

Sunday, June 27, 2004 – Day Zero

Frank Storch (age 41) and Frankie Storch (age 14) flew to Hilo from Honolulu early in the morning in order to obtain permits, water, and fuel for the trek. The main group of trekkers and support team flew to Hilo from Honolulu later. The main group included: Matthew Simpson (age 12), Kelsey Gratz (age 13), Russell Park (age 13), Alec Takashige (age 13), Kyle Yamauchi (age 13), Randy Gratz (age 46), William Simpson (age 44), and Dean Takashige (age 51). The (wonderful) support team included: Melissa Simpson (age 14) and Mari Simpson (age 44).

After driving all the way down to Hawaii Volcanoes National Park (HVNP) and back, Frank and Frankie met the main group and support team at the Hilo airport. All the bags and backpacks were loaded into the support van. The support team drove the van to Kilauea Military Camp (KMC) at HVNP while the now-complete main group traveled via the KMC shuttle bus. The Scouts were eager and lively on bus to KMC while the adults were quietly enjoying their last day without soreness for a while!

Everyone had lunch at the KMC cafeteria. Mari and William took the van to verify the locations where the support team would meet the trekkers later during the week. All the others hiked from KMC to the HVNP Visitor Center along Crater Rim Trail, past Sulphur Flats, along the edge of Kilauea Caldera and back.

The group checked-in to the dormitory at KMC at 3:00PM which allowed the trekkers some free time until 7:00PM. They had dinner in KMC cafeteria (steak!) followed by the scouts having fun in the KMC game room, where they played video games and “Dance Dance Revolution Solo” (DDRS) until 9:00PM. Then it was lights out and a good night’s rest before they began their grand adventure.

Monday, June 28, 2004 – Day One – 11.3 Miles

Everyone had a big breakfast in the KMC cafeteria. Mari drove the first group of trekkers (Matthew, Kyle, Alec, Dean, and William) to the Puna Coast Trail trailhead along Chain of Craters road (near Pu’u Loa petroglyphs). The first group of trekkers filled water and fuel bottles in the rain while waiting for the second group. After all bottles were filled, the first group, except for William, who stayed to watch the gear, hiked a short distance to the Pu’u Loa petroglyphs. The second group arrived approximately one hour after first group arrived. Everyone checked and stowed their water and fuel bottles, checked their backpacks and gear, and made themselves ready to begin their grand adventure. William called all trekkers together for short prayer and inspirational chat. He told them that he was happy and proud to be there with them and told them that there are three things that they needed to embrace in order to meet and achieve their goals in life as this grand adventure before them could represent.

The first thing they had to do was to say “I Can” – they had to decide that there is something that they want to achieve and determine what it takes to achieve it. Second, they had to say “I Will” – they had to be determined and confident that they could accomplish whatever they resolved to do with proper planning and preparation. Third, they had to say “I Do” – they had to actually endeavor to attempt their goals and persevere though whatever hardship they may face in order to complete their objectives and achieve their goals. By believing in “I Can, I Will, I Do,” they would be well prepared to face and conquer many challenges that lay ahead for them. With that, they all came close, put their hands together, cheered a rousing “I Can” and then they were off on the beginning of their grand adventure. The rain began to subside as trekkers headed south along the Puna Coast Trail at approximately 9:00AM.

The first destination was Apua Point for lunch. The rain had ended at around 10:00AM, the sky was clear, and there was a fresh trade wind blowing at their backs. They passed a few hikers coming north along the trail and a few hikers also passed them going south. They arrived at Apua Point at approximately 11:45AM and stopped for lunch of tuna, flat bread, and fruit. Everyone was still in good spirits although most were beginning to feel the effects of carrying the fully loaded packs.

The trail left the shore and continued for several miles across rolling fields of mostly pahoehoe lava. As the afternoon wore on, the pace of the hike slowed as everyone was experiencing greater fatigue from the strenuous effort to walk across the lava fields. Within a mile or so of passing the Keauhou Trail and Shelter, the trail appeared as if it was going to come to an abrupt end at the base of a shear cliff before they reached the Halape shelter. Once they came to within a few hundred yards of the cliff, it became obvious that the trail had been carved into the cliff side as a set of intricate stairs that would allow them to reach the plateau 100 feet above and continue on the final mile to Halape shelter. Once they reached the top of the cliff, the shelter and beach area were visible a short distance away. They all arrived at the shelter at around 5:00PM and quickly set-up camp.

