Tracings of the past

by Barbara Decker

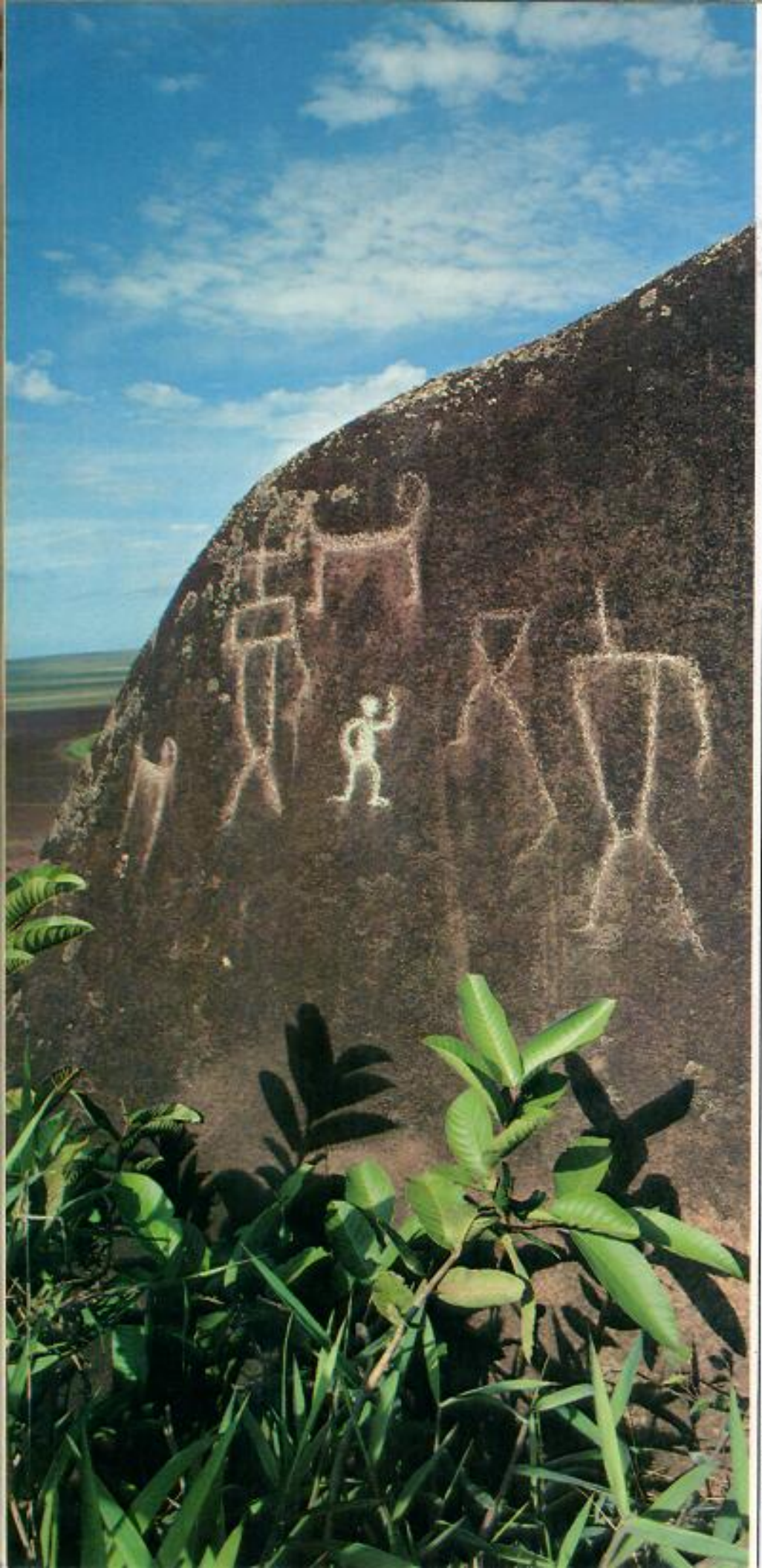
The leaves of the kiawe trees cast lacy shadows on the smooth, glistening lava along the trail from Puako, on the Big Island of Hawaii. We stopped for a moment in this welcome patch of shade for a cool drink from the water bottles we were carrying and it was only then we noticed that the rocks around us were alive with images—carvings of human figures, animals, sails, and hundreds of symbols we couldn't identify. We were in the Puako petroglyph field, one of the largest concentrations of rock pictures in Hawaii, with over 4,000 carved images.

