

KONA COFFEE NEWS

Issue #6

What's happening on the farm and beyond

JANUARY 2010

*Drought, Flood, Earth Quake,
Fire, Volcanoes, Hurricanes, or*

What it Takes to Grow a Cup of Decent Kona Coffee

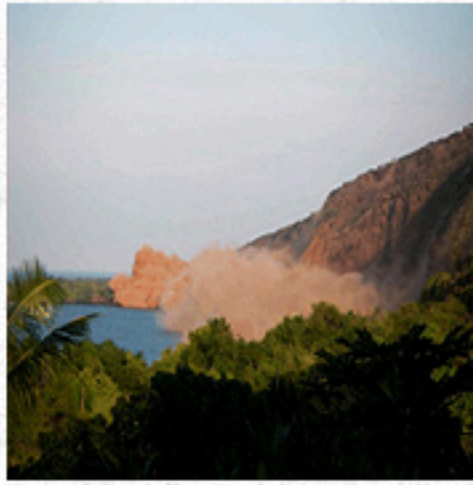


Living in Hawaii on a farm sounds idyllic. And given the chance, we personally wouldn't leave our beautiful small coffee plantation for anything. But living under a volcano, in the middle of the biggest ocean of the world is not for the faint of heart.

Everything is exaggerated—the waves are the highest, hence the invention of surfing by Hawaiians. The distances to get anywhere are the longest, therefore the islands had a rather late settlement by humans and the airfares will always be steep. So there are a few snafus, moments when life throws us one of those unpredictable, out-of-nowhere curve-balls, especially when Mother Nature twitches and tosses in her sleep.

Quake!

Sometimes the earth literally moves under our feet. Little quakes, whilst this giant pumice stone called the "Big Island" settles itself on the ocean floor. The volcanoes are active, and add weight on top. Pieces break off, deep lava tubes collapse, and the whole thing inches slowly towards Kamtschatka, Siberia. The biggest quake in modern Hawaiian history was in 2006, which measured at 6.7 on the Richter scale—strong enough to crack concrete, damage an old stone church, topple a few dry-stacked rock-walls, and left a number of coffee shacks permanently lopsided. But our small, wooden post and pier constructed houses fared pretty well. No casualties, although plenty of nerves and glass items rattled.



Part of the cliff in Kealakekua Bay falls off.

Volcano!

Our volcano is active year round. It's not an explosive, rift volcano (a la Mount St. Helens), but more of a seeping one, oozing lava slowly, although constantly. Since the mid '80s, current flows occur on the windward side of island. The lava entering the ocean creates what's known as vog (or lava haze), which drifts over the southern tip of the island, until the evening winds blow it away again. Some days