There was plenty of water in the tank for them to filter and refill their water bottles and hydration bladders. Although it had been a tough, hot hike that day, everyone quickly recovered and they enjoyed a nice, hot meal before the sun set over Mauna Loa behind them. Before they turned in that night, they went down to the beach for stargazing and told a “tag team tale” that had them all laughing.

Tuesday, June 29, 2004 – Day Two – 12.2 Miles

They woke up to a beautiful sunrise and a cool breeze with just a little bit of misty rain. The menu called for a hot breakfast of hash browns and sausages, but the scouts did not like the potatoes very much. They were encouraged to eat as much as they could because today was expected to be the longest day of all – little did they know that it was going to be a very long day indeed!

After breakfast was cooked and consumed, the tents were struck, the gear was cleaned and stowed, the water bottles filled, and they were ready to leave the shelter at about 9:00AM. It was a little later than they had anticipated starting, but as this was the first opportunity to break camp, they discovered that it was too easy to dawdle without everyone working together to get ready to depart. Once again they gathered around, put their hands together, and cheered "I Will" as an encouragement to each other to continue on their grand adventure.

The route for the day required them to follow the Halape Trail up and around Pu'u'eo Pali – an elevation gain of over 1100 feet within 1.6 miles. There, they would pickup the Hilina Pali Trail and follow it southeast towards their lunch destination at Ka'aha Shelter. The distance to Ka'aha Shelter from Halape Shelter was expected to be a bit more than six miles and then it was another six miles from Ka'aha Shelter to Pepeiao Cabin for their second campsite of the trek.

It was a tough hike up Halape Trail and the trail was very difficult to follow after about one mile. The cairns (lava rocks piled in stacks for trail markers) that were visible were in poor condition and, at about 10:30AM, it was obvious that they were way off the trail. William climbed to a prominent lava formation and used his binoculars to search the lava fields for the trail. Once he determined that the group was about one mile north and west of the trail, he went to another prominent point between where the group was and where the trail markers could be seen and guided the group using hand signals around to a point where they could pickup the trail again. They finally were on the right trail around noon (about a 90 minute delay) and continued the slow climb up the back of Pu'u'eo Pali along the Hilina Pali Trail.

The trail finally reached a point near the summit of Pu'u Kapukapu. From there, they could once again see the ocean. What they could not see was the trail when they reached a point where it appeared to come to an abrupt halt at the tree engulfed base of a cliff that ran a long way towards the ocean on their left. Initially, it appeared as if they had once again made a wrong turn along the trail and would have to backtrack to find their way. Just as the scouts in the lead were reaching the tree line, a couple of hikers appeared at the top of the ridge and it was clear that those hikers were looking for a way down the cliff side just as the trekkers were looking for a way up.

Once their long train of hikers had all gathered together again at the tree line, the hikers that had been seen at the top of the ridge came crashing out of the heavy brush, trees, and bamboo that blocked their way. From their bushwhacking down and out, it was easier to make out the trail as it made straight for the cliff and went straight up about 200 feet – no switchbacks to reduce the slope. In several points, it was a hands-and-feet scramble up the hillside through kiawe and thick grass. Unfortunately, the trail was not much clearer at the top. The grass was very high and there were no cairns visible across the field to the trees on the opposite side.

It was a few hundred yards through the high grass on top of the plateau to the other side where the map and a general understanding of the route indicated they should continue. Once they reached the trees, the trail was still a mystery and they were not sure how dense or far it was through the trees and brush. They made their way around to the right of the stand of trees and proceeded to a point that they estimated was opposite the trail through the trees from the high grass area they had just left. As they reached that point, they saw that the trail did, in fact, come through that area and the cairns clearly stood out across the ancient lava flow that was slowly being taken back by the flora.

At this point in the day, the sun was fully in the sky, and the temperature had risen significantly from the cool breeze they had enjoyed off the ocean earlier. They all began to take notice of the effect of the bright sun on the hard, dark lava fields as they continued down the trail in search of Ka'aha Shelter. Several of the trekkers were beginning to run low on water, so William struck out ahead of the group and practically ran the last two miles to Ka'aha Shelter by the ocean shore. He quickly removed his backpack, had a long drink of water from his reserve, broke out his filter and refilled the six water bottles he was carrying. Then, he headed back up the trail to bring water to the trekkers that were following.

