

## About the Area



Mauna Loa eruption, July 5-6, 1975.

Rick Hazlett

Mauna Loa is one of the most active volcanoes on earth, and the most massive mountain in the world; the 42,000 cubic kilometers (10,000 cubic miles) of its expansive bulk is greater than all that of the Sierra Nevada. Both trails to the cabins on its slopes cross numerous lava flows created in recent years, and each trail leads hikers past outstanding examples of volcanic products. The trails are snow-free in summer, but they are used all year by hikers who find a special experience on this high mountain Hawaiian wilderness.



## Park Guidelines

Because of Mauna Loa's wilderness character and ruggedness, some regulations are necessary: Register at park headquarters before beginning your hike, and report your return. In this way we can know what parties are on the mountain, and give help if they should fail to return at the expected times. Pack out all unburnable trash. One of the pleasures of wilderness is to find it litter-free. Leave the cabins as you would like to find them.



# HAWAII VOLCANOES

## Hiking Mauna Loa's Summit Trails

## Mauna Loa Trail

The Mauna Loa Trail begins within Hawaii Volcanoes at the end of the Mauna Loa Road at an elevation of 2,032 meters (6,662 feet), passes through nene country and an open ohia forest, and rises above the last trees at the 2,530 meter level (8,300 feet). Above Red Hill, 3,060 meters, (10,035 feet) the trail follows Mauna Loa's northeast rift. On clear days the view from Red Hill is magnificent: southward over the park, across to Mauna Kea, and northwestward to Haleakala on the island of Maui. The trail rises gradually but steadily for 29 kilometers (18 miles) in all, and ends at the summit cabin at an elevation of 4,041 meters (13,250 feet).

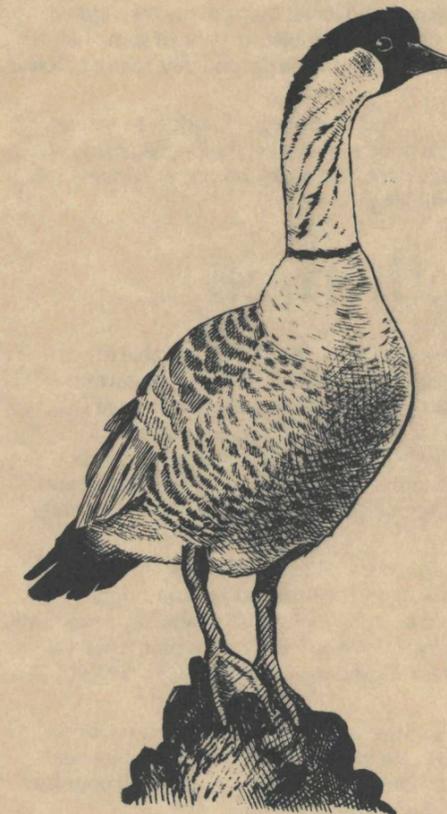
There are two patrol cabins which you may use without charge, but you must register at park headquarters. The Red Hill cabin has 8 bunks, and the summit cabin has 11 bunks. Each cabin has blankets, white gas stove, lantern, heater, and a limited number of cooking and eating utensils. You must provide your own fuel.

A good hiker can walk the 11.2 kilometers (7 miles) to the Red Hill cabin on the first day in three or four hours; reach the summit cabin (17.7 kilometers, 11 miles) on the second day in 8 hours; and if in *very* good condition, can return to the end of the road (29 kilometers, 18 miles) on the third day in 10 to 12 hours. A minimum of three days then, is necessary for the round-trip to the summit. For most hikers four days is less strenuous and more enjoyable.

There is no dependable water supply along the trail, but there are water tanks at both cabins which collect rain water from the roofs. Check at park headquarters to confirm this supply. A sign near the summit cabin also points southwestward to water and ice in a lava crack about .4 kilometer (.25 mile) away. We recommend you carry water for use on the trail, and purifying tablets (Halizone) for use with the cabin water supplies.

