

WINSLOW UPTON

A Visit to Kīlauea

Edited by Frances Jackson

THE DESCRIPTION OF A VISIT to Kīlauea that follows was transcribed from a manuscript journal kept by Winslow Upton, later professor of astronomy at Brown University, during a Naval Observatory expedition to the Caroline Islands to observe the solar eclipse of May 6, 1883.¹ On the return trip, the U.S. frigate *Hartford* stopped at Hilo, and between May 24 and May 31, a party of scientists and seamen took the opportunity to visit the volcano at Kīlauea.

Winslow Upton (1853–1914) was educated at Brown University and received his degree in astronomy from the University of Cincinnati. He served as assistant at the Harvard astronomical observatory, assistant engineer with the U.S. Lake Survey at Detroit, computer with the U.S. Naval Observatory, and computer and professor at the U.S. Signal Office before returning to Brown as a professor and, after 1891, director of its Ladd Observatory. Brown awarded him an honorary doctor of science degree in 1906.

While with the U.S. Naval Observatory in Washington, D.C., Upton volunteered as meteorologist for the 1883 Pacific solar eclipse expedition. He and other scientists gathered in Callao, Peru, then boarded Admiral Farragut's old frigate *Hartford* for the voyage to Caroline Island, returning by way of Hawai'i. There he joined his wife and sister, who had traveled with an early Raymond Whitman tour group, coming overland by railroad with visits to Denver, Santa Fe, Tucson, Yosemite, and San Francisco before sailing on to Hawai'i.

Frances Jackson, a retired University of Hawai'i associate library specialist, is an associate editor of the Journal.

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The trip to Kilauea during Upton's stop at Hilo was the basis for several lectures on Kilauea and volcanoes in general over the next few years. While "Upton's Log" is mentioned in his daughters' 1971 account of his life, *An Earth-bound Astronomer: Winslow Upton, A Memoir*,² its present whereabouts is not known.

The journal entries for May 28 and 29 noting the king's hurried return to Honolulu on the *Hartford* were occasioned by the death in Honolulu of Princess Ruth, a granddaughter of Kamehameha I and governor of the island of Hawai'i. Upton's wife, Cornelia, also described these events in letters to the *Albany Argus*.³

Thursday, May 24. The island of Hawaii was sighted this morning and during the forenoon came into plain sight, with clouds hovering above it. At noon the ship's position was lat. $19^{\circ}34'$; long. $54^{\circ}27'$; distance 176 miles—or 35 miles from Hilo. As the land was neared the towering summit of Mauna Kea was seen above the clouds, with patches of snow upon it. Mauna Loa was not visible though a glimpse of it had been obtained in the morning. As we approached the harbor two schooners were seen and the Steamer *Likelike* which was just coming in from Honolulu having on board the King.⁴ After we came to anchor I went ashore with chronometer and sextant but with little hope of getting an observation, as it was 5 o'clock and the sun was approaching clouds. Failing in the attempt I went with Brown into the village whither Messrs Colvocoresses, Rockwell and Denniston had preceded me.⁵ The former was making an official call upon the consul, and as we looked up a street we saw a crowd of children following the consul who was on horseback and Mr. Colvocoresses who walked at his side. The King was in the town, having arrived on the *Likelike* and a villager who stood by thought he was probably in the crowd as he told us—"the King must be there because a man bearing a sword is in front" (referring to Mr. Colvocoresses). This little scene, the consul⁶—a shabbily dressed large man—mounted on a white horse, attended by Mr. Colvocoresses and followed by the crowd, was one of the most ludicrous scenes I have witnessed for a long time. Proceeding to the office of Dr. Kittridge,⁷ I found Messrs Rockwell and Denniston bargaining for horses for our trip to the volcano. I there learned of the arrival in Honolulu of my wife and sister Lucy. I had been anxious to come ashore in the first boat thinking it possible that they might be in Hilo on a visit to the volcano. Two ladies had

come that afternoon and were stopping at Mr. Severance's,⁸ but inquiry there proved that these ladies were not related to me. I wrote a letter and sent it to Honolulu by the *Likelike*, after debating whether or not to go at once to Honolulu and give up the visit to the crater. We had planned to start for the mountain in the morning but could not secure horses before Saturday, as each horse must be specially shod for the trip and the blacksmith was in his best clothes bound on a call upon the King. Returning to the ship we passed the consul who had been on board. This man, Col. Spencer, is a character, and a very bad one too, a positive disgrace to the country he represents, as he leads a most vicious life of debauchery and boasts that he is the father of 60 or 80 illegitimate children. What a hindrance to missionary effort must be the presence in official position of such as he!

