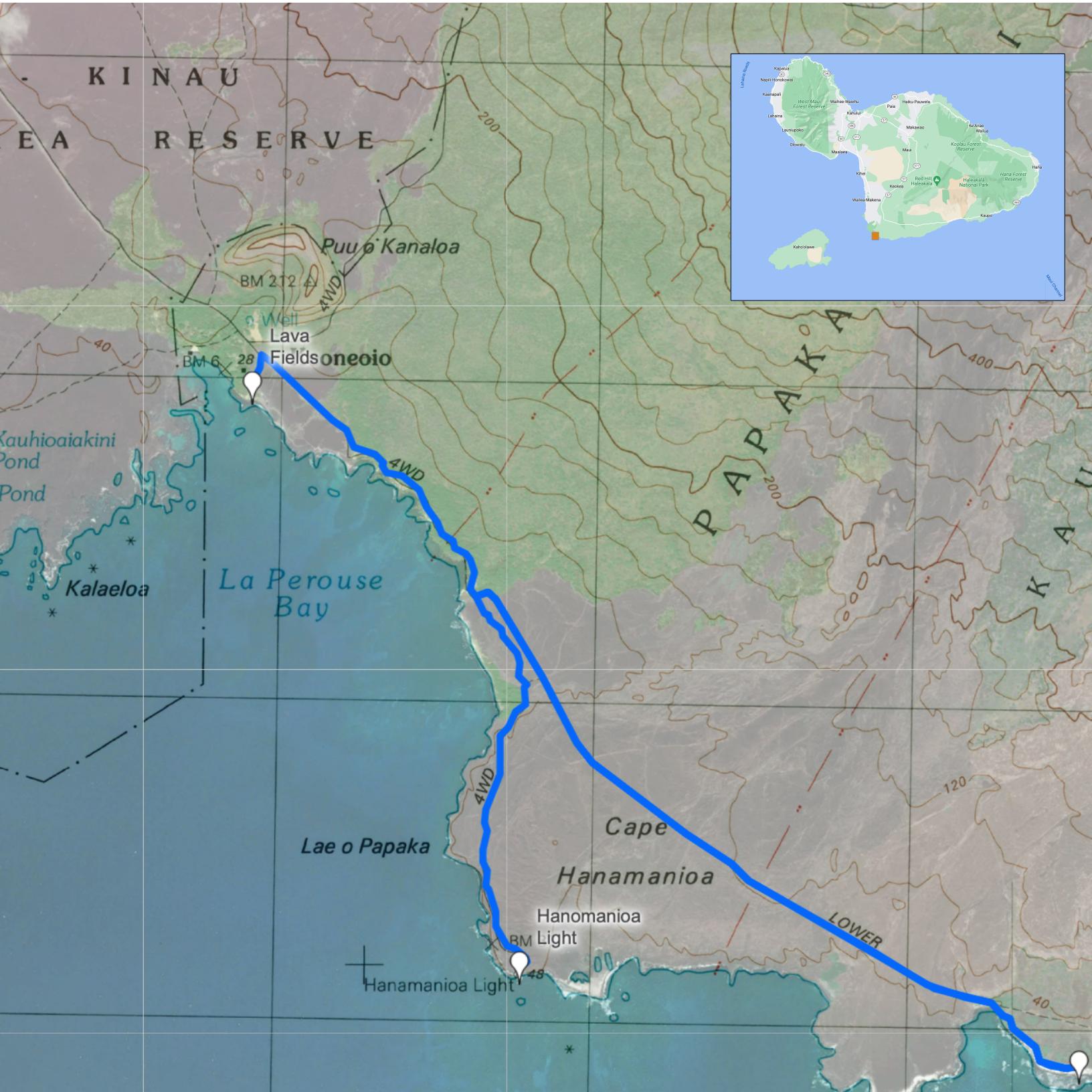


HANOMANIOA LIGHT



Maui Shorts
Todd G. Simpson
2022

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THE morning is spectacular; 23°C and not a breath of wind. I hit the trail at 5:30am, just light enough that I don't need a lamp. It's going to be hotter than usual, so getting part of this walk done before sunrise makes sense.

