

5/15/04

Yesterday I took a guided hike into the Haleakala Crater. There were just 4 of us - the guide, who was a botanist, and a young couple (late thirties?) from Florida. He is a urologist. They were trying to get in shape for another trip, scaling Mt. Rainier. And they said that eventually they want to climb Mt. Everest. Then again, they could just be trying to impress. They seemed to have plenty of money.

There is a winding, but smooth, 2-lane blacktop all the way to the top - 10,000 feet. We drove up there and took a few pictures, then went back down to 6,000 feet to begin the hike. We descended to the floor of the crater, which is at 3,000 feet. It was a rocky trail, forcing me to concentrate mostly on where I was stepping. I've decided I'd rather hike uphill than downhill. Later, someone said we took no longer hiking up than we did hiking down.

We zig-zagged down the crater wall and usually felt pretty safe, although there were some pretty sharp dropoffs. The vegetation was beautiful. There was a "tree fern" that had red as well as green leaves and lots of yellow primroses along the trail. At the bottom, there was grass and lava outcroppings. It looked nothing like it did from above. We hiked another mile to one of about 5 cabins on the floor of the crater that people rent. We went there only to use the outhouse and eat lunch, which was muffins, granola bars, and macadamia nuts because Roger, the guide, had forgot to pack the turkey sandwiches.

A couple of chukkers - similar to a grouse - hung around the cabin. There were also pheasants - plain old ring neck pheasants like we have at home - but they stayed away from us. We could hear them crowing and we saw a few.

The ascent got me panting a little, but the old guy (me) kept up pretty well. I lagged behind some, but part of the reason was that I was snapping pictures. I have 7 rolls of 24 so far. I didn't notice any extra difficulty caused by the high altitude. We were prepared for the cold, but I stripped down to a T-shirt soon after we started. We didn't get rained on, but much of the time we were in the clouds and couldn't see more than 100 feet.

This morning, Carol and I started to drive our rental up the mountain, but the fog/rain turned us back. Later, we went to a valley in the west mountains. (Maui is called the "valley isle" because it has 2 sets of mountains with a valley between.) But this was a different valley, a valley within the west mountains. It has steep, high, heavy-vegetated walls

with a river running through it, but we got rained out. And it looks like rain for the next 2 days.

Steve