Friday, May 25. I went ashore with Brown early and obtained with difficulty time sights. We watched some natives pulling to the shore a seine of fish, and walked about a little before returning to the ship. At about noon I received a message from Mrs. Thorne, one of the ladies mentioned in yesterday's paragraph, inviting me to call as she had met Mrs. & Miss Upton. I was intending to visit the Rainbow Falls in the afternoon and made a call accordingly upon Mrs. Thorne before starting on the walk. From her and Mrs. Howe, both of whom were passengers in the *Australia* from San Francisco, I obtained particulars of their voyage and their present welfare.

The walk to the Falls is through a pleasant country, most of it open, with an occasional Kanaka farm house in sight. The village of Hilo can hardly be called attractive but its buildings are mostly in good repair, made of wood, and the place seems to be prosperous. The population is small, composed of natives, Chinamen, a mixture of the two, with a goodly number of whites. The country is not very fertile on account of the lava character of the ground, but there is a shallow soil, which from the extraordinary rainfall readily produces crops. Cocoonut, mango, banana, & bamboo are among the trees found, while the taro plant is extensively grown. The two waterfalls which we visited are well worth seeing, the larger having a fall of 100 feet or more. The special beauty of both of these falls is the luxuriant growth of ferns on the walls of the precipice. I returned to the ship for dinner but again went to town in the evening to see the native dance called the hula, which was given in honor of the King. His majesty was entertained at dinner and had not returned at 10 PM when I

returned to the ship. The dance nonetheless was performed several times in the evening, the dancers being 6 women and 2 men. It is a peculiar movement, unknown to the civilized dance, and the accompaniment was in this case furnished by the dancers themselves,—a monotonous two part song in which the alto often moved in progressions of fourths or fifths. There was nothing in the entertainment as conducted to offend anyone though it was easy to see how the movement of the dance might suggest impure thoughts to any who were on the lookout for such suggestions, especially if the dress of the dancers were at all indecent.

Saturday, May 26. We were up at 5 o'clock and left the ship at 6. At the landing we were met by men with our horses which we mounted and started on our journey at 6.45. Our party numbered 16 and we had a guide and extra horse for our packages. My horse gave me great satisfaction, easy to ride, and a good natured animal, sure-footed, a quick walker and obedient except when I wished him to pass another horse on a narrow path. The road was at first through an open country, past a sugar mill and a few houses and cultivated field. After a few miles the trail became narrow and plunged into a wood of great beauty. On each side were gigantic ferns some of them 15 or 20 feet high and a great number being as high as the rider's head while both horse and rider brushed by the growth. There were also high trees, the pandanus being marked and quite a parasite growth of immense vines covering them. Coming out again into open country the path was more difficult on account of the lava rock, sometimes a smooth surface but often rough rocks requiring hard climbing. The half way house, 15 miles, was reached at 12.00 where we halted an hour. There are several native grass houses here and one or two frame houses constituting the village of Olaa. Continuing the journey the path was a difficult one over the lava bed, usually in open fields, and it became monotonous enough before the Volcano House was reached. We had been joined by a party of four, Mr. & Mrs. Thorne, Mrs. Howe and Mr. Fairland, purser of the *Zealandia*, which increased our number to 20 and on our arrival found that three, viz. a clergyman with two ladies, had preceded us. The capacity of the house⁹ was thus severely tested but we all had comfortable beds and plenty of food. There was a single and a double bed in the room assigned me and my companions were Messrs. Marthon and

Preston.¹⁰ I arrived at 5.30 and all the party were in at 6.30, Mr. Woods¹¹ with the guide coming last; he had been obliged to abandon his horse, who was sick, and had ridden part of the time the pack horse and part the guide's horse. The scene at the Volcano House was peculiar. Much sulphur vapor was escaping from crevices in the ground and at others hot air came out, making it hard to hold the hand in front. In fact, the natives take advantage of the heat for cooking and it is the intention of Mr. Jordan,¹² the proprietor of the house, to make similar use of it on a larger scale. At about two miles distant the smoke of the burning lakes came up which at night glowed with a brilliant red glare, constantly undergoing changes. In the ground were numerous red fires glowing, thirty being counted from the bluff in front of the house, and the scene was not unlike those on the line of the Penna R. R. in the coal regions of Pennsylvania. We were all tired and more or less stiff and sore with our long ride of 30 miles. I enjoyed a sulphur vapor bath in a crude box built over a fissure in the ground, before I went to bed.