The trailhead is at the very end of Makena road, at La Perouse Bay.

Any guide book will tell you three things about the walk to the Hanomanioa Light and this section of The King's Highway.

First, bring lots of water. It gets hot.

Second, wear lots of sunscreen. The lava fields have little to no shade.

Third, wear sturdy shoes. The trail is rocky and rough, so although it's level, it can still turn an ankle.

What they should also say, but is probably implied, is to do the walk early morning or late evening to help mitigate the heat. This is also when the light and shadows are the most beautiful, which is certainly the case this morning.



Blink

and you see an unexpected
eruption of fire from the summit of Haleakala.

It's sunrise up there and the perfect cloud has wafted in.

The view of the mountain from this vantage is compelling.

The humps and lumps (smaller cones) give depth and contrast to the view
unlike the smooth and uninterrupted rise as seen from Kahalui or Kihei up through
Kula. It's also barren and dry unlike the grown-in regions above Hana.

The single large tree on the horizon intrigues me.

You can see it from many vantage points along the Kihei coast, even from Maalaea.
That you can also see it from here means it must truly be on the main western ridge.
There's no easy way to access it, but I intend to try at some point. It beckons.





Lava rock is miserable to walk on. Luckily the trail is well marked and there are small sections of sand in the early stages which give your ankles a break.

As you drive the end of Makena road you typically see a few feral goats; they're common in this area. I spooked a couple off the road this morning. Less than half a mile into the hike, where there's still some vegetation, the goats turn the tables.

A trip of goats numbering in the hundreds stopped me in my tracks (and no, that's not a mistake; a 'herd' of goats is most commonly called a 'trip'). The trail was quiet, and then suddenly there was a noisy stampede. Billy goats with long beards, graceful does, and hordes of kids, smaller than cats, leaped, ran and squealed past me, many within a meter or two. I couldn't get the camera out fast enough, and so I just captured the tail end of the trip trip (what - two puns in one phrase?).



Lava fields are stark and unforgiving, and all the more beautiful because of that. The Big Island with its more recent active flows is, in my memory, even more inspiring than this trail, but the contrast with the ocean and the lightening of the sky this morning is inspiring.



The Hanomanioa Light is well off to the left in the image above, while the southern shoulder of Kaho'olawe is on the right. These waves are consistently great for surfing and while no-one was out yet, I would see a lone boarder enjoying a ride on my way back. You have to be experienced to ride here; the landing can be rough.

Another half mile down the trail I heard a baby crying loudly. It was the type of cry that evolution has burned into our brains - help, help! I figured someone was camping on one of the small beaches that dot this trail, although this baby was a wailer like I'd never heard before.

I was relieved as I came around a corner and found that it was this little guy, stranded on an outcropping and not sure what to do. The kid had heard me coming and panicked. The cries were loud, crisp, and clear. Seeing me finally inspired hir and it managed to scramble down and cross the trail to join hir parents, who were waiting patiently.

Once together they scampered off, unaware that the lava was so rough that they shouldn't be able to move that fast.







La Perouse, the French explorer, landed on the southwest tip of Maui in May of 1786 and traded with the villagers there. While not fit for large vessels today, it is speculated that La Perouse Bay was more welcoming 250 years ago. La Perouse may have been the first European to land on Maui.

While Cook had visited Hawaii in 1778, he didn't land on Maui on that trip. La Perouse used a map from Cook's first expedition to navigate to the bay that now bears his name, pictured here along with Haleakala and the West Maui Mountains. This was La Perouse's last known location before he disappeared forever (into the sunset?).

Cook's history is well documented so we know that on his second trip to Hawaii he sailed westward along the southern coast of Maui and although his men could see the amazing waterfalls and life-giving foliage of Kaupo they were unable to make landfall due to the rugged coast. Instead, they sailed further west and then north, passing La Perouse Bay and Molokini, ultimately ending up in Lahaina. The ships, from Captain Cook's time through the whaling era and into the beginning of the sugar cane era, generally avoided the jagged southern coast, especially at night, lest they struck some remnant of the lava flows.