Just as he started up the trail, Kyle, Russell, and Alec were just arriving at the shelter. Shortly thereafter, Dean, Frankie, and Randy came along and were given some water and encouragement that the shelter was just a short distance ahead. Matthew and Frank brought up the rear and were thankful for the fresh water. William took Matthew's backpack to lighten his load as they all made their way down the shelter for a well-deserved lunch. It was now 3:00PM and they were only halfway to their destination of Pepeiao Cabin for the night.

All the water bottles were refilled, a hearty lunch was quickly consumed, and packs were repacked. The adults briefly discussed altering the plans to spend the night at Ka'aha Shelter, but that idea was scrapped due to the lack of space, rough terrain, and uncertainty about the weather. If a squall were to blow in, this shelter would not provide much protection because it was so close to the ocean.

William took some of Matthew's food and water in order to help him overcome some of his fatigue and they both headed off down the Ka'aha Trail for Pepeiao Cabin ahead of the others. The trail paralleled the coastline for approximately three miles before it turned sharply inland and headed straight for the Hilina Pali. After about one and one-half miles further, the trail came to the base of an extremely steep climb up the side of the mountain. The cabin was but another one and one-half miles further, but they had to climb over 1600 feet in elevation gain in that distance. By now, the sun was getting much lower in the sky and William and Matthew were concerned that the rest of the group might not make it to the cabin before nightfall. They stopped at the top of one particularly high ridgeline and searched across the lava plain that they had just cross for the other trekkers, but could not see them. They also stopped to take in the spectacular view of the island and the ocean as they admired the distance and terrain that they had covered since leaving Halape Shelter that morning.

They reached Pepeiao Cabin at around 7:00PM and discovered that they were not alone. Upon entering the cabin, they saw the equipment of at least one other hiker who would be joining them that night. William and Matthew set about collecting all their water bottles and broke out their water filter to purify another load of water. Just as they were getting their backpacks down and equipment out, their new best friend, Peter Vallejo, returned to the cabin from taking an evening stroll. William said "Aloha! Are you alone here?" Peter replied "Yes, are you alone?" To that, William replied, "Well, we are for the moment, but we may have an emergency situation on our hands. There are five other scouts and three adults still out on the Ka'aha Trail."

Peter, their new best friend, immediately put on his hiking boots, grabbed his headlamp and six bottles of water and head back down the trail that William and Matthew had so recently trudged up. William continued to filter water into the remain bottles, made sure that Matthew had water and snacks, took his headlamp and two small flashlights, and headed down the trail about ten minutes behind Peter. Matthew remained at the cabin and used his flashlight and headlamp as beacons to hopefully guide the rest of the group to the cabin.

Mauna Loa stood dramatically over the tiny cabin and looked spectacular as the sun disappeared beyond the summit and on to the unseen horizon. Thankfully, it was a clear night and a nearly full moon. William found the five scouts and Randy about one-half mile down the trail where they had decided to spend the night. They had already setup two tents and were considering their options for dinner. Peter had already found them, given them some water, and had gone further down the trail in search of Frank and Dean. As it was now completely dark, they could make out the headlamps and flashlights of the final trekkers from about one-half mile further away down the trail. They decided to repack their gear and continue to the cabin once the rest of the trekking group rejoined them.

In short time, Peter, Frank, and Dean climbed the last bit of cliffside before the trail resumed over reasonably flat terrain (as "reasonably flat" as lava fields can get). Peter had taken Dean's backpack and William took Frank's from this point for the final push the cabin. William had placed two small flashlights, pointed down the trail, on top of cairns to act as beacons for the groups approach to the cabin. Under the full moon, they made their way to the cabin without the aid of flashlights. Matthew was dutifully awaiting their arrival and helped the scouts remove their backpacks and get familiar with the cabin area. For most of the scouts, all they could think about was getting their tents setup and falling asleep, but Randy recognized that they would need their energy restored for the following day.

He asked the scouts to quickly setup their tents, store their gear, and fix and eat a hearty dinner before they turned in for the night. Two pots of water were brought to boil in the cabin in order for them to prepare their dehydrated meals. As the scouts began to eat, some of their energy and enthusiasm returned (but not too much). Each scout was weary from the harsh terrain and conditions they had covered that day, but they knew that the hardest part of the trek was behind them. Shortly, before midnight, the meals were finished, water bottles refilled, gear cleaned and stowed, and the scouts were sound asleep in their tents.

