

Hawaii –2007 (not a “trip letter”)

I'm not going to start writing trip letters for travel within the US, but a good way to kill some time at the airport and on the airplane flying home is to write a bit on our recent trip to Hawaii – with an emphasis on some “interesting” interactions. The reason we went to Hawaii was for me to attend the annual Solar Physics Division meeting; one of the few science meetings I go to now days. It was to take place Monday (Memorial Day Monday actually) through Thursday so we decided to go a day early and see a bit of Oahu and stick around a couple of days after the meeting and visit Molokai (having never been there).

Friedel took us to the San Jose airport and although I had previously only been able to get Dawna an assigned seat, at the airport they gave us 24A&B, which was an Isle/Window combination that was quite nice. Flight was fine and included a (rather poor) meal; arriving Honolulu on time around noon. Picked up our rental car and headed into/through the mountains on the Pali Highway. Took a bit of the old road getting to the summit, with fine mountain growth all around. At the summit it was windy (as always) and when we started to do a little walk down a part of the old road that no longer carries car traffic the clouds turned to windy rain and we retreated to our car. A bit further down the other (windward) side we stopped at a lookout and there was a trail there so we explored a short ways into the “jungle” without rain. Next was some bumming around on the windward coast checking out the views of the ocean as well as the green mountains we had just come across. Had a mid afternoon meal (good fishburger, nice fries, and a good local beer) at a place near the ocean and then explored/bummed some more gradually working our way northward. Ended up getting a room at the only hotel in the area, an old place with modest charm and friendly people. Took a walk along the ocean and then hit the hay. The next day/Sunday we spent bumming our way to the top (North) of the island checking everything out at a slow pace as we went. Very nice scenery of the ocean and mountains. One highlight was a roadside place doing shrimp (taken right from some ponds at the place) in garlic that was excellent. Another was spending a fair amount of time at the Waimea Valley Audubon Center. This place has extensive grounds with an amazing number of well-identified plants. You walk along taking offshoot paths to see more and more plants, meanwhile gradually getting to the end of a stream where there is a modest waterfall with a pool below it and swimming (which we didn't partake of but it sure convinced you you were in Hawaii). Headed back to Honolulu going across the middle of the island along with a lot of other traffic. Went to our hotel (Doubletree, not our style really but one of those signed up with the conference and within a 15 minute walk to the convention center), checked in, and then took the car to the airport to get rid of it. Caught a city bus back to town, getting out at the Ala Mona Shopping Center where we had a quite reasonable hamburger and fries and beer. After that we walked onward to our hotel and called it a night. Gosh, the last time we were in Honolulu the Ala Moana Shopping Center was way out from Waikiki and quite new and folks went there to see a top-notch shopping mall. Now there are giant hotels all the way out to it.

For the next 4 days I primarily attended the meeting while Dawna did her thing. However I must admit I played hooky one (Tuesday) morning and we went and did the hike to the top of Diamond Head. We had never done this before and it was fun, albeit hot and steep. Part of the reason it was hot was that we tried to go there early by bus and got conflicting information on when a bus would come to our stop. Eventually we took a ride with a cab who was illegally looking for folks like us and hauling them out there for a fixed price (only \$3 as I remember it) each. So by now it was getting towards the hotter part of the day. It was quite clear out and the views from the top were spectacular. Up on top a chap was describing some of what we were seeing and also advertising for “eco-tours” that he conducts. Seemed knowledgeable and ambitious so I got Dawna to sign up for the next afternoon’s (Wednesday) outing. She enjoyed it as well. Other things worth mentioning for those four days would be on Monday Dawna went around the island on a bus basically retracing what we had done by car and that night we had a nice meal at a seafood restaurant. My pan-seared tuna was basically raw except for the herb-invested crust and was absolutely delicious. Our other evening eatings were just so so.