The early Hawaiians were prolific picture-makers. These rock images, which archaeologists call petroglyphs and Hawaiians call *ki'i pohaku*, are found on all the Hawaiian Islands. They usually are carved on the smooth lava called *pahoehoe*, which has a thin shiny crust that is easily broken when chipped with a harder rock. When the crust is chipped or scratched away, a rough-textured inner surface is revealed, making a distinct and lasting picture. On the Big Island there are three fields with thousands of pictures in each and almost a hundred other sites with smaller concentrations, including some in caves and on isolated boulders.

Maui has a rich collection of petroglyphs, like the beautiful series of figures carved on a cliff face at Olowalu, near Lahaina. Also on Maui are several sites where the rock pictures were painted instead of carved. These paintings are called pictographs and are quite rare in Hawaii. On Oahu there are a dozen places where petroglyphs can be seen. Some of the best are in Nuuanu Valley—on the edge of Honolulu, where careful carvings of big lively dogs, ceremonial figures, and men with rainbows arching over their heads can be seen on the rocks along Nuuanu Stream.

Primitive art holds a fascination for modern man. For those of us who are not archaeologists, art gives us our clearest glimpse of what was in the minds of the people before the written record. Petroglyphs supply an added dimension because of the permanence of their locations; except for a few that have been pried up and trucked off

Greg Vaughn



Douglas Peebles

to museums, those we see today are in the same physical setting where they were created. When you walk through a silent petroglyph field today and run your hand over one of the ancient carvings, the sun on your shoulders, the light sea-breeze, and the texture of the rock under your hand all feel the same today as they did to the Hawaiian who carved the image 100 or 1,000 years ago.

But if it is easy to re-create the physical environment of the early Hawaiians, the same does not hold true for the mental and emotional environments; those are impossible to duplicate. In the world of the ancient Hawaiian, the supernatural was as real as the natural. The images we see reflect a view of the world so different from our own that our intuitions cannot tell us what their symbols may have meant to them. A simple stick figure may symbolize the most solemn appeal to a deity, while a symbol that seems to us to be charged with mystery may be just a way of counting yams. This is the real problem in interpreting the petroglyphs we see today. We can recognize and admire the graceful figures of men and women, canoes with billowing sails, fish or animals, but we can never be sure why an early Hawaiian was motivated to spend hours in the hot sun, meticulously carving them into the lava.

The locations of most carvings only add to the mystery. They are almost always in large groups and often concentrated so thickly that the carvings overlap. This is true even when the site is surrounded by acres of rock that, to our eyes, looks just as appealing but is completely untouched. The most common sites are in barren terrain, not in or near old villages but grouped along the foot trails that circled the islands about a half-mile to a mile inland from the shore. This led to early speculation that they were just doodles made by travelers who stopped to rest along the trail. Few experts believe that today, though. The designs are too purposeful and consistent to be random scribblings.

Who were the people who carved these remarkable pictures? Experts think that the tradition of petroglyph-making arrived in Hawaii with the first immigrants from Polynesia in about the seventh century A.D., but that the activity flourished more toward the

end of the prehistoric period, in the 17th and 18th centuries. Accurate dating is almost impossible except in a few cases where the lava flows on which petroglyphs were carved have been radiocarbon dated. However, it is possible to tell their relative ages by the increasing sophistication of the designs.