However, the harsh terrain and arduous travel had begun to take its toll on Frank. Upon arrival at the cabin, it was obvious that he was not fairing well and his condition was closely monitored. He was very weak and needed to eat and drink to help revitalize himself, but he was completely exhausted and fell quickly to sleep in one of the racks in the cabin. After an hour or so of rest, he was able to rise and take some water and small snacks, but was unable to hold down any thing that he took in. The other adults were very concerned for him and encouraged him to eat and drink plenty of water. They all agreed to wait until morning to evaluate his condition, but Frank ruefully said that if he did not fair better on Wednesday, that he would leave the trek when they met the support team so as not to delay or potentially risk the rest of the trek. Frank, Dean, and their new best friend, Peter, slept in the cabin racks. Randy setup his tent near the scouts, and William attempted to sleep on the floor of the cabin, but the ants that infested everything below the racks drove him to setup his tent at 3:00AM in order for him to get any sleep at all!

Wednesday, June 30, 2004 – Day Three – 9.8 Miles

The sun rose quickly and lighted the slopes of Mauna Loa magnificently as the trekkers began to stir at around 6:30AM. The stoves were lit, water was boiled, and breakfast was eagerly consumed. The trade winds were bringing a promise of a fine day of trekking under a clear, bright sky. As soon as everyone had cleaned up and stowed their gear, the group got together for photographs and a chance to say mahalo and farewell to Peter. All the scouts thanked Peter for his assistance and indulgence for sharing his solitude with such a large group and waved “good bye” as he headed down the trail that had taken so much to come up the day before. Before striking out, Frank informed the adults that, although he felt better after resting and getting something to eat, he was not certain that he was completely restored and would wait until we reached our destination for lunch, Hilina Pali Lookout, before deciding whether to continue on the trek. One more time, the trekkers gathered together, but this time, William spoke to the scouts and admired them for their endurance and perseverance from the day before. He reminded them that the most difficult part of the trek was behind them and they were well on their way to completing their grand adventure. With their hands joined together, they all gave a loud “I Can” cheer.

The trekkers left Pepeiao Cabin around 8:30AM along the Ka'u Desert Trail. They were heading for the Hilina Pali Lookout for lunch and then on to Kulanaokuaiki Campsite for the evening. There, they would meet the support crew in order to replenish with water. The distance to Hilina Pali Lookout was about 4.8 miles and was a gradual climb from 1680 feet to 2280 feet elevation. At several locations along the way, the trail dipped into low sections where the cool trade winds could not be felt and the heat quickly rose to make the hiking through those sections quite uncomfortable. The hot sections particularly affected Matthew, largely due to his extreme exertion the day before in reaching the cabin so as to aid the others with water. At one point along the trail about half way to the lookout, the group stopped to rest, have a snack, refill their hydration bladders, and take in the spectacular vista that surrounded them. From their vantage point, they could see the entire route that they had covered the previous two days as well Mauna Loa, Mauna Kea, and South Point, the southern most point of the United States. At this point, Kyle assisted Matthew by taking some of his gear, which made it easier for Matthew to make his way to the lookout. Frank was slowly making his way up the trail and would meet the group at the lookout. They resumed their way along the trail and reached Hilina Pali Lookout at around 11:30AM.

Once they arrived at the lookout, the scouts quickly removed their backpacks and brought out their lunch items for a veritable feast of peanut butter and jelly burritos, pepperoni and cheese, and dried fruit. The view from the lookout was even more spectacular than their previous vantage point along the trail and, with the full exposure to the trade winds, quite cool and comfortable. Fortunately, all the scouts had refilled all their water bottles before leaving the cabin, as there was no fresh water from this point forward. The scouts were quite relaxed and refreshed and ready to scurry up the road, but Frank had not, as yet, arrived at the lookout. As soon as they saw him emerge from the woods down the trail, they took off with two hiking sticks to meet him. They took his backpack from him and used the hiking sticks like a stretcher to carry it to the lookout for him. When he arrived, it was obvious that he was physically drained and would not be able to continue.