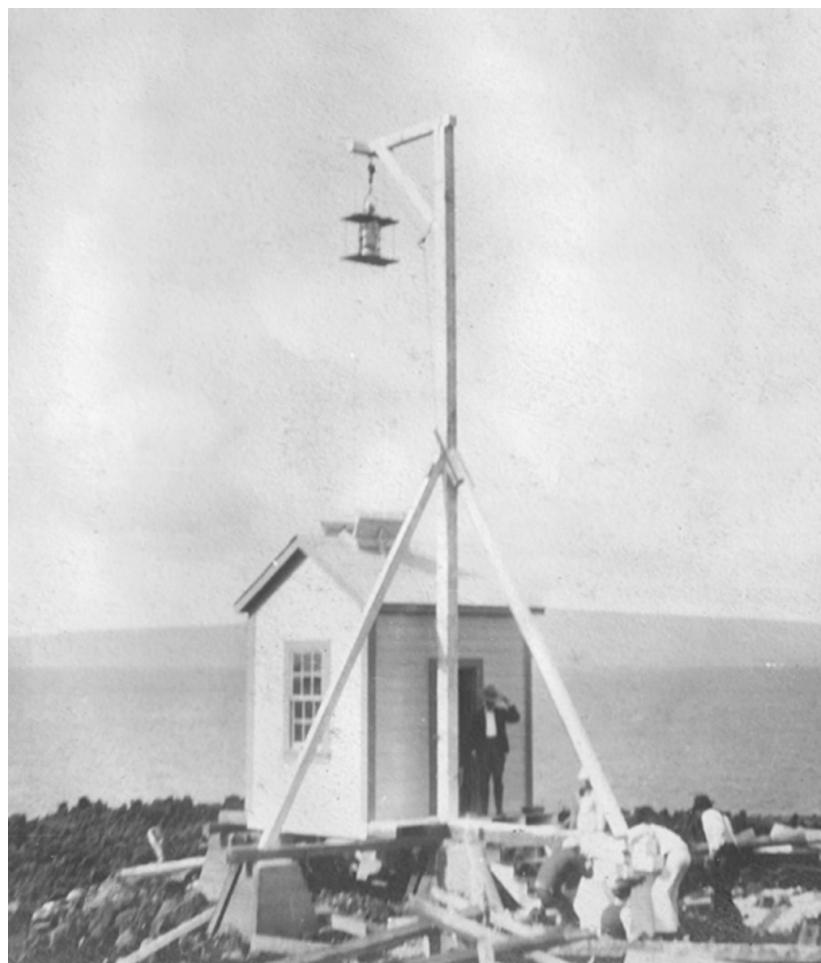
I imagined, gazing out to sea, a tall ship passing by, keeping its distance from the jagged rocks.

During the sugarcane era, in the 1880s, ships began regular stops near Makena to pick up sugar from a mill near there. Many of those ships ran into trouble, so, finally, a light was established, in 1884, on Kanahena Point, just north of La Perouse Bay.

The first lightkeeper, John Andersen, and upon his death, his wife, would make the six-mile round trip from their house in Makena to maintain the light - every evening and every morning until 1910. Several other keepers kept the Kahahena light alive daily until 1918 when the Hanomanioa Light was installed several kilometers to the south of the bay. This new light was powered by acetylene and required significantly less caretaking. There was a small dock built nearby to facilitate delivery of the fuel.

Today the Hanomanioa Light remains, using modern technology, and all traces of the dock have disappeared. Neither is there a house with this light; thus the awkward reference.

John Andersen and his diligent wife
Lived a very lava'ish life
Each morning and night without fail
They'd trudge the Hoapili trail
Keeping ships safe from rocky strife.



What has not disappeared, however, is the trail from Makena to both Kanahena and Hanomanioa. One could imagine the trail I was on becoming more worn over time, as the keepers of the lighthouse made their daily treks. The trail also connects with the King's Highway, built much earlier, which has an amazing history of its own which I'll visit another time.