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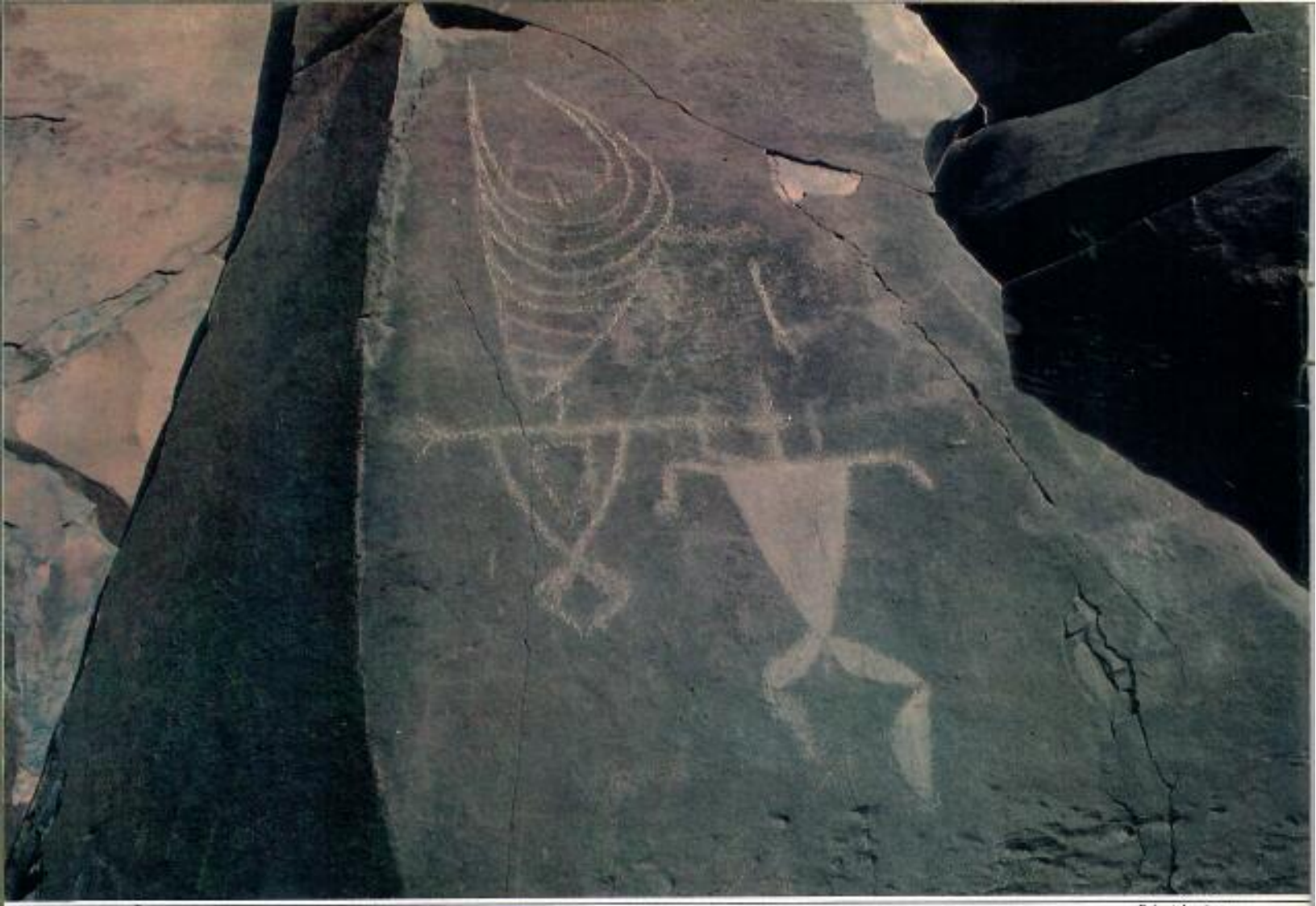
This is confirmed by the fact that, in the areas of thickest concentration where the designs overlap, the earliest simple stick figures are overlain by pictures of men in animated poses with triangular bodies and muscular arms and legs.

Rock art in most parts of the world seems to be related to hunting magic, warfare or religion. Apparently, neither of the first two motivated Hawaii's petroglyph makers. Here, the emphasis was on gentler matters: a commemoration of events, records of trips and, at several of the largest and most important fields, protective symbols relating to birth, children and families. These last make the most intriguing pictures. At Puako there are intricately carved family groups, birth scenes, and long lines of figures—one above the other—that sometimes are called "marching men" but seem more likely to be a genealogical record.

Puuloa, on the Big Island, is especially significant because it is the only site in Hawaii, and one of the few in the world, for which a specific function is known. In interviews by anthropologist Martha Beckwith in 1914 and by others a few years later, local villagers told of its special magic.

Puuloa is a large, barren field of billowing *pahoehoe*, about a mile inland from the ocean. The main feature is a long, low hill of lava. "Long Hill" is the literal translation of the name *Puuloa*, but Hawaiians interpret it to mean "Hill of Long Life" and associate the magic of the name with the petroglyphs there. The top of this central hill is completely covered with at least 7,000 cup-like holes that were pecked into the lava and appear to be very old. On the flat lava that surrounds the hill in all directions is an incredible array of carvings, almost all incorporating these cup-like holes in different designs. Some are simple holes or groups of holes enclosed in a circle, some are holes

David Carnavell



Robert Jamieson

interconnected in imaginative ways to form designs, and many are human figures associated with groups of holes.

