

It's All Downhill on MAUI'S HALEAKALA

by Kelley Newman
Photos by Josh Newman

The alarm in our hotel room went off at 2:15 am. Unfortunately, it wasn't a mistake. My husband, Josh, and I held a half-hearted argument about whose idea this had been, and how wrong it was to get up this early on our honeymoon. Then we rolled out of bed, threw on some clothes, and stumbled out the door to the car.

We drove for an hour in the dark along the west coast of the island of Maui. The moon was full and bright, and we could see a mountain rising to our left and the ocean to the right. The stars above us were twinkling, but that's not what had gotten us out of bed at this hour. We were headed to the top of the volcano Haleakala to see the sunrise, after which we would bike 28 miles downhill to the ocean. The ride

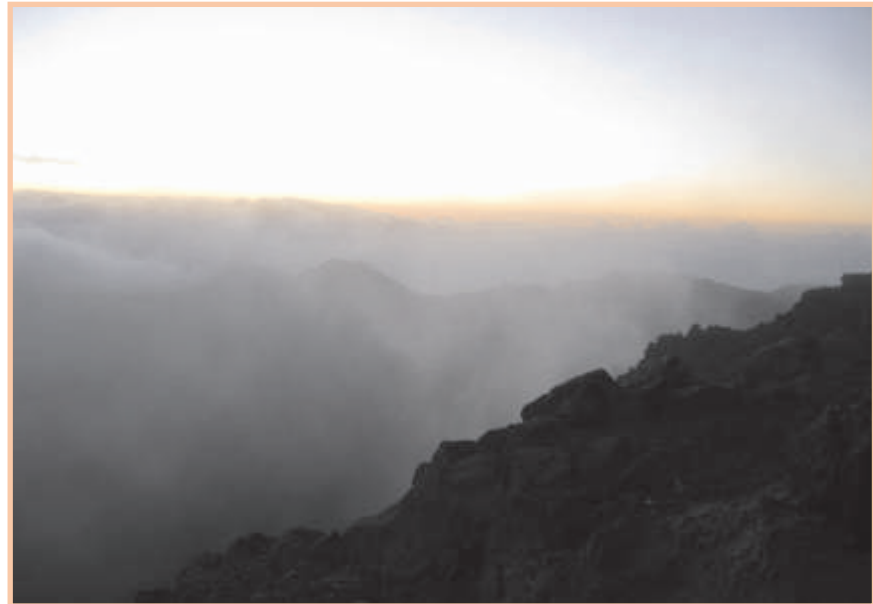
the van and headed for the viewing area. We Arizonans got a brief taste of the cold and ran back to the warm van until the sky started to lighten. Then we, too, stood at the railing watching the slivers of light at the horizon.

A portion of the top of Haleakala collapsed into a massive quasi-crater between 120,000 and 150,000 years ago. It was a surreal experience to stand at the edge of the seemingly bottomless void in the dark, while clouds blew past us and over the edge. The landscape was desolate, with only sparse desert-like plants attempting to grow there.

As we watched, the clouds at the horizon began to glow as the sun rose behind them. For a moment, the sky was light and golden; it was a spectacular sight.



The sun begins to rise over Haleakala.



The crater on Haleakala.

supposedly had only 400 yards where pedaling was required. At this early hour, that sounded pretty good to us.

A number of bike outfitters on Maui offer guided or self-guided tours of Haleakala. Josh and I are independent riders (which really means that we don't like being told what to do), so we opted for the self-guided option, which includes bike and gear rental and a shuttle ride to the top of Haleakala. The driver pointed out historic churches and breakfast spots and told us the history of the area on the way to the top of the volcano.

Although sleepy, Josh perked up when he heard we were passing through the old cowboy town of Makawao. He brightened even more when the driver pointed out the best pastry shop in town. "This is the ride of my dreams," he whispered to me, eyes wide. Then he fell asleep for the rest of the drive.

