

# Kapoho Village loses

*Editor's note: Those who travel around the Big Island can find the remnants of a bygone era nearly everywhere. This column attempts to explain the history behind some of them.*

**T**he Kapoho graben — a slice of the earth's crust that's subsided between two bordering faults to the north and south — resembled a large slice of a pie. The seaward edge of the graben was the wider edge, and tended to drop downward during changes in the level of the lava that supported it. This was due to its position directly over the east rift zone of Kilauea.

During times of volcanic stability the Kapoho graben remained stationary, and there were no changes in sea level on its outward edge. As long as the summit remained inflated with lava, the Kapoho graben did not move as the charged column of magma under it supported it much as a hydraulic jack can support the weight



## The Riddle of the Relic

Kent Warshauer

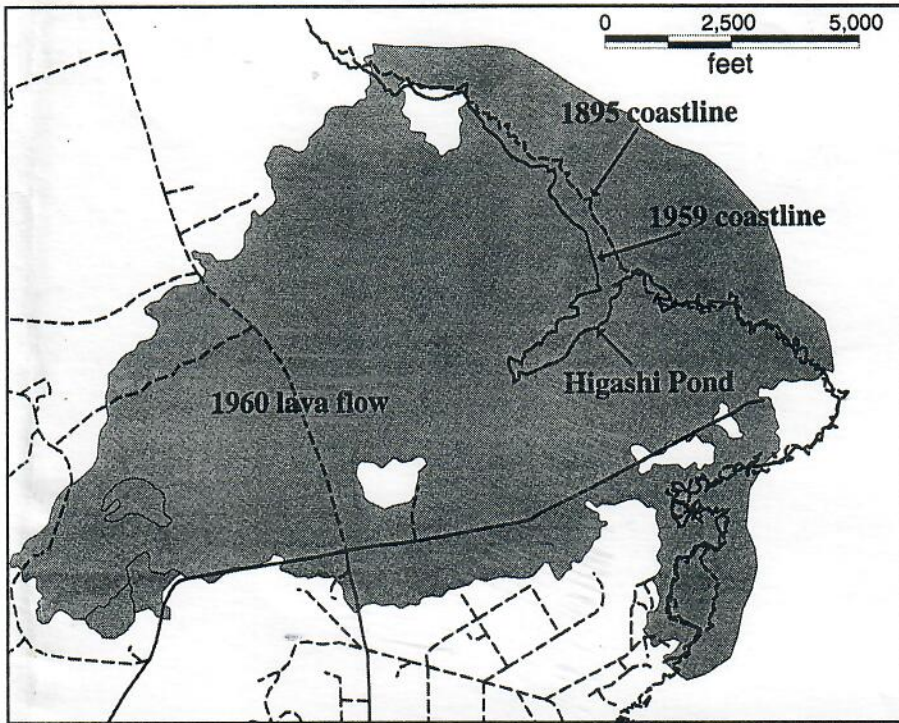
of a automobile.

A submarine eruption on the east rift zone triggered changes in the Kapoho graben much like the actions of a hydraulic jack. To lower the auto from its lifted position, the mechanic opens a valve and the fluid returns to the reservoir and the piston retracts. A submarine eruption does the same thing. The magma supporting the Kapoho graben drained away, causing the land to subside.

During historic times the coastline off Kula has changed, the first instance following a one-day submarine eruption reported by Mrs. Sarah J. Lyman on Jan. 22, 1884. A large part of the

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# tug-o-war with Pele



*Map by Jim Kauahikaua, USGS*

This map shows the major lava flows that overran Kapoho. The destruction of the village was heralded with a series of earthquakes that began in January 1960.

# KAPOHO

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coastline disappeared under the sea. As this particular eruption occurred in shallow water, it was noticed from shore and reported.

Undoubtedly, other recent underwater eruptions have occurred, as changes in the summit crater had been also recorded as large collapse events occurring Aug. 13, 1883, March 7, 1886, March 7, 1891 and again July 11, 1894. These events probably occurred in deep water, as they were not reported by local residents.