On Thursday, we checked out of our hotel. I still attended the sessions and Dawna bussed over to the shopping center for lunch and a bit more looking around. Then we took a taxi to the airport and got on a small plane to Molokai. We were flying a local airline, Pacific Wings, that had quite low prices and VERY small planes, seating about 10 folks or so. Boarding was rather non-standard as well as they had no PA system but rather the pilot appeared at the designated gate (20-30 minutes late by the way and we were wondering what the heck was going on) and led us out to the airplane, putting us onboard by name. There was no co-pilot and the plane had only one engine/propeller. I mention this because when eating dinner with Jim Lemen the night before he had said that he assumed the plane would at least have two engines. Wrong. Oh, Jim used to fly small planes. Anyway, got to see Waikiki and Diamond Head as we flew out of Honolulu and 20 minutes or so later we landed at the small Molokai airport. Cheryl, the lady who runs the B&B where we were staying was there to meet us and guide us to her house, after we quickly picked up our rental car. We followed her to the B&B. The arrangement there was that she (and her husband Jack who we never actually saw) live on the main floor of the house and the one family B&B is on a level under them. It consisted of a bedroom, bathroom, large kitchen, and a family room; and could probably sleep 4-6 but of course there were only 2 of us. I think we drank a bottle of wine and ate some snacks and then hit the hay fairly early as we’d be getting up early the next day for a pre-arranged visit to the famous Leper Colony at Kalaupapa/Kalawao, which no longer has any folks with Hansen’s disease because drugs have cured it but does have some former patients who by choice are living out the rest of their lives there.

Cheryl was willing to serves us breakfast at any time we desired which meant 6:15 AM since the game plan was to drive to the airport, get there by 7:15, take a cab to the trailhead, and then hike down to the Colony before the mule train that would be taking people down set off about 8 AM. It worked and we had an enjoyable hike down what with fantastic views of the steep cliffs, the ocean and Colony/peninsula below. When I say down I mean it because the trail drops 1700 feet during its 3.2 mile length. Thus it is sort of like walking down stairs; and infamous for its 26 switchbacks. Anyway, we were

the first hikers down, having started a bit earlier than is recommended and another half dozen or so showed up at the bottom within 15-30 minutes of when we did. The mule group of about 15 people were like an hour behind us. While at the bottom we enjoyed great ocean and mountain views including spotting a few killer whales and/or Orcas and also some playful dolphins. There was also some modest excitement when one chap showed up in a hurry and explained to the ranger that his wife was back on the trail with a sprained ankle. After much running around some rescue folks went up to get her.

Eventually everyone was down and we all got in an old bus and did the Damien tour. This is the only way you can visit the Colony. The bus goes slowly, the driver narrates, you stop at a variety of places (churches, cemeteries, small stores) and generally get educated about Hansen's disease, the Leper Colony and the few key people who aided the patients over so many years, including Father Damien himself. Quite informative and a spot I've thought would be interesting to visit for a long time. Plus great weather. The game plan for us was to fly back up to the top because (a) we didn't especially want to hike it, (b) it would give us time to explore more of the island in the afternoon, and (c) the view from the plane would be interesting; so we had made reservations to accomplish this. Most of the other folks were going back topside via the same method that they came down, but 4 of us were flying out. Well the bus got to the tiny airport at 1:50 PM for the 1:55 flight and lo and behold our plane was already closing its door and starting to taxi. No amount of running and shouting got the pilot to stop and come back for us. The Damien tour guide was ticked, the one worker at the airport was ticked, and we four were ticked, and stranded. While making phone calls to the airline to complain and try to get them to come get us a charter plane landed to pick up a half dozen or so folks who were going to Oahu. After explaining the situation to them the pilot said they could take 3 of us and stop topside "on their way" to Oahu; but of course there were 4 of us. The other male and I flipped a coin and I lost. Meanwhile, we heard a rumor that not only was the next scheduled flight at like 5 PM but it was likely full. A quick decision and Dawna went with the other couple and flew topside; part of our motivation being that she could get the car that was parked at the airport and go to the trailhead since it now appeared I'd be hiking back up! The airport worker chap gave me a ride to the trailhead, which was very nice of him, and up I went; hurrying as much as I could but that's not a lot as I tire out on the uphill hiking pretty easily now days and a 1700 foot climb is not trivial. Made it though (no real choice) in less than 2 hours and there she and our car were. Put my sweaty body in the air-conditioned car and we headed off to do the drive to the eastern/wet side of the island as planned but a couple hours late. This meant we couldn't sightsee at as many places as we had planned nor get in a swim but we were able to make several picturesque stops plus the road itself is quite spectacular as it gets further and further to the east what with the ocean on one side and the mountains on the other. At the end of the road lies Halawa Valley, a gorgeous place. Did a small amount of great beach walking there and then headed back so as to be onto the less curvy, wider road before darkness set in; the last half dozen miles or so before the road ended had been a quite twisty single lane road. Drove right by Cheryl's and into town, Kaunakakai, where we had pretty reasonable pizza. Boy was I ready for a nice bath and good sleep.