After an hour of dark, winding roads, we came to a parking lot at the top of Haleakala, where a number of similar vans were awaiting the sunrise. At an elevation of 10,000 feet, the temperature was 33 degrees F, and the gusting wind made it feel ten degrees colder. The Canadians in our group jumped out of

Back in the van, we headed down the road. Bike tours are not allowed to begin within the park at the top of Haleakala, so we drove to the first pullout outside of the park boundary (elevation 6,500 feet). It was still cloudy and misty when Josh and I took off down the mountain, but soon the clouds cleared and we had a fantastic view of the rolling hills and towns below us. We stopped to enjoy the view of a vibrant rainbow arching across the sky. Grinning, we hopped back on our bikes and headed down the winding road. We crossed several streams and rugged waterfalls. As we continued riding, a light mist began to fall.

We later learned that the rain had prompted the rest of the people in our group to ride straight back to the bike shop without stopping. We, however, opted to make a day of it and turned our ride into the unofficial Breakfast Tour of Haleakala. Our first stop was at a roadside stand that the driver had pointed out on the way up. Several people were having coffee and snacks, but we were intrigued by the plants growing outside the stand. The owners had an orchard of protea, which is a

plant with round, exotic-looking flowers, originally from South Africa.

While wandering through the orchard, Josh spotted some of the wild chickens that are ubiquitous in the Hawaiian Islands. The brightly colored fowl were originally brought to Hawaii by the early Polynesians who settled there. When Hurricane 'Iniki devastated the islands in 1992, roosters raised for illegal cockfighting and domestic chickens escaped from their cages. They proliferated in the wild, and now many roam the islands, accepting handouts from tourists and waking them up in the middle of the night with their crowing. Josh snapped a few pictures of them strutting among the protea and we got on our way.

A thermometer at the roadside stand had said 60 degrees F, and it was still raining, but we were comfortable in our rain gear and helmets. The road was easy to ride, since it was all downhill, and I soaked in the views of the countryside.

After a few miles, we stopped for our first official breakfast of the ride: coffee and toast at the Kula Lodge. It was a cozy place with windows overlooking a valley full of flowers. We sat for a while and enjoyed the view. The rain falling on the tropical forest looked poetic from our dry seats. We warmed ourselves in front of the large fireplace before heading back out to the bikes.

After winding through another stand of eucalyptus trees, we took a left at the arena where local rodeos are held and rolled into Makawao. This is where we would have our second and third breakfasts. The first of these was the Komoda Bakery, where the pastries had been so highly recommended by our tour guide. I waited outside with the bikes while Josh went into the shop. We were wet enough by now that a few locals smiled at me in sympathy as I stood there. I told them it had been a beautiful ride so far, but they didn't look convinced. Josh reemerged from the shop with a fresh donut-on-a-stick and a huge smile on his face. The donut got a thumbs-up.

We walked down the street, pushing our bikes, because our next

breakfast was only a few blocks away. Although Makawao still has the charm of the Old West, the town also has a number of art studios and shops. We were more interested in food than art, so we turned into a small courtyard area and locked up the bikes. We found seats in a crowded café and ordered hot drinks and food. When we got up to leave, I noticed a large puddle of water under our table, which had formed from our dripping clothes.

As we prepared to get on our bikes for the last time, we were both soaked. The rain had worked its way past our raincoats and pants and made puddles in our shoes. Josh found a waterlogged worm stuck to his rain pants. We mounted our bikes and headed down the final section of the ride: a smooth, winding road through more ranches. We passed the old, defunct Pa'ia sugar mill and several sugarcane farms before finally pulling into the bike shop where we had started our journey. In spite of the rain, we had both loved the ride. The scenery was lush and green, all three of our breakfasts were delicious, and seeing the sunrise at the top of Haleakala had been an amazing experience. As we climbed back into our rental car, we were tired, happy, and full of great food. Getting up at 2:15 am had been totally worth it. 

Tucson writer Kelley Newman wishes she had gotten a few donuts to go from the Komoda Bakery.



Kelley adjusts her bike seat before the ride.