Although I've done the walk to the Light before, I'd resolved to do it again having recently dug into Maui history and having more context. It's one thing to do a hike; it's another to walk in the footsteps of the early lightkeepers, imagining how much better my footwear is than theirs was.



If you've been to Maui in the last ten years you won't be surprised that the number one best selling vehicle on the island is the Toyota Tacoma, unlike the rest of the US where the Ford F150 reigns supreme. The history of the Japanese in Hawaii gives Toyota a great brand, but beyond that, the ability to upgrade and build out a Tacoma make it quite desirable to the locals. You'll see some pretty crazy units; many of them with oversized tires and high suspensions.

Still, even given that, I was surprised to see a white Tacoma parked in the middle of the trail ahead of me. I hadn't noticed tracks, although in hindsight one wouldn't, given the size and consistency of the lava rocks. It certainly seemed out of place, and a bit beat up, so I approached cautiously and didn't take pictures. The other thing you will note in Maui is that there are a lot of non-functional vehicles; the climate is perfect for living in these. Of course, there was nothing to fear; the vehicle was empty and as I got closer I noticed camping gear in the back.

First question: how the heck did that Tacoma get here. I've done some off-roading in the Rocky Mountains, but this lava trail is tough. Even with a jacked-up unit like the one in front of me, I wouldn't have attempted it. Seemed almost like it'd been dropped in by helicopter. Second question: was this allowed? There are signs at the trailhead forbidding camping and a locked gate blocking the only access road - although calling it a road is a bit optimistic. Probably questions I would never get an answer to.



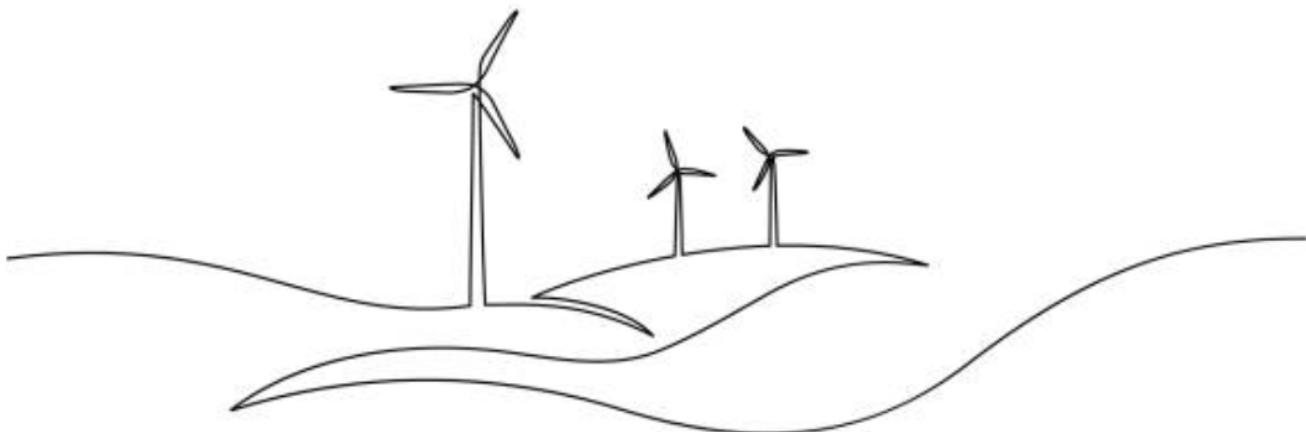


As I got a bit further along, I looked back along the trail, towards Molokini, which you can see on the horizon in the previous picture. Sure enough, there was a person, perhaps fishing, on an outcropping across from where that Tacoma was parked. You can spot them as the tiny vertical spire below and to the right of Molokini, on the previous pages.

Part of the mystery solved - the Tacoma hadn't been abandoned; there was at least one person nearby.

Only a few minutes later, the Hanomanioa Light came into view. While it's just a mile and a half from the parking lot to the Light, and there is no elevation gain (the trail follows the coastline pretty closely), it's a bit of a slog through the rock. That, plus the fact that I'd banged my knee up last week, meant I was coasting along at only about 3 mph. Not that speed matters; this is one of those spots where you're compelled to stop and stare, either mauka (towards the mountain) or makai (towards the sea) at every turn in the path.