Changes were noticed in the shoreline, as early maps recorded the receding coastline during surveys done in 1880, 1895, 1924 and 1960.

On April 2, 1924, a swarm of earthquakes began near the Kilauea caldera, and migrated down the east rift zone, centralizing in the Kapoho area by April 20 as the walls of Halemau mau began to collapse on the summit. The Kapoho area began to shake as the graben dropped, due most likely to a submarine eruption in deep water draining the magma column.

The earthquakes in Kapoho increased in intensity by April 22 when great cracks began to form as the graben dropped into the sea, and water began to rush into low lying areas. Earthquakes continued as new cracks opened and closed — one crack crushing a cow. On April 25, the earth near the railroad company's dancing pavilion dropped 90 feet, and a crack opened in the Japanese cemetery as it also dropped 30 feet.

The Kula fault dropped 10 to 12 feet along its nearly five-mile length, and the southern side of the Kapoho graben fell a foot or two. The sea flooded inland, forming Ipocho Lagoon (Higashi's Fishpond) as the coastline sank another 14 feet, leaving coconut trees standing in 12 feet of water.

## THE KAPOHO LAND AND DEVELOPMENT CO. LTD.

In early 1948, the Lyman family heirs decided to develop their 12,000 acres in Kapoho, and a family corporation was organized for this purpose. The Kapoho Land and Development Co. Ltd. was organized Sept. 28, 1948, with Richard J. Lyman Jr. as president, Arthur Lyman as vice president and treasurer, and Clarence Lyman secretary.

A new road from the light-house to the Kapoho Beach shoreline allowed the subdivision of recreational sites for cottages among the many tide-pools in the area, as surveyors began plotting various areas for either lease or sale.

By 1950 about 40 residents of Kapoho Village had purchased the lots they'd been leasing and on which they had

built homes or businesses. Two remote fishponds were leased for mullet farming, the five-acre Mizukami Pond and the Ipocho Lagoon, now to be known as Higashi Pond.

Surveys and permits were completed on the Kapoho Beach Lots and all access roads provided when the lots, starting at \$575 each, went on sale June 7, 1952. This 75- to 80-acre subdivision contained 125 lots, and was considered a semi-private luxury subdivision.

Electricity to Kapoho was a desire of the people, but the community at this time lacked the \$16,000 of the required \$40,000 needed to bring it into the village. It was not until Oct. 7, 1959, that electricity came to Kapoho Village, beach lots and school. This was due to the Lymans investing \$90,000 into the \$155,566 project, as they had something bigger in mind.

On May 6, 1958, it was announced that a Hilo syndicate headed by real estate broker Peter Hayashi had purchased a 90-acre tract at Kula for \$172,500. This purchase included the Waiakea Lagoon and the "last truly authentic Hawaiian village" according to Richard Lyman, president of the Lyman heirs.

This sale, by the way, kicked off the subdivision land boom resulting in most of the sub-standard Puna subdivisions we have today. Ironically, the syndicate planned an exclusive subdivision with a small boat harbor, deluxe hotel and a 18-hole golf course around Higashi Pond to be developed by the Lyman interests. The village site was cleared of vegetation, revealing the ruins of ancient fishing settlements, which were destined to become a park and picnic area near the proposed hotel.

On March 26, 1959, the Kapoho Land and Development Co. Ltd. announced a development plan for Kapoho calling for a hotel overlooking the Ipocho Lagoon, coast and warm springs. This resort was to have 120 guest suites, to be expanded to 250.

Also planned was a 25-acre community center in the heart of Kapoho, complete with community, civic and commercial buildings, ballfields and parks, and a 23-acre industrial area as well as a small airport. Also planned were 183 farm lots of five acres each.

On April 30, 1959, a hui consisting of James Kuwaye, Norman Lyman, Kazuhisa Abe, Stanley Hara, Jack Suwa and Yoshio Yanagawa, purchased 900 acres and planned for a "Japanese architecture" hotel resort, a beach subdivision with lots from 10,000 to 20,000 square feet and 2½- and 1-acre lots for farming and homesite purposes.

