

poured above and below ground, reaching the ocean and building more land. The park “Visitor Center” at the bottom is now a motor home, which has had to be moved many times to avoid the fate of the last visitor center down here. Check with the rangers to see what’s shakin’. Ask if nighttime offers good viewing conditions. Often at night the skylights, holes in the ceiling of a lava tube, are visible in the distance. Usually the only way to see a skylight during the day is on a helicopter flight. When the lava is flowing inland, you are usually allowed to hike to it. (They may *imply* that you can’t but will usually admit that it is permitted if pressed.) See ADVENTURES on page 238.

HIKING IN THE PARK

Much of the best hiking on the island is in Hawai’i Volcanoes National Park. The ACTIVITIES chapter has a HIKING section on page 192, which lists scads of great hikes in the park. There’s also a couple of spookier park hikes listed in ADVENTURES. Note that strolls of less than 30 minutes were described above in the tour of the volcano.

OUTSIDE THE PARK ENTRANCE

Just outside the park entrance there are a few sights that are worth checking out, either before or after your park visit.

Mauna Loa Scenic Road leads past the **Tree Molds**. These holes are created when a lava flow encounters a sopping wet tree trunk, which resists bursting into flames just long enough to harden the lava around it, giving the holes the texture of the tree bark. Better tree molds are found on the easy beginning of the **Napau Crater Trail** hike listed on page 195. Farther up the road

is **Kipuka Puauulu (Bird Park)**. This 30-minute hike goes through a kipuka, an old growth of forest surrounded by newer lava flows. This kipuka features many native trees and plants. Birds abound in this park—hence its nickname, Bird Park. The entire 1-mile stroll takes only 30 minutes plus stopping time. There are several benches scattered along the trail, which ascends gently for the first half.

Mauna Loa Scenic Road becomes very winding past here and switches to one lane (with several blind turns), as it passes through forest. At the end of the 13-mile road (at 6,650 feet) is the trailhead to **Mauna Loa Trail**. This is where you start your multi-day trek through the cold and altitude to ascend the summit of Mauna Loa. (Maybe another day.) There are picnic tables and a nice view of the park at the road’s end. Though pleasant, this road is dispensable if you are budgeting your time.

Off the main highway south of the park entrance near the 38 mile marker is the **Ka’u Desert Trail**, which leads less than a mile to **Footprints**. Most of these were created during the explosion of 1790 (plus a few from an earlier explosion in the 1500s). You may read or be told that the footprints are worn away because they were vandalized. The truth is apparently a little more embarrassing. Park sources have told us that park personnel tried to protect the footprints many years ago by placing a glass case over them. Their intentions were pure, but when it rained, water condensed on the underside of the cracked glass and dripped onto the prints, wearing them away. That’s why the display case is gone, but the vandalism rumor persists. Most personnel believe the vandalism explanation to be



Creation meets destruction. The ocean begins dismantling the land even before it cools.