After he had some lunch and water, Frank told the other adults that he did not want to burden or put the trek at risk and would not continue further. William told him that they would ask the support team to drive down the road from the campsite to pick him up. He determined that it would be best if he returned to Oahu as soon as possible rather than remain and meet the scouts at the completion of the trek and joining them for the celebration that would follow. The lesson being that you cannot reap the rewards of an endeavor if you do not achieve the goal.

Shortly before 1:00PM, the scouts stowed their gear, donned their backpacks, and gathered together to allow Frank to address them as a group. He told them that he was very proud of them for what they had accomplished so far and was confident that they were going to complete their grand adventure with ease from this point forward. He also told them, while choking back his emotions, that he was sadly not going to be able to complete the trek and wished them all Godspeed and good luck as they headed up the road towards Kulanaokuaiki.

Shortly after leaving the lookout, William informed the group, based on his measurement of the distance that they had covered using his GPS receiver, they had passed the halfway point in the trek. Along the way, several vehicles heading towards the lookout passed them. One of the vehicles was a National Park Service pickup truck. They stopped the truck and told the park ranger, who was going to the lookout to check on its condition and haul out the trash, that they had left one of their group there and asked that he assist him by giving him a ride up from the lookout to the campsite. The ranger was hesitant at first, but agreed to assist after he checked the group's backcountry permit and hearing about Frank's condition. About 30 minutes later, the ranger brought Frank to rejoin the group along the road, where he hiked with the scouts the final half-mile to the campsite. The campsite was a welcome sight and everyone began to relax a bit while they waited for the arrival of the support crew.

The campsite consisted of a few flat pads for tents and several picnic tables. As there was already another tent setup on the upper pad, the group setup their tents in a central flat area and brought two picnic tables together for community use.

Shortly after the tents were setup, Mari and Melissa, the support crew, arrived with plenty of fresh water and a couple of quarts of fresh watermelon and other fruit. The melon and fruit was quickly devoured in an almost shark-like feeding frenzy! It was amazing to see how ravenous the scouts were in consuming a small, but delicious helping of cool, refreshing fruits. After a quick farewell, the support crew took Frank away to Hilo where he would spend the night before returning to Oahu the next day. The wind was moderate and steady, so a small kitchen was setup in the lee of the stone toilet building in order to boil water for dinner. The menu called for pasta that night, either spaghetti or lasagna, and everyone ate hungrily leaving nothing for the rats that signs indicated inhabited the area. The scouts also made a chocolate and caramel concoction for desert, but were hesitant to try once it was prepared. Sunset fell over the summit of Mauna Loa in a splendid, colorful display of many colors and the cool trade wind breeze made the evening quite comfortable.

The support crew returned later in the evening with more water so that the trekkers would have plenty for breakfast and the hike out to Chain of Craters Road, where the support crew would meet them again. Mari told them that Frank was safely in a hotel in Hilo, would be flying out to Oahu in the morning, and would meet the group upon their return to Honolulu in a few days.

Thursday, July 1, 2004 – Day Four – 12.5 Miles

The higher elevation of Kulanaokuaiki meant that the evening temperature was quite a bit cooler than the previous two nights. Additionally, the weather in this section of the Big Island can quickly change from clear to cloudy in a very short time. The morning started quite clear and sunny, but shortly after breakfast and before they were ready to leave, the clouds rolled in and made everything around them damp and chilly. They broke camp and after they joined together for a short inspirational message and a hardy "I Can" cheer, they headed up the road to rendezvous with the support crew.

The clouds that surrounded them gave everything a wet, glossy sheen and helped keep them cool as they made good speed up the road. They were moving much more rapidly over the road than they had been previously over the lava fields and along the trails. This was partially due to their high enthusiasm and partially due to the fact that they had consumed about half of their rations. They arrived at Chain of Craters Road about 15 minutes before they were expecting the support crew, so they removed their backpacks and donned their jackets to stay warm in the breezy, cloudy, damp air.

Mari, the solo member of the support crew that day, arrived at precisely the designated rendezvous time. Everyone had a quick snack, removed their jackets, and put on their backpacks for a short (one mile) hike down Chain of Craters Road to the Mauna Ulu Lava Shield visitor's area. On the advice of the park rangers they had consulted in preparation for the trek, they hike on the right side of the road walking with traffic, rather than on the left side facing traffic and were followed by Mari in her car with her emergency lights flashing. The park rangers recommended this as a safer alternative due to the limited visibility along the road and the high speeds that vehicles usually drive on their way to and from the shore.

