By John W. Perry
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A soft rain fell upon the towering cliffs and rugged, lava-encrusted grasslands separating Halape from Hilina Pali Lookout with its ribbon of roadway leading to Kilauea volcano. At sea level — gray sky, gray ocean — a rising tide shot wave after wave into Halape's tiny inlet, each wave flooding through a cluster of dead coconut trees, marking the scarred heart of Hawaii Volcanoes National Park's southern coastal boundary.

A mile or so away, below Puueo Pali, I wiped Ka'u raindrops from my face, jettisoned two quarts of emergency water from my backpack and walked the final distance to Halape shelter, terminus of the Halape Trail, a 7.2-mile highland path meandering seaward from Kipuka Nene Campground beyond the Big Island's magnificent Hilina Pali.

The shelter, Halape's only people-made structure, offers tentless hikers a protected bivouac in the wilds. The price is agreeable: free. One of three park-erected shelters along the park's 30-mile stretch of coastline, the horse-stallish shelter of plank, tin and rock straddles a watertank.

Its roof is a metal umbrella against sun and rain. To please neat-minded guests, a clean floor of sand decorates its interior and a broom stands guard at the entrance. Nail heads serve as clothes hangers for a fastidious hiker's outdoor wardrobe. A weathered logbook — "Halape, I love you!" — registers the shelter's transient visitors.

John W. Perry photos

Halape at low tide with its cluster of dead coconut tree trunks. An earthquake dropped the seashore into the sea.

Halape: a

Nearby is Halape outhouse. It is not posh, simply an open-air pit toilet (with a civilized seat) enclosed by a knee-high wall of lava rocks. "Please Close Lid" is the simple instruction. A sitter's view is seaward, a stander's view is landward toward the approaching Halape Trail. On a rainless day it is a wonderful place to sit and sightsee.

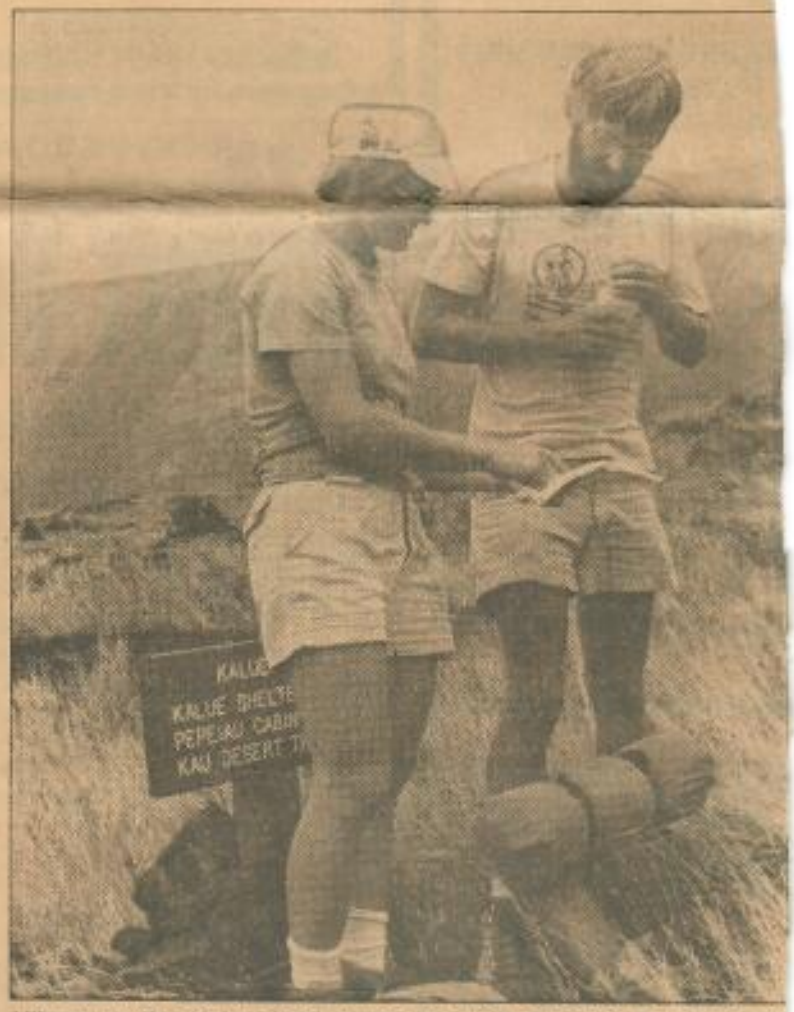
Below the shelter, wedged between ocean and hill Puu Kapukapu, is Halape Beach. A half-dozen tent sites mark shoreline homesteads of previous hikers. Dwarf coconut trees shade several sites.

One word describes the character of the beach's surrounding landscape: rugged. A massive earthquake fault severs the foot of Puu Kapukapu. Grassburrs grow in profusion. Black basalt boulders, reminiscent of oval slingstones, break the incoming tide at the beach's rim. On the basalt rocks, nibbling on blue green algae, camp "black foot" *opihi* , a marine molluck with a tent-shaped shell. A pistol-shot away, ringed in white surf, is barren Keaoi island.

On the eastern rim of the beach, beneath the branches of a lonely palm, I erected a tent. Hotel Halape. A slab of flat lava served as a kitchen table. Other outdoor kitchen hardware included a keep-it-hot-or-cold-in-the-wilderness thermos mug and an ingenious P-38 can opener. Cafe Halape.

On the opposite end of the beach, a two-minute walk from my tent site, an adventurous West Coast couple had encamped. I initiated a chat. Rather secretive, neither person volunteered a name.