The testimony is that it was the custom of early Hawaiians to bring to Puuloa the umbilical stump (which they called the *piko*) of a newborn baby, carve a hole in the rock, put the *piko* in and cover it with a stone. If the *piko* was still there in the morning, the child was assured of a long life. This was not just a local custom; families from Oahu, Maui and even Kauai would save the *pikos* of all their children and eventually make the long canoe trip to Puuloa. There, they would make a hole for each *piko* and surround them with a circle to signify a family. Some circles contain as many as 30 or 40 holes.

This custom seems to have continued for many generations, well into the late 1800s, when it was discouraged by the missionaries.

Petroglyph-making in general was flourishing when Captain Cook arrived in 1778. In the decades that followed his discovery of Hawaii, a profusion of new carvings appeared: strange new animals (horses and goats), sailing ships, churches and an occasional gun. With the opening of missionary schools came writing. Some of the last petroglyphs made were carefully carved Roman letters spelling out Hawaiian names and dates, all of them in the 1860s.

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By 1870, the practice of rock carving had practically died out. The world had changed. Coastal settlements had been abandoned and life was centered in towns and ranches. Travel on old foot trails had stopped in favor of the use of horse and carriage. In a world that moved a little faster, rock carving was obsolete.

Most pieces of primitive art we see in museums exist because they were beautiful enough to be cherished and strong enough to survive. In this way, petroglyphs are unique; almost all that were ever made still exist, from trials to tallies to real works of art. This mysterious calligraphy has become one of our best windows to a vanished way of life.

For several years, Barbara Decker and husband Robert have collaborated on science writing. Together, they have produced magazine articles, newspaper columns, and two books: Volcano Watching, published by the Hawaii Natural History Association, and Volcanoes, published by W.H. Freeman and Company. The Deckers live on the Big Island in the Hawaii National Park, where Robert is Scientist-in-Charge at the U.S. Geological Survey's Hawaiian Volcano Observatory.

hyatt's hawaii

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Contents

For 43 years, the Royal Hawaiian Band was directed by Prussian Army Captain Henry Berger. His first concert, a musical tribute to King Kamehameha the Great, was briefly interrupted by Berger's arrest. Since then, though, things have gone more smoothly for this musical ensemble. These days, there are free concerts on Sunday afternoons and at noon each Friday. Bob Dye's story also credits Berger with the preservation of the music of old Hawaii.

As veteran journalist and cartoonist Harry Lyons points out, the $80 million, 815-room, 20-acre Hyatt Regency Maui does tend to get one's attention. In addition to innovative uses of lava (real and man-made), waterways, open spaces and a $2 million collection of Asian art, you'll find an entire squadron of birds of all sizes, shapes, colors, habits and temperaments. And it may well be the only hotel in the world with a bird that can sound like a duck, a chicken, a cat or a Space Invaders electronic game. Lyons' tale of fowl play begins on page 8.

Foster Botanic Garden, in the middle of Honolulu, is a quiet retreat with plants of all kinds, including many you won't find in your hometown nursery. As Paul Seaman points out, you can see a Bo tree propagated from one planted over 2,200 years ago. You can also see a tree used to catch fish, one that provides drinking water and coconut palms with nuts weighing 50 pounds. Seaman's story starts on page 12.

Imagine for a moment that you've developed a product for which demand exceeds supply. You have neither a delivery system nor salesmen, yet people line up at your door every day for their allotments. You are offered millions for your business. What would you do? Jeanette Foster's story of Dewey Kobayashi and his family also is the story of a successful entrepreneur who refuses to sell out.

Oahu's North Shore has been a playground since Hawaiian royalty maintained vacation homes there. Dan Myers, ever a practitioner of the factual, sober, straight-laced school of writing, presents a textbook case on how best to spend a weekend enjoying all this bountifully endowed region offers—and another on how to virtually guarantee total disaster, including a shattered marriage.

The Waikiki Shell was the setting for just one afternoon concert by the Royal Hawaiian Band, for which it originally was constructed. Bobbie Jennings' account of the ups-and-downs of this outdoor theater includes stories of a dinner for two on center stage, performances by the cream of America's entertainers, and a cannon-free rendition of the "1812 Overture."

Maintaining the reputation for quality cuisine at Bagwells 2424 is the responsibility of chef Yves Menoret, a task he handles with Gallic elan. We've included two of his favorite recipes—for Filet of Lamb in Puff Pastry and Poached Pear with Chocolate Sauce—on pages 27 and 28. Enjoy.