The group arrived at the Mauna Ulu area shortly before 11:30AM and stopped for about an hour for lunch before continuing on to their destination of Napau Crater for their last night of the trek. Mari, once again, left and returned with more water that the group would need to carry until they completed the trek the next day.

Upon saying "see you tomorrow" to Mari, the group began the final push toward Napau Crater. At the end of the parking area, there were many Nene, the flightless Hawaiian goose and state bird, bathing without a worry or a care in a large puddle that had formed just beyond the path to a Mauna Ulu viewing point. The group took a couple of photographs of the birds, which did not seem to care that their bath was being observed so closely. The group then made their way back to the well-marked and well-worn path across the lava fields that surrounded the Mauna Ulu Lava Shield to Pu'u Huluhulu. Pu'u Huluhulu is large outcropping of lava that has been pushed up almost 100 feet to former a natural lookout point from which to take in the desolate and barren area the spreads out in all directions. From the summit, the scouts were able to get their first glimpse of the steam and smoke rising from the active volcano vent of Pu'u O'o. At the time of their trek, Pu'u O'o had been continuously erupting since January 3, 1983. The destination for the last night of the trek was a remote campsite overlooking Napau Crater and was about one and one-half mile from Pu'u O'o. Napau Crater was the sight of a brief episode of volcanic eruption in early 1997, but has been silent ever since. The group was hopeful that the sight would provide a clear view of the vent activity.

The trail was well marked and well worn across several miles of lava fields. It took them past several open pit areas and crevasses with hot steam trailing into the air, reminding them that they were hiking over and around an active volcano. After about four miles, they came to Makaopuhi Crater and entered a lush tropical forest of eucalyptus, bamboo, pine, and other trees and dense undergrowth. Shortly, they came to a junction with the Naulu Trail, which is the route they would take the following day to complete their grand adventure. From that junction, they had two miles remaining to reach Napau Crater. Along the way, they passed an abandoned Pulu Factory where the scouts explore the old stone walls for a short while before yet again strapping on the backpacks and suffering to tread just a bit further to the campsite.

The weather was cool and overcast when they arrived at Napau Crater. The campsite was to the left and mostly blocked from viewing Pu'u O'o by trees that grew along the plateau above the crater. The overlook was about a quarter mile to the right from the campsite and was situated on the very edge of a sheer cliff that provided an excellent view Pu'u O'o across Napau Crater. After the group setup their campsite, they all went to the overlook to admire to magnificent panorama and relish the moment in all its grandeur.

The group returned to the campsite and made preparations for dinner. The group was in very high spirits and less fatigued than previous nights thanks to the lightening of their backpacks down to the bare essentials and consumption of most of their food. After dinner was finished and the gear was cleaned and stowed, the group returned to the overlook just as twilight was giving way to darkness. The view of Pu'u O'o was difficult to discern at times due to the encroaching clouds that were pressing down on the mountainside. During the time that they spent at the overlook, each of them shared something of what they had been through over the past several days, what they were feeling, and what they learned from completing their grand adventure. It was a special and poignant moment for everyone, perhaps more so for the adults than the scouts as the younger men were quickly fading with heavy eyelids and sagging energies.

As the group returned to the campsite and secured themselves in their tents, the wet clouds were fully down on them, keeping everything exposed cool and damp and completely blocking any hopes of seeing the glow of the lava pit and flows of Pu'u O'o.

Friday, July 2, 2004 – Day Five – 5.2 Miles

William and Dean shared a tent near the makeshift dining fly and were quickly sound asleep. However, neither of them could stay asleep for long (perhaps each of their snoring woke the other one up!) and at about 4:00AM, they decided to rise, have a cup of coffee, and "talk story." Not long after they were up and enjoying their coffee and the peace and quiet of the early morning, they were joined by Alec. He was chilled and wanted some hot chocolate. Unfortunately, he had consumed all of his packets earlier in the trek, so he sipped "aqua caliente" to help combat the damp, chilly air. At around 5:00AM, William got up and wandered up the trail a short distance to find the privy and take care of "the call of nature" when he happened to look across the plateau in the direction of Pu'u O'o. He noticed that the clouds appeared to be lifting and, at that moment, he saw the bright reddish-orange glow of the lava pit and a flow from Pu'u O'o!