## SLOW DESTRUCTION OF KAPOHO

The destruction of Kapoho and its graben was a slow process. The first big disaster befell the Kapoho community at 7 p.m. March 3, 1955, when a crack developed on the western edge of the village and opened up into the town itself. This phenomenon had also occurred during the earth movements of 1924, but this case was different.

Lava began to spew from the western edge, and flow towards the town at 9:30 p.m. along a newly surveyed highway. This outbreak was situated in cane fields owned by S. Ikeda, S. Kakugawa and K. Fujisaka. By 2:25 a.m. the following morning, the Ikeda house and P. Caniete houses had been burned and the ruins covered with lava. An old railroad embankment at the head of the Kapoho graben prevented the destruction of the town, as the lava flow stopped upon entering the town's ballfield. Some 450 acres of cane land were put out of production, eliminating Olaa Sugar Co. cane growing operations at Kapoho, although private planters continued to operate. Small coffee, papaya, vanda orchids, and vegetable farms replaced these fields.

On Jan. 10, 1960, earthquakes again rocked the ancient buildings in Kapoho. On Jan. 12-13, people working in fields north of the village experienced earthquakes made it hard to remain standing. Earth cracks opened in and around the village as the graben sank, and at 10:30 a.m. on the 13th, Kapoho Village was declared a disaster area by the Civil Defense Agency and evacuation of the 300 or so inhabitants began.

At 7:30 p.m. lava fountains broke out in a sugar cane field, and a crack opened towards the sea a half mile long, spewing lava and steam. Located a half mile northwest of Kapoho Village, this vent soon built a cinder cone dubbed Puu Laimana for Senator Lyman, owner of the land, about a third of a mile from the center of town.

Lava flows issuing from this cone had traveled to the ocean by Jan. 15, where the cold water diverted and stalled the flow. This caused the lava to inflate and fill the former shallow valley. Hastily built earth and rock walls put up by bulldozers failed to contain the lava, and on Jan. 17-18, Higashi Pond and Warm Springs were overrun.

The tiny hamlet of Koa'e, former headquarters of the Eldert Ranch, was the next victim, succumbing Jan. 23-29. Along with William Elderts \$4,000 home, eight other dwellings, the Hoonaaou church and hall and the Puula church hall were consumed, wiping the tiny community off the map.

Meanwhile, the remainder of Kapoho had fared no better.

# Travel

On the evening of Jan. 27, lava flows buried the majority of Kapoho town and also burned four buildings of the Kapoho School. Only 15 buildings in the town remained by morning as the eruption was producing some 6,600,000 cubic yards of a day. As the lava overflowed the graben, more structures were destroyed. Three homes of the Tanioka, Higashi and Fukumoto families were moved out of the way of the advancing flows.

Pele targeted the beach communities next and burned the U.S. Coast Guard lighthouse

keeper's residences Feb. 2. Lava then overran both Kula Village site and the Waiakea and Mizukami fishponds, burned the teacher's cottage at Kapoho School, and also invaded the Kapoho Beach Lots. On Feb. 3, the million-dollar subdivision began to shrink as lava replaced \$40,000 luxury beach homes. By the eruption's end on Feb. 19, 1960, 10 buildings and 30 lots were destroyed in the Kapoho Beach Lots.

The town of Kapoho ceased to exist, as only three buildings survived the assault. Eighteen acres of cane land were

destroyed and 533 acres were damaged by cinder fall, more than 40 farms destroyed by lava along with 71 residences and 16 business establishments, churches and public buildings. Only the old Railroad Station, Mukai home and Nakamura Store survived, the latter being dismantled by Yoshio Nakamura and the lumber used to build a house in the Kapoho Beach lots, leaving only the sign.

*Readers who have questions for Kent Warshauer, the Sugar Mill Spy, can write to him in care of the Tribune-Herald, P.O. Box 767, Hilo, HI 96721.*