I was actually surprised to arrive at the Light; I'd expected to come across a fork in the path, the left hand choice leading to the King's Highway, while the right hand led here to the Light - the Hoapili Trail (Hoapili was an advisor to King Kamehameha I), as shown in the map earlier.

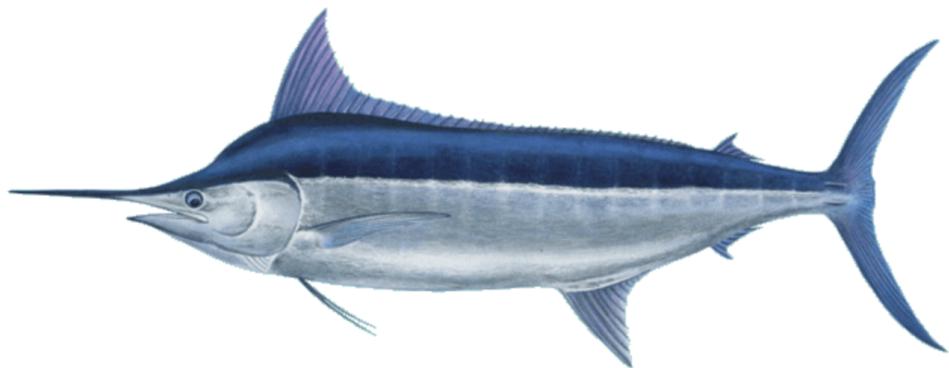


On the way back I took careful note of where the intersection was. It's less than obvious, and the casual hiker (me) is bound to take the Light path by default. However, there is a big white sign out in the middle of the Lava, and it sits on the King's Highway, so you can recover and work your way over to that sign should the Highway be your destination.

This may be the only place on the island where you can see both windmill farms at the same time. Although....perhaps, also from that lone tree on the ridge. You can see the west Maui windmill farm, if you squint, overleaf, in the spot where the sun is hitting the West Maui mountains. The south Maui farm can be seen on the cover image.







On my way back I was just in time to see the fisherman get back to his Tacoma. He'd caught a couple medium sized Kajiki, which he showed me stored on ice in a big cooler. His fishing rod was unlike any I'd seen before; four sections each of which were over seven feet. While I didn't ask the hard questions (Was he allowed to have his truck in here? Had he stayed overnight? He must have.) he did tell me that he'd driven in on the walking path. "It's not a fun trip," he told me, "but the cooler is a must." I had to agree; carrying a couple thirty pound fish out by hand, as they dried out, would be even less fun. I asked if he would sell the fish in the market or to a restaurant, and he indicated 'no', it was just for fun. I liked that answer.

We chatted a bit more - he thought he recognized me from a movie, which happens once and a while. Some zombie apocalypse, I imagined, given the state of my hair.

As I continued on the path back I focused on spotting truck tracks, and indeed they were there. I still wouldn't have attempted it, and I expect driving would be even slower than walking.

My mind wanders when I walk alone. I wonder what a modern AI image generator would think of this place? Wonder no more.



Back at La Perouse Bay I took time to relax; there were no snorkelers yet, although they would come, so I had the place pretty much to myself.

Just across the bay is the private enclave that Jeff Bezos bought in 2021 for seventy-eight million (just beyond Jeff's house you see the parking lot and the start of the trail). Another in a very long line of American robber barons who use their wealth from the mainland to buy a piece of paradise. And not an ahupua'a (a traditional wedge of land from mountain to sea containing everything required for survival), but, rather, a western plot.

The contrast, between John Andersen getting twenty bucks a month (about six hundred dollars today) to maintain the Kahahena Lighthouse for the public good and Bezos locking down a beautiful chunk of coastline is stark. As stark as the lava field it sits on.

Perhaps that's why it feels a bit like you're traveling back in time as you head south to the Light, and then get shocked back into the present as you return. I suggest you take your time on this trail....at least on the way there.



THE END