He called excitedly to Dean and Alec to come quickly to see what might be a once-in-a-lifetime spectacle. When they did not come at once, William raced back to the campsite and discovered that they were making sure that the camp stove out and safely secured before they ran up the trail. William called out to all the scouts and roused them all from the warm, dry sleeping bags to quickly come and get a glimpse of the lava. Several of the scouts were quick to rise and headed up the trail and around to the overlook and were, therefore, fortunate enough to see the glow. Unfortunately, a couple of the scouts (and Randy) were not so quick and, by the time that they were out of their tents, found their shoes, and made their way up the trail to the overlook, the clouds had pushed back in and hid the glowing lava pit and flow. In hopeful anticipation, they all waited calmly and quietly at the overlook, gazing in its direction, hoping and willing the clouds to lift soon before the sun came up and began to slowly filter its light through the cloud cover. The clouds would not cooperate and by 6:00AM the sun was up enough that they did not need their flashlights and headlamps as they made their way back to the campsite for breakfast.

Breakfast consisted of anything and everything that the scouts had left in their backpacks. They discovered, much to their satisfaction, that they had an abundance of fully cooked and vacuum-sealed bacon and ate handfuls until they were about to burst. After breakfast, the business of packing up the gear and preparing to make their way back to civilization was hampered by the extreme dampness of the tents and other exposed gear. Nonetheless, all the gear was packed and stowed, the campsite cleaned in the spirit of Leave No Trace (as the other campsites had been), and the group gathered together one more time before beginning the day's journey.

Russell had asked if they would get to say "I Do" that morning, but William pointed out that although they were very near the completion of their grand adventure, they were not done yet. He gave them all his appreciation and admiration for being such wonderful companions and adventurers and with a group cheer of "I Can, I Will" they headed back up the Napau Crater Trail to turn down the Naulu Trail and seek to complete their journey at Kealakomo (Pizza Hut) Overlook. They left Napau Crater under cloudy, but clearing skies and made excellent time through the forest and out again on to the lava fields.

Along the route down Naulu Trail, they came to a short stretch where the lava flow had left islands of open land including several hundred yards of pavement of a road long ago abandoned and returned to Madam Pele. As they continued further down the trail, everyone had a sense of excitement about being so near the end. Soon, they could once again see the shore, although it was several miles below them, and before long they saw the top of car fly by as it made its way down Chain of Craters Road. Just a few hundred yards further, and they could see the road and the roof of Kealakomo. With a sense of muted excitement, they were all sharing broad smiles as they stood together at the trailhead next to the road.