Our next (and last) day had also been preplanned. Once a month the Nature Conservatory organization does a tour of their preserve (Kamakou). They've occupied this land for a century or so and thus kept it in its natural state and since we just happened to be on the island the first Saturday in the month we had signed up for the tour. Breakfast an hour later today (7:15) and then back to the airport where we met the docent tour guides. For a minute we were panicked as they didn't have us on their list of people (although I had a couple of e-mail messages of confirmation) but it ended up OK. Ten of us took off in two large pickup trucks being driven by the two docents. Up the mountain we went on an increasingly worse and worse 4-wheel drive road, getting educated by the drivers both while slowly moving forward and also at some nicely chosen stopping points. One of those enabled us to look back down at the area we had been to the day before. At the end of the road you hike on a boardwalk through the rain forest. The boardwalk is 8 or so inches wide and has a metal grid nailed to it to help you not slip; plus the docents had some walking sticks that really help one keep his (or her; Dawna only fell once!) balance. Not a trivial walk really even though it is only like 1.5 miles long, as you have to take care with every step. Stopped lots of place for flora education from the docents and eventually at the end of the walk ate our self-fixed (was true the prior day too) lunches. The lunch spot was magnificent as it looked out at rugged green mountain slopes and valleys; reminding one of the mountains on Kauai we had seen from a helicopter when we visited there. Actually the literature says these cliffs (Pali) are some of the highest in the world even exceeding those spectacular ones on the Pali coast of Kauai. A wonderful lunch spot and I gather rather unusual to have it be as clear as it was, let alone not rainy.

Got back to the airport around 4 PM, and headed westward to explore that end of the island a bit; eventually ending up at a famous or infamous place (Kualapuu Cookhouse) for dinner, where we both had the baby back ribs with BBQ sauce involving guava. Reasonable and definitely not your regular restaurant as we ate at a picnic table outside. One downside, and the same was true at the pizza place the night before --- no beer. Back to Cheryl's we went checking a few more things out along the way prior to it getting dark. Chatted with her a bit, then did our packing and went to bed.

Next morning had another 7:15 AM breakfast, another trip to the airport, but this time turned in the rental car and got on a tiny plane back to Honolulu, along with about 5 other people. Today's extra happenings included Dawna almost leaving a drawer full of stuff/clothes at Cheryl's but it got discovered at the last moment, and learning that the reason the car door didn't close properly on the rental car was that someone had hit a deer with it a couple of days before they handed it to us. Made it to Honolulu, where the plane parked way off in a corner and we walked out a gate and were handed our luggage. I'll tell you there sure had been no security things on those hops between Molokai and Oahu. Walked back to where the major airlines were, checked in on Hawaiian Airlines, killed some time before our plane left, and to San Jose we went. We had assigned seats, isles with one in front of the other and made an attempt to switch them to a pair like we had had coming over but to no avail. Was just fine, really. Flight was basically full but a fine (767) airplane and it even landed a bit early. Took a cab home

Sure seemed like we'd been gone for more than a week. Definitely enjoyed seeing the laid back, "real Hawaii" island of Molokai. Too bad we didn't get in some swimming and or snorkeling and/or kayaking time but thoroughly enjoyed what we did do. Honolulu/Waikiki is for the birds, however. Oh, and Dawna had a very bad allergy situation on both Oahu and Molokai; sneezed the whole time and some headaches. Must have been the time of year for something that gets to her.