When the first missionaries arrived in Hawaii in 1820, they brought the written word—and a lot of other things—with them. A form of written communication of which they were completely ignorant was, eventually, discovered—symbols we now call petroglyphs. Barbara Decker, a student of these records of people we still understand only partially, provides a glimpse into Hawaii's past, beginning on page 29.

Aloha,

Edward G. Sullivan
Regional Vice President
Hyatt Hotels Hawaii

Gene Tinker, *Editor and publisher;* Ted Baptista, *Art Director;* Wendi, *Assistant Art Director;* Carmona Photography, *Cover Photo.*

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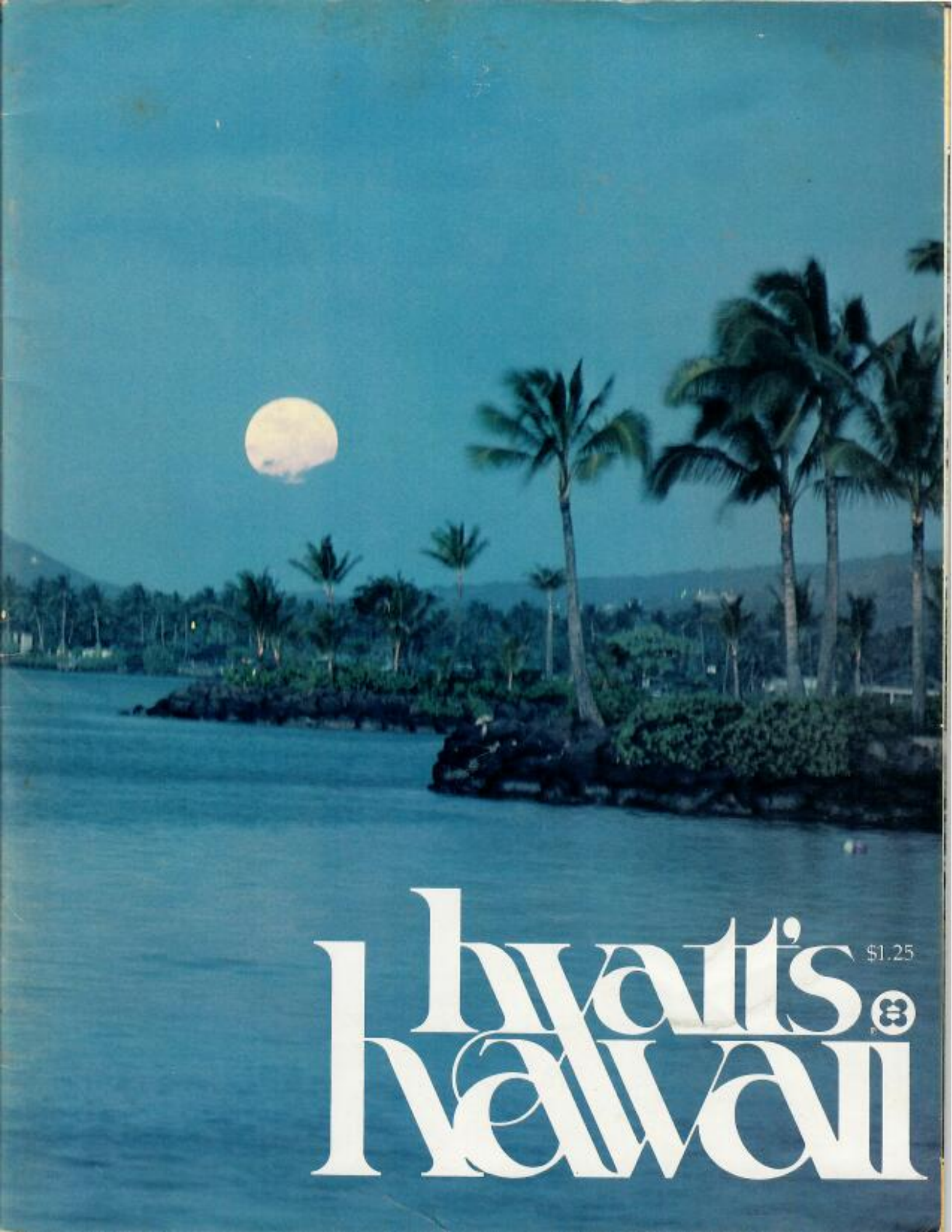
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