Sunday, May 27. The sky was clear and we had a fine view of Mauna Loa as well as the crater of Kilauea. A party visited the latter in the morning but I preferred to wait until afternoon. In the morning I visited the fields near the house where there were some nice wild strawberries, and the rest of the time I spent quietly. In the afternoon at 3 o'clock we started for the scene of activity. The path lay first down a very steep slope, then at once upon the lava beds, formerly the scene of fiery energy. Now the energy was evidently only slumbering as numerous fissures in which a red glow, visible even in daylight, and heated currents constantly rose from the whole vicinity. Crossing this suggestive region, "suggestive of—various considerations," the path running along over rough lava heaps for about a mile, we ascended a slope and were at once on the margin of the "new lake". Here an impressive sight came at once before our eyes, an immense circle, a hundred feet or so beneath us, containing a mass of boiling rock emitting a red glare. It was constantly changing, the whole mass being semi-liquid from the heat. At one time only one or two fires were seen, when a red crack would suddenly appear and widen, causing soon a new outbreak of red fire, the black masses in the vicinity flowing towards it and being rapidly melted, a shower of sparks being thrown up. This was kept up with constant variety, the outbreaks

being now in one spot now in another, a few places only showing a steady flame. A second lake the "south lake" we also visited where the bubbling was more intense. We waited for darkness and the scene at the near lake was intensified, the red streaks being more vivid, red spots appearing on the surface which during the day time appeared black and the walls of the crater as well as the clouds being illuminated. Then came the return to the house, for which we started at 7 o'clock. Just after we left, a stream of lava burst out of the ground and ran over the very path we had traversed in going between the two lakes. I did not see it as I was in the forward part of the party but those who came last were somewhat startled by it and hastened to overtake us. As we recrossed the old portion, the fires in the crevices were more startling especially when the ground sounded hollow, as it did in a few cases and we realized what was beneath us. We passed some flowing lava also, and I for one experienced some relief when we reached the bluff at whose summit was the house. This part of the journey was very severe, the path being very steep and I was thoroughly wet with perspiration on my arrival at the house. The whole trip was one never to be forgotten.

Monday, May 28. We left the Volcano House at 6.45 and the journey to Hilo was safely accomplished and more rapidly than the upward journey. But it was quite monotonous on account of its length and the roughness of the path. I arrived at the half way house at 11.00 and leaving at 12.00 reached town soon after 4.00. I was the first to report at the ship though six had reached Hilo in advance of me. All of our party returned in safety though there had been several incidents. Lawrence¹³ was run away with at the start on Saturday and cut a John Gilpin figure for a few minutes when his horse was stopped and he exchanged steeds with Fletcher.¹⁴ Preston had a vicious horse who threw him on the ascent, while Read had a narrow escape from his horse stumbling when near home.

While at the House, the King sent a messenger asking the privilege of going to Honolulu in the *Hartford* together with his party which favor was granted. Preparations for his reception were made during the day.

In the evening I went to town, where our band gave a concert, and made a call upon Mrs. Thorne and Mrs. Howe.

Tuesday, May 29. I was up early, none the worse for my Volcano

jaunt, and packed my trunk, as we must vacate the Admiral's quarters for regal use. At 10.00 the King's party which included 6 or 7 ladies were received and His Majesty shortly after. The whole ship's company were on deck, the band played, the yards were manned and the salute of 21 guns fired. The ship was at once got under way and at 11.20 we started under steam and soon hoisted sail in addition, passing Hawaii and being off Maui at nightfall. I looked over my eclipse papers, and wrote the above account of Hilo and the Volcano trip.