I did learn that both were ex-teachers-turned-bicyclists who had stopped in Hawaii to hike on foot to Halape before flying to New Zealand to fulfill a bicyclist's dream: a six-month peddling tour of New Zealand's North and South islands. We talked about self-propelled locomotion: walking, hiking, peddling and paddling. The motorless talk blended lazily with Halape solitude.



Hikers on the Kalue Trail pause to study mileage to Halape, 6 miles away. In the background is Hilina Pali.

"Do you know what happened here in November 1975?" asked the female bike peddler, looking toward Halape inlet and its ocean-flooded tree trunks.

I nodded yes. The terror began on a Saturday, about 3:30 a.m., when a triple event rocked the island: an earthquake, an eruption at Kilauea and a coastal tsunami. The earthquakes — there were

scarred oasis

two — and tsunami demolished Halape, where 34 campers — Boy Scouts, Sierra Club members and local fishermen — lay sleeping.

"Halape, a beautiful remote sandy beach," wrote a Hilo reporter, "literally disappeared as the entire coastline subsided. Tumbling rocks after the first earthquake and the sudden drop of land after the second injured many hikers in the area."

Four huge waves rolled over the camp sites, uprooting coconut trees and humans. A female hiker described the horror: "The next thing I knew a wave came along and washed me out to sea. I didn't know if I was ever going to come up from under the water. Then, just as suddenly, I was tossed high on the land."

A 56-year-old Hilo surgeon and a 26-year-old Puna fisherman died in the predawn nightmare. Rocks and waves injured 17. Two horses drowned. Ironically, the name Halape means "crushed missing" — Hawaiians once planted gourds here, those buried by wind-blown sand caused gourd harvesters to "miss" them.

Prior to Nov. 29, 1975, writers described Halape as a "coconut palm shrouded area." The jewel of the coastline. Sixty coconut trees shaded a cool, sandy beach. Today the headless white trunks of those trees stand in the blue-white surf, each rooted in a submerged campground.

The chitchat about death and disaster changed to fish talk when the male bike peddler produced a fishhook. I looked at his hook and asked, "What kind of bait do you use?"

"Portuguese sausage."

I was shocked. I had never heard of Portuguese sausage used as a fishbait (but what did I know?). I had never eaten Portuguese sausage — I only eat fish — and did not expect a fish to eat it either. I had read books on fly fishing for trout in New Zealand and how to hook Texas bass on spinning gear but never How To Fish Halape With Portuguese Sausage.

The confidence with which the bike peddler named his bait, fed it to his hook, mounted a black lava rock and tossed his line into Halape inlet disturbed me. I sensed a fish challenge — West Coast bicyclist versus Honolulu freelance writer; Portuguese sausage versus Hilo cutbait (*nenue*). I made a makeshift fishing pole from a tent pole and fished the shoreline rocks.

The two-man Halape fishoff did not last long. A sudden shower drove the bike peddler to his tent where his lady had prepared supper. For dessert, he ate his fishbait.

Hard-headed, I continued to fish in the rain, determined to dine on mushroom soup with fresh fish heads and bodies. Any critter with fins would do. In a matter of minutes I hooked three hard-headed hawkfish, called *po'opa'a* in Hawaii. "The fisherman who fools around in shallow waters takes home a *pa'opa'a* fish," is a fisherman's proverb. I wondered if hawkfish had an appetite for Portuguese sausage.

That night, beside my tent,

I hid a hawkfish head in sand and anchored it with a rock. One never knows when one might need a hawkfish head — perhaps for cutbait. I did not know it would cause mental pain in my own head.

Next morning a red sunrise engulfed Halape and its tree-skeleton forest. My morning began with two discoveries, one a delightful surprise, the other sheer aggravation.

The delight: At sunrise I discovered a hawksbill turtle track engraved upon the beach. It reminded me of a giant horseshoe hoofprint. Under the camouflage of darkness the hawksbill had emerged from the water, flippered its way atop the beach, layed its eggs in sand beyond the high water mark and flippered its way seaward, leaving behind an inverted U track. Soon wind and tide would erase the track, leaving only hours-old eggs hidden beneath sand.

The turtle had chosen to drop its eggs near the bicyclists' tent. The male peddler thought he had heard sea turtle chatter during the night.

"Did you hear any strange sounds last night?" he asked.

"Only the flapping of my tent rainfly."

"Do sea turtles make noises on shore?"

"I don't know."

The human population at Halape that day — three — knew little about sea turtles. The last hawksbill I had seen decorated an endangered species poster sold by the Sea Turtle Rescue Fund. It cost $50, signed by the artist.

The aggravation: My hawkfish head had been stolen during the night. Gone. Without a trace. I sat on a rock and pondered about how or what would rip off a man's fish head. I complained to my fellow campers. "Mongoose," said one; "crab," said the other.

The mystery resolved itself when a gray head with feline eyes appeared from behind a gray rock: a wild pussycat. "Hawkfish head thief!" I shouted. "Give me back my head!" Without a social meow, the cat retreated into the bushes, my head digesting in its belly.

As the sun climbed to midday, I took a cooking pot and searched out a small pool of trapped rainwater near the base of the hill Puu Kapukapu. "Follow the beach until you come to a pile of five rocks. Descend into an earthquake trench. Pour cooooooool water over your head!" an Oahu hiker had told me. I did.

Among the rocks on the pool's bottom, dislodged from Puu Kapukapu during the earthquake that smashed Halape — I saw a carrot-colored crayfish. It marched back and forth over a rock, stopping each time my shadow darkened its aquatic pathway.

I left Halape in the noonday heat. From beneath the rim of a sun umbrella, I watched for a moment the wind fill with sand the hawksbill turtle track.

The moon would appear in its fullness twice over Halape before the sand would erupt with newborn hawksbills, each scrambling seaward to immerse itself in Halape water. A new generation of rare and endangered sea life in a scarred oasis.

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