

FROM THE FRONT PAGE

ERUPTION From front page

lava's been coming out pretty much continuously. The actual place it's come out of the ground has changed, but it has continued," Kauahikaua said.

Over the years, the continued activity, paired with the volcano's accessibility on the Big Island, has served to provide scientists with plenty of opportunities to learn about how volcanoes work, he said.

And while they are learning how better to predict eruptions, they are also becoming skilled at using knowledge gained in the last 30 years and applying it to events that occurred further back in time.

"One eruption, which we've named 'Ai la'au,' happened about 450 years ago, but it was hard to pin down how long it lasted," Kauahikaua said. "Now (using knowledge gained in part from the Pu'u O'o eruption), we think it may have been between 40 and 60 years."

The last 30 years has provided plenty of exciting moments for scientists, but perhaps none as thrilling as the moment on Jan. 29, 1997, when the crater floor at Pu'u O'o collapsed, dropping between 450 and 500 feet overnight, and draining the massive lava lake, he said.

"It had already started to collapse in a minor way, but then, all of a sudden, the bottom fell out," Kauahikaua said. "It left a hole as deep as it was wide.



HOLLYN JOHNSON/Tribune-Herald

Tourists check out some of the steam vents at Hawaii Volcanoes National Park on Friday afternoon.

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not have been on site when the eruption began.

It was an exciting and busy night and the beginning of a long adventure—much longer than any of us at that time anticipated. My recollection is that when Episode 1 ended, we assumed the eruption was over. By the time we were in Episode 2, I think we realized this was a normal east rift zone eruption. A word about the name of Pu'u O'o: I was simply trying to describe on the radio from the eruption site where one of the vents was located. I described the location as near the "o" in "lava flow of 1965" on the topographic map. Someone at HVO decided to informally call the growing spatter cone Pu'u O, and the Kalapana Hawaiian elders took it from there to Pu'u O'o.

Norm Banks
HVO staff geologist,
1978-1985

After the alarm was called out, and we gathered at HVO, several of us geared up (as we had some failed and a few eruptive events) and drove down to the end of the Chain of Craters Road to hike into Kilauea's middle East Rift in the dark and rain. We spent the night, wet, chasing the center of seismic activity (our packs loaded with cameras, time-lapse cameras, thermocouple kits, other observation instruments and survival supplies) as seismic reporting came in from HVO. We finally ended up at the site of the actual site of the first outbreak. We had cameras all set up and pointed in the right direction from some high points north of the eruption site. My memory is that our first crew was augmented and replaced, by helicopter (Ed Wolfe's party), at about

dawn and before the lava broke surface, although I returned to add or replace the ground geologists after some heat, drying, and food back at HVO.

None of us at HVO were predicting on the night of 2-3 January 1983 that we were seeing the start of an East Rift "siege" eruption. If anything, with the 3+ years of short eruptions ('79, 3-80, 4-81 and 9-82) and multiple (10-15) short eruptions (seismic swarms and deformation events), we were expecting a day to week of surface activity or none at all. Even when activity resumed 10 February, but then stopped again, the betting would still have favored a limited event. The resumptions in March and April had some possibly thinking a Mauna Ulu event, but not a siege.

I think that "siege" did not enter the lexicon until Pu'u O'o had become fully established and had experienced repeated episodes that pointed to an eruption that could certainly match/exceed Mauna Ulu's record. When I left HVO in mid-1985, I'm not sure that there had yet been consensus or a "eureka" moment, although certainly then Pele had edged out Mauna Ulu's 4+ year record, and there were discussions by then that we could be documenting something that

might match pre-historic eruptions.

Lopaka Lee
HVO staff scientist,
2007-present

About the naming of Pu'u O'o, it's ironic that I recall sitting on my Aunt's roof in Puna looking at the fainting thinking, "Tutu Pele coming...." As a 9-year old, I recall a common meaning of "o'o," particularly the way we've come to pronounce it, "mature, old, aged." Of course, this is consistent with the Hawaiian belief that things can be influenced by naming alone—for better or worse. Personally, every time I hear the name Pu'u O'o, I think, "Indeed!"

scientists say they've got plenty of work left to do, so they hope the lava flows will continue for years to come.

One area where they hope to make breakthroughs soon is on the subject of lava lakes.

"A lot of the work going on at the observatory right now is trying to really understand in general their relation to summit eruptions," he said. "It feels like we're on the verge of a big discovery in that way, and it would truly be exciting. We don't have enough data yet, and it would certainly be a shame to have the activity stop before we've figured it out."

Email Colin M. Stewart at cstewart@hawaiitribune-herald.com.

Volcano Awareness Month

January is Volcano Awareness Month. In recognition of the 30th anniversary of the Pu'u O'o eruption and Volcano Awareness Month, the U.S. Geological Society will host a number of talks:

Where: University of Hawaii at Hilo, University Classroom Building (UCB), Room 106

When: Thursdays at 7 p.m.

● Jan. 3 — 30th

LEE

Anniversary of Kilauea's East Rift Eruption
Tim Orr, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

ORR

Frank Trusdell, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 31 — Snowballs from Kilauea?

Ken Hon, University of Hawaii at Hilo Geology Department

Don Swanson, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 17 — Peleholuamea, Volcanism

Upanali Kanaka'ole

Kanahale, Edith

Kanaka'ole Foundation

and Hawai'i Community College

● Jan. 24 — Mauna Loa: How Well Do You Know the Volcano in Your Backyard?

Frank Trusdell, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 31 — Snowballs from Kilauea?

Ken Hon, University of Hawaii at Hilo Geology Department

"After Dark in the Park" Programs

● Tuesdays at 7 p.m.

Kilauea Visitor Center, Hawaii Volcanoes National Park

Entrance fees apply.

More information: (808) 985-6014 or 985-6011.

● Jan. 8 — 30th Anniversary of Kilauea Volcano's East Rift Eruption

Tim Orr, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 15 — What's happening in Halema'uma'u Crater?

Matt Patrick, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 22 — A Below-the-Surface Look at Kilauea Volcano's "Plumbing" System

Mike Poland, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory

● Jan. 29 — The Story Behind Monitoring Hawaiian Volcanoes: How HVO Gets the Data It Needs to Track Eruptions and Earthquakes

Kevan Kamabayahashi, USGS Hawaiian Volcano Observatory



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NOTICE TO ALL COUNTY RESIDENTS CLOSURES

All County Solid Waste Facilities Will be Closed on the Following Holidays

TUESDAY • JANUARY 1ST
NEW YEAR'S DAY

The following transfer stations that are normally closed on Wednesdays will be open on the Wednesday after the holiday to better serve the public:
Glenwood, Ke'e, Laupahoehoe, Pahala, Pāpā'ikou and Puakō.

Mahalo for your kokua.

For more information, please call the Solid Waste Division at 961-8270.

HAWAII COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT SOLID WASTE DIVISION

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