Wednesday, May 30. I slept in the port steerage on a transom. We were in sight of Oahu at early morning and arrived at Honolulu about 10 A.M. The king's party were first put ashore after which I took a Kanaka boat and was rowed to the land. Finding no one at the wharf awaiting me I proceeded to the hotel and learned that my wife and sister had gone to the wharf for me. I had landed at a different wharf. After two attempts to find them I returned to the hotel to which they had returned some time before. In the afternoon I looked over letter &c made sextant observations; in the evening we had a call from Dr. Kennedy¹⁵ and Mr. Denniston.

Thursday, May 31. I attempted sextant observations but it was cloudy, then with my wife visited the Pali, a grand precipice from which is a good view. Messrs Miller¹⁶ and Colvocoresses called, after which I again attempted sextant observations with partial success and then visited the *Hartford* with my wife and sister, Mr. Oscar White¹⁷ and Mr. & Mrs. Furneaux.¹⁸ We dined in the ward room. In the evening we called upon Mr. & Mrs. W. W. Hall¹⁹ and entertained Mr. Woods after our return.

NOTES

¹ The location of the original manuscript is not known. A copy of pages 65–76 of the journal, plus a typescript note on the participants, can be found in the Hawaiian Collection at Hamilton Library, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa, Honolulu. For additional information, see "The Report of the Eclipse Expedition to Caroline Island, May 1883," in *Memoirs of the National Academy of Sciences*, vol. 3, 1883 (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1884) [1]–146.

² Eleanor S. Upton and Margaret F. Upton, *An Earth-bound Astronomer: Winslow Upton, a Memoir* (Northampton, Mass.: Metcalf Printing Co., 1971).

³ Copies of four of Cornelia Upton's travel letters are in the Hawaiian Collection at the University of Hawai'i. The copies were made in 1966 from original type-

scripts owned by Eleanor and Margaret Upton. The originals are now held in the Sophia Smith Collection at Smith College in Northampton, Mass.

⁴ David Kalākaua.

⁵ The persons referred to in this sentence are S. J. Brown, ensign, U.S.S. *Hartford*, later professor, U.S. Naval Observatory; G. P. Colvocoresses of Connecticut, lieutenant, U.S.S. *Hartford*; scientist Charles H. Rockwell of Tarrytown, N.Y., originator and business agent of the eclipse expedition; and H. M. Denniston of New York, commander, pay inspector, U.S.S. *Hartford*.

⁶ The consul, i.e., U.S. commercial agent at Hilo, was Thomas "Captain Tom" Spencer, retired ship's captain, sugar planter, and Hilo merchant.

⁷ Dr. C. S. Kittridge, physician, dentist, and proprietor of the "sanitorium" on King Street, Hilo.

⁸ Luther Severance, Hilo resident, held several government positions, including collector of customs, Hilo postmaster, sheriff of Hawai'i, and agent for both schools and the Board of Health.

⁹ In 1883, the Volcano House was a comfortable wooden structure with six small bedrooms, a central parlor with fireplace, and several smaller rooms serving as kitchen, dining room, and quarters for the resident host. It survives today as the Volcano Art Center in Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park.

¹⁰ Upton is referring to J. L. Marthon of Massachusetts, lieutenant commander, U.S.S. *Hartford*, and Erasmus D. Preston, U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey.

¹¹ C. Ray Woods of London, England, a photographer sent by the Solar Physics Committee of the Royal Society.

¹² J. T. Jordan, lessee and resident host at the Kilauea Volcano House.

¹³ H. Aubrey Lawrence of London, England, a photographer.

¹⁴ W. B. Fletcher, naval cadet, U.S.S. *Hartford*.

¹⁵ S. D. Kennedy of Maryland, commander, medical inspector, U.S.S. *Hartford*.

¹⁶ Miller is probably either C. K. Miller, associated with the firm of Kennedy & Co., Honolulu wholesale and retail grocers, or William Miller, a cabinetmaker and upholsterer.

¹⁷ Edwin Oscar White, a clerk with E. O. Hall & Sons, Honolulu (hardware and plantation supplies).

¹⁸ Charles and Mary Eliza Sisson Furneaux. Furneaux, a Boston artist, had come to Hawai'i with William Brigham. He was later U.S. commercial agent at Hilo.

¹⁹ William W. Hall, president and manager of E. O. Hall & Son.