

Jewel Threatened by Its Own Beauty

Survival of Hanauma Bay

By Harry Whitten
Star-Bulletin Writer

Hanauma Bay is a turquoise jewel adorning the face of Oahu. Today this lovely jewel is threatened by the sheer number of people that it attracts.

A symposium held Saturday at the University of Hawaii at Manoa discussed what to do about Hanauma — how to protect it and also to permit local people and visitors to enjoy its opportunities for recreation and education.

Officials of the city Department of Parks and Recreation presented figures, admittedly crude but nevertheless significant, on the explosive growth in the number of people who visit Hanauma. Estimates put annual visitors at around 210,000 in 1970, at more than 2 million by the 1980-81 fiscal year.

"This over-utilization requires extensive management," John P. Craven, chairman of the University of Hawaii Marine Council, said in his opening remarks. "Man, assisting nature, can do a great deal," he said.

He said that once so much spearfishing was done that only

juvenile fish could be found. The fish came back after the bay was put in a marine life conservation district in 1967, thus halting all fishing. Then people could come and view species of fish in relative solitude, and the crowds increased.

"DOING NOTHING is counter-productive," he said. "Doing something about Hanauma Bay is vital but not easy."

Matters discussed at the symposium included Hanauma Bay's geology, its currents, history, water quality, safety, commercial use, opportunities for education and research, and the split jurisdiction between state and city.

At present the beach park is operated by the city Department of Parks and Recreation while the marine life conservation district — including the waters of the bay — is under the jurisdiction of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources.

William Gorst, a planner with the state Parks Division, discussed the exchange plan developed by the city and state park agencies whereby Hanauma Bay would be transferred to the state Parks Division.

The two agencies had agreed that the state's primary responsibilities should focus on management of material and cultural resources, particularly those important to tourism or having state-wide significance, while counties should focus on community services.

GORST SAID the state Parks Division would do more in resource management and the state Division of Aquatic Resources could furnish expertise in water management. The state has conservation enforcement officers but does not have a lifeguard service and would probably contract with the city for this service, he said.

The first phase of a master plan project for the city park went out for bid in April, Michael Creagh, city parks planner, said. This involves improvements to the parking lot. Because construction costs went up after Hurricane Iwa, the city will only be able to do part of the first phase, he said.

The plan, which includes development of scenic overlooks, water ponding areas, an improved trail system and expanded picnic areas, is available in libraries and other places.

Hanauma Bay occupies two craters on the line of volcanic vents at the southeast end of Oahu. Ralph Moberly, of the Ha-

Discussed at Symposium

wall Institute of Geophysics, said that the ages of the eruptions that formed the craters is poorly known, but that they probably occurred between 40,000 and 7,000 years ago. The sea breached the crater wall about 7,000 years ago, he said.

FROM ABOUT 5,800 to 3,500 years ago the coral grew mainly upwards and from then to the present the coral has been growing mainly seaward. The shore bench is forming at the present time.

Abraham Plianaia, director of the UH Hawaiian studies program, said two definitions have been listed for Hanauma: (1) a bay where hand wrestling was done and (2) a curved bay.

He preferred a third explanation of the name, given him by the Hawaiian cowboy Eben Low. Low told of a current that canoe paddlers could catch near Mooomomi Bay, Molokai, and which would take them almost to Hanauma Bay with hardly any paddling. Thus Hanauma would be "the bay at the end of the run from Molokai."

Hanauma Bay is the terminus of an undersea telephone cable, completed in 1957, that connects Oahu with California.

Karl H. Bathen, of the UH department of ocean engineering, said there are risks to swimmers and divers at certain times of the

year. He said there is a current, the "Molokai express," which can sometimes carry the swimmer far out to sea.

Ralph S. Goto of the city parks department says Hanauma presents special safety problems because of the huge number of people who visit the place, including Japanese tourists who present a communications problem. Numerous injuries occur every year at the place known as Toilet Bowl, out of sight of the lifeguards, he said.

HE SAID there have been three drownings so far this year at the bay, while the lifeguards have made 63 rescues.

One matter that concerns the lifeguards is that many Islanders don't know how to swim, one survey indicating that half of the children in the fourth grade can't swim. He advocated a public education program to teach people about water hazards.

Roger Fujioka, of the UH department of microbiology, said the quality of water in the bay is good, that tests indicated the bay's water could not be blamed for an outbreak of sickness reported in 1982.

Les Matsuura, of the Waikiki Aquarium, said the aquarium has used the bay in its education program for nature walks and reef life courses but the bay's education value has been underused.

He said it would be an excellent site for study of island geology, strand ecosystems, reef ecology, and other subjects.

