

There's high life in the

By Horace Sutton

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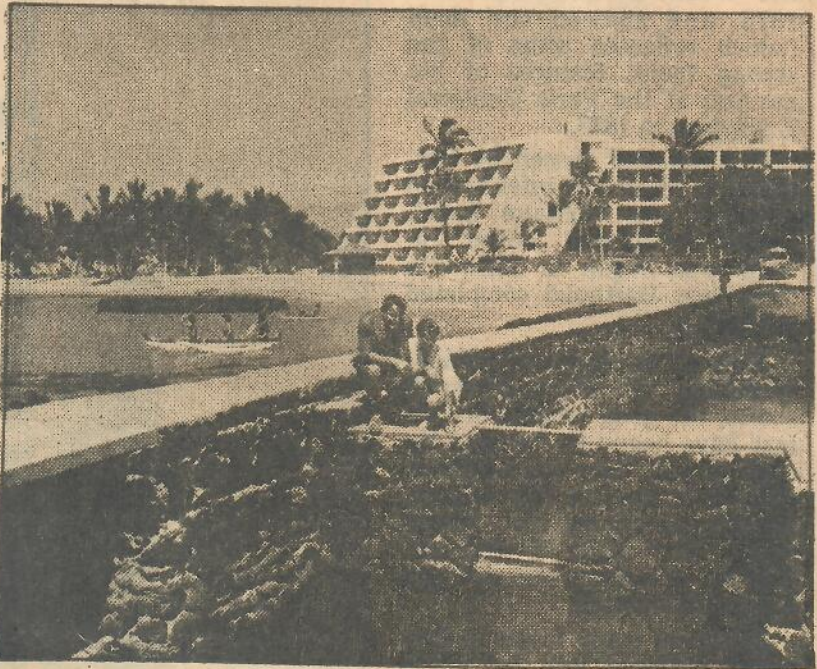
KAWAIHAE, Hawaii — It may be some time before tourists will be traipsing around the moon. That news need not come as a disappointment to the itchy traveler. There is at least one alternative.

On this planet there is no trip more startling than to fly off from Los Angeles on a United Airlines gas bird and land five hours later in the stark lava fields that stretch in all directions from the Keahole Airport on the Big Island of Hawaii.

Great outcroppings of chocolate-hued lava stretch wall-to-wall for endless miles along the west coast of this newest of the Hawaiian Islands. It was here that Hawaiian kings came to spend their summers and here that they maintained a vast network of fish ponds that were off-limits to commoners. Off-limits meant off with the head of any transgressor.

The Hawaiian kings etched a rough-hewn path stretching for 32 miles across the carpet of lava. Loose lava was piled along the edges of the trail to keep horses and pack animals on course. They called it the Mamalohoa, or King's Trail, and it exists to this day as does a seaside fishermen's pathway.

Modern man has built a boulevard through this lava expanse and named it Queen Kaahumanu Highway. In the wayfarer's unquenchable quest to be remembered, graffiti mark the shoulders of the highway for nearly 30 miles —



Ancient fish ponds used by Hawaiian royalty are still in use alongside the elegant new Mauna Lani resort, built atop prehistoric lava fields on the Kohala Coast of Hawaii's Big Island.

placed there in white stones that stand out against the deep-hued lava. "Dickie and Donna Tyson," they proclaim, and "Craig Loves Shawna," as well as "Welcome Home Bobbie, Didi and Kalehua."

Even more incredibly, modern man has chosen this site, of all places, to plant a string of luxury resorts, built in, around and on top of the volcanic spew. Indeed, it would be hard to find a more shining splendor than the newest of these playgrounds, the Mauna Lani Bay Hotel, which opened on the Kohala Coast last year.

Twenty miles north of the

Kona Airport, it is an oasis of opulence fashioned out of the prehistoric Kaniku lava flow. Its gentle curve of white sand

lava on the Big Island

beach ends where the ancient fish ponds begin. They still function, and are being dredged and further restored until they will once more serve as natural storehouses for Hawaiian fish swept in from the sea by the currents.

From the porte-cochere of this 350-room extravaganza, a blue-tiled runway reaches into a vast atrium where a double stairway, flanked by twin four-tiered cascades, descends to a cocktail lounge that appears to float in a dark lagoon. Full-sized palm trees shade the tables and the call of birds mingles with the strumming of Hawaiian guitars at tea time.

This preserve, called Kalahui-pua'a, was the private hideaway of Francis H. I'i Brown, a Hawaiian sportsman and golf champion who consorted with Bing Crosby, Errol Flynn and Bob Hope, as big photo murals on the clubhouse wall attest. His friend of many years, Winona Love, swam often at a secluded spring-fed pool which Francis had edged with concrete. It exists today deep in the lava fields, a 20-minute

walk from the hotel's own colorful man-made pool.

The golf course, named for Brown, is a spectacular achievement, created as it was from different types of black and brown lava which were crushed and sifted. Top soil was poured on top and the grass seeded. Now the hazards aren't only water (the Pacific Ocean on No. 6) but sudden bunkers of lava that have been left intact. When you're in the rough here you are looking for your ball on the surface of the moon.

Is this fanciful pleasure-land an American creation? Not on today's tintype. Its main investor is the Tokyu Group, a Japanese conglomerate with 75,000 employees and annual receipts of more than \$3 billion. Its chairman, Noboru Gotoh, was a friend of Francis Brown's, whose nephew is president of the resort's Hawaiian board.

Mauna Lani is just six miles south of the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, which Laurance Rockefeller opened in 1965. Mauna Kea has grown from 154 rooms to more than 300, and is owned now by United Airlines and run

by its affiliated company, Westin Hotels.

Two and a half years ago an American group opened a 543-room Sheraton Hotel on the other side of Mauna Lani. More sedate than stylish, it attracts incentive groups and large parties who pay from \$85 to \$200 per room without meals to disport on this 31,000-acre preserve. The King's Trail runs right alongside its two golf courses.

Anyone who wants to live in the lava, Hawaiian style — or reasonable facsimile thereof — might look in at Kona Village Resort, not far from the airport. Here the customers live in thatched-roof cottages with fridge and coffee-maker. There are no keys on the doors. If you don't want to be disturbed you put a coconut in front of your doorway. There are convenient ice chests planted along the pathways. But there is no room service, no telephone, no TV, and no radio. If you bring your own ghetto box please keep it turned off. Listen to the bird song, the management suggests.