of 25 people today, including scientists and specialists in geology, geophysics, seismology, volcanic gases, computer technology, electronics, Web design, library/photo archives, administration, and public information. Hundreds of volunteers have also provided valuable assistance to HVO through the years.

The observatory is not normally open to the public, but as part of its centennial celebration, HVO will hold an "Open House" on January 21, 2012. On that day, people can visit the observatory and interact with HVO scientists, who will answer questions and provide demonstrations and hands-on activities about their work.

For more information on HVO's history

"Eruptions of Hawaiian Volcanoes: Past, Present, and Future" (p. 15):
http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/117/

"Volcano Watch" articles:
http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/volcanowatch/2011/11_06_02.html
http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/volcanowatch/2011/11_06_09.html
http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/volcanowatch/2011/11_07_28.html

HVO Web site: http://hvo.wr.usgs.gov/observatory/hvo_history.html