IN THIS connection, James E. Maragos, of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, said the bay's corals offer opportunity for research and education.

Bruce A. Carlson, also of the aquarium, said an average of 38 fish species were observed in the 1968-74 period and 50 species in the 1976-82 period. The increase occurred after establishment of the marine life conservation district.

Chapman Lam, of the Hawaii Council of Dive Clubs, expressed frustration that more has not been done toward completion of an underwater park project. He said volunteer divers gathered data for a conceptual plan completed in 1969. The bay was designated as an underwater park in 1970 and a kiosk with information was erected in 1974 but not much else has been done, he said.

Robert F. Erwin, of the Leeward Community College Marine Option Program, said recommendations have been made twice for an underwater trail but such a project is yet to be carried out. He described a proposed trail, which he said would be for persons interested in marine fauna and flora, but would not be for everyone.

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Beachgoers — residents and tourists alike
— flock daily to Hanauma Bay.

Fish, people and problems at Hanauma

Twenty years ago people were not a problem at Hanauma Bay. Hardly anyone went there. The bay was hot, the bathrooms were primitive and the trip down to the beach required a long and tiring walk back up to the parking lot.

Most people who wanted to get to a beach went to places that were easier to get to or had something that Hanauma bay did not — such as fish.

Many years of misuse and overfishing had reduced the fish population in the bay to the point where almost no fish of any size lived there. No one then could have imagined that the day would come when the fish would return to Hanauma in such large numbers and that people from all over the world would come to see them.

from
the sea

mike markrich

Carlson estimated a 600 percent increase in the number of fish and marine animals living in the bay since the fishing ban went into effect at Hanauma Bay 16 years ago.

But if the fish have increased, so have the tourists that come to see them. Each year more than 2-million people visit the bay. They come with plastic bags full of frozen peas for the fish and snorkels for themselves. The visitors and local people who visit the bay go there for a good time. But no one knows how much impact their presence is having on the marine life in the bay or if enough is being done to make sure that people can swim there safely.

The symposium involving presentations by scientists, educators, city officials and business leaders was held by Sea Grant as a means of finding out.

"(Hanauma Bay) is an area that gets heavily used but we have no idea what effect that (the usage) is having on it," said Janice Auyong, symposium moderator.

"When you look at it from inside the reef you don't see very much in the way of seaweeds, they are now only growing on the outside of the reef. You see a lot of fish but you don't see other kinds of life such as invertebrates (small crabs, etc.) We want to know what else is happening there."

Although the state Division of Aquatic resources has been gathering information on the bay since 1968, there has been no concerted effort to interpret and publish the data. Sea Grant environmental specialist Ray Tabata said knowledge of the bay has become more important as more and more people use it.

Last year, concerns about possible pollution in the bay caused city officials to close it to swimming briefly. During the same period, complaints about overuse of the park by commercial tour groups prompted the city to re-examine its policies toward the use of the park for commercial purposes.

It was ultimately determined that there was no evidence the bay's inshore waters had become polluted, but city officials decided to change the rules on the use of the bay by tour groups. Tour groups were no longer allowed to claim entire areas on the beach so they could feed their tourists a meal as part of the day's activities. There was a limit put on the number of divers that a tour operation could have in the

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water at any one time; new permits were required for programs such as dive tours and commercial photography.

For those who grew up with the bay, the changes, however late in coming, were welcome. Abraham Piianaia, UN Hawaiian studies professor, compared the state's role to that of a konohiki or traditional fishing chief who would closely regulate activities of people in a fishing area.

Piianaia says he has many fond memories of the bay from his childhood when his family would camp there. But with more than 2,000 people visiting the bay on a busy weekend, it is difficult to rekindle the kind of feeling for Hanauma he had when he was young. "When you have that many people, you have to accept the soda cans, the paper cups, that sort of stuff".

People in the visitor industry such as Tom Laidlaw of I and R Productions say

the bay provides employment for many people in the visitor industry, which makes it safer for visitors by increasing the number of trained swimmers there at any one time.

His remarks were acknowledged by others at the recent Hanauma Bay symposium. City water safety director Ralph Goto said supervision is a problem with three lifeguards assigned to a beach used by hundreds of people per day.

Although Hanauma is considered a safe place to swim, it can be dangerous in certain areas. Unfortunately, there is nothing at the beach but a small kiosk to tell people where they are.

This increases the risk of swimming there for groups such as Japanese tourists who may be left at the bay with skin diving gear by tour companies that tell them only that they will be picked up later.

"When I think of things like that it spooks me," said symposium organizer Sherwood Maynard.