Cover: Lua Poholo (foreground) and Mokuaweoweo Caldera.  
By Bill Fink

## Observatory Trail



The 9.8 kilometer (6.1 mile) Observatory Trail begins outside Hawaii Volcanoes National Park at 3,355 meters (11,000 feet) near the Mauna Loa Observatory on the Saddle Road side of Mauna Loa. This trail is marked with yellow paint, beginning at the end of the road. Because the summit of Mauna Loa is wilderness, the jeep road beyond the locked gate is restricted to use by only the National Park and Geological Survey staffs.

Access to the trailhead on weekdays must be pre-arranged with the Mauna Loa Observatory, telephone 935-8482. This station maintains a locked gate nine miles below the observatory to reduce the contamination of air by automobiles during their atmospheric sampling periods. The gate is open from 5:00 p.m. Friday to 9:00 a.m. Monday.

Allow 6 to 8 hours on this steeper route to the summit cabin. It is possible for *good* hikers to reach the summit caldera and return to the Observatory Trailhead in one day, a 10.3 kilometer, 6.4 mile roundtrip, but you must begin hiking by 10:00 a.m. to be able to return before dark. Because of the rapid climb from sea level to the trailhead the likelihood of high altitude sickness is greater on this trail, and the hike is, of necessity, much slower.

Nene by Keith Hoofnagle

# Hiking Tips

The trek to Mauna Loa's summit is not a technical climb, but it is strenuous, and the weather can change quickly. So there are some common-sense practices and preparations to ensure a trouble-free trip.

Mauna Loa's summit has a sub-arctic climate, and weather conditions are sometimes as rigorous as alpine areas on the mainland. In summer the trails are clear, and you can usually hike in shirtsleeves, but even then the temperatures normally drop to freezing at night.

Winter storms can last several days, and the snowpack may be 2 to 3 meters (6 to 9 feet) deep. Snow can extend down to Red Hill, and then hikers have 17 kilometers (11 miles) of snow-covered trail to walk each way. The trail is marked by *ahus*, or rock cairns, but even these can be covered by snow. Be wary of snow-built cornices overhanging the summit caldera cliffs; they can collapse without warning.

# Mountain Sickness

Mountain, or high altitude sickness, is normally more inconvenient than it is dangerous. Most hikers experience this at and near the summit. Because of the rapid climb to 4,041 meters (13,250 feet) the body does not have time to adjust to the reduced oxygen supply. The first symptom is usually a headache. There is commonly a general nauseous feeling, pounding heart, lack of appetite, and shortness of breath after any exertion.

Temporary relief may come by taking several deep, cleansing breaths at rest stops, or by lying down for 10 minutes with your head lower than your trunk. Aspirin is often helpful, and antacid tablets may be of some help for nausea. If problems persist the second day, return to lower elevations.

The best way to adjust to the high altitude is to ascend gradually. Get a good night's sleep before beginning, walk at a slow, steady pace, and snack on carbohydrates. Avoid alcohol and smoking.

# Hypothermia

Hypothermia occurs when the body is not able to generate enough heat to keep the vital organs warm because of cold and wind. Most people who have suffered "exposure" have been victims of hypothermia. Uncontrollable shivering is your body's first defense against hypothermia, and is a key warning signal. If you don't have adequate clothes to add for needed warmth, turn back.

Wind is deceptively effective at stealing heat generated by the body, so a windproof and water repellent outer garment should be used, along with several layers of shirts and sweaters. Wool sweaters are far superior; when wet, cotton acts as a wick and makes heat loss even more rapid.

It's important to have adequate head protection, since your body will give it high priority for an adequate heat supply. An old mountain saying is very true — If your feet are cold, put your hat on.

# Planning



Mauna Loa winter landscape

Keith Hoofnagle

You need *sturdy* hiking shoes on the lava. And because of the high elevation, be sure to have sun protection for your eyes and skin. Hike with at least one companion; a lone hiker may be in serious trouble if an accident occurs. Topographic maps are available at park headquarters, and rain gear, mittens or gloves, extra food and socks, and a compass are important additions to help you backpack safely and comfortably.