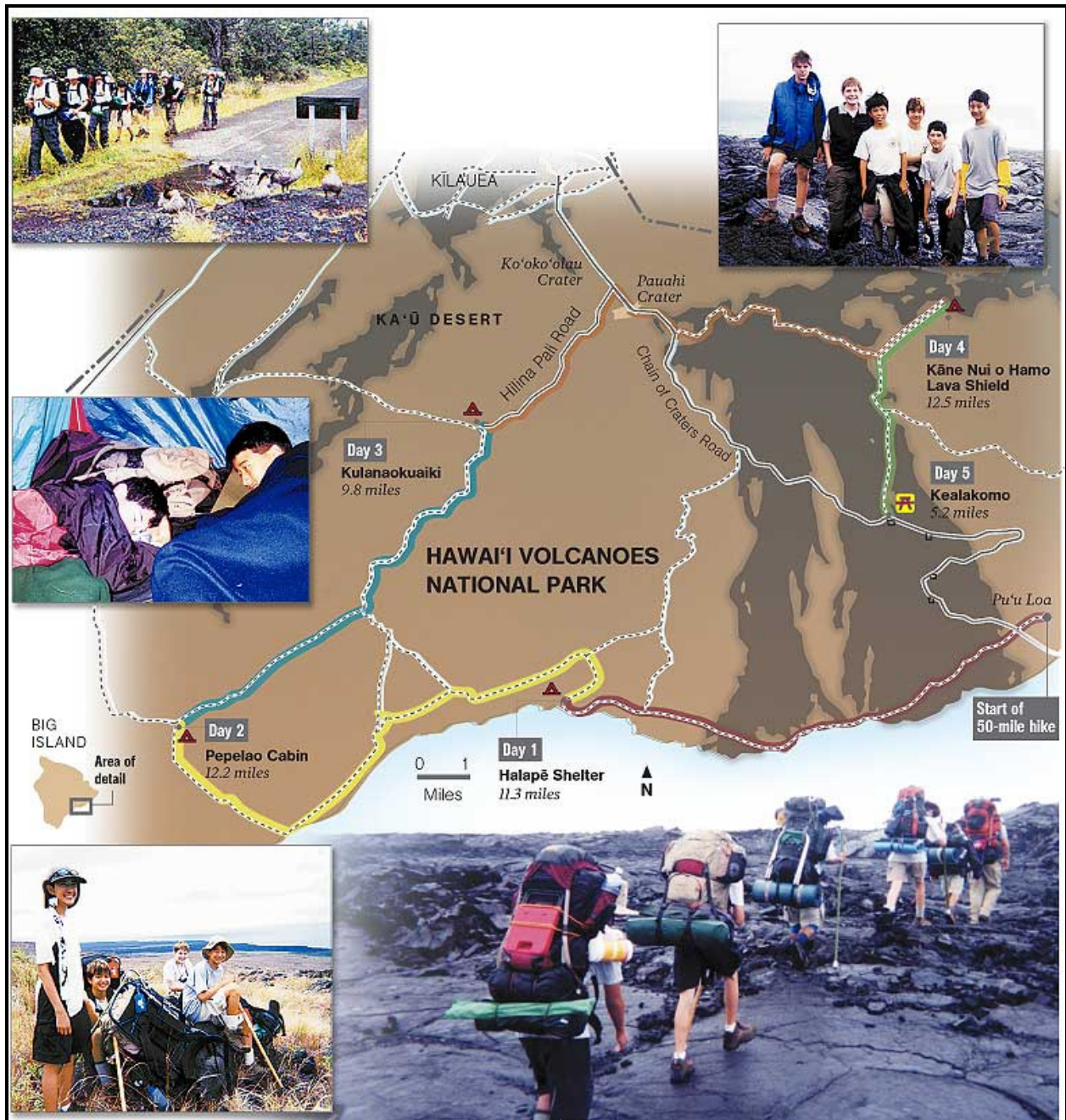
They put their hands together one more time and gave themselves a well-deserved congratulation with a hearty, robust cheer of "I Can, I Will, I DO!"

Epilogue – 51 Miles Total

The trek group was met at Kealakomo, about an hour after they completed the trek, by their support crew of Mari, Melissa, and Steve Park, who had flown to Hilo that morning and would stay with the group until they returned to Oahu the next day. The weather that had cleared enough to allow the trekkers to get off the mountain unbothered had worsened by bring a very strong wind and a driving rain that made it difficult to remain dry under the shelter. The support group brought lots of drinks, sandwiches, and snacks and a large watermelon that was quickly cut and devoured. After their short celebration, they packed all their gear into the vans and went to the end of Chain of Craters. From there, they hiked, thankfully without their backpacks, out a couple of miles and were able to see the lava that originated at Pu'u O'o as it entered the ocean in small, but fiercely hot, streams.

They returned to the vans and stopped to explore Thurston Lava Tubes, including a decent of over one kilometer into the darkness of one tube, on their way back to KMC. Once back at KMC, they returned to the same dormitory they had used on the night before they began their trek for hot showers and clean clothes. Several of the trekkers took the opportunity for a short nap before they all met again for a celebration in the KMC Bowling and Activity Center. They had a veritable feast of heavy pupus, pizza, and beverages, bowled several games in heated competition, and spent quite a bit of time in the game room playing video games and stomping to the music on the DDRS.

The following day, they packed all their gear into the vehicles, had a huge breakfast at KMC, and took the opportunity to visit many of the sights around the national park, including the visitor center, Jagger Museum, Devastation Trail, Halemaumau, and several overlooks and vistas. They left the park and headed north towards Hilo and made a visit to the Hilo Zoo. After the zoo, they had a quick lunch before visiting Rainbow Falls, the Boiling Pots, and the lava tubes of Kaumana Cave above Hilo. Then, it was time to head for the airport to catch their flight back to Honolulu. At Honolulu, they were met by their families with leis and much aloha and an eagerness to hear about their grand adventure.



Also reported in The Honolulu Advertiser, August 23, 2004.

“Hiking Scouts go the distance” by Rod Ohira

<http://the.honoluluadvertiser.com/article/2004/Aug/23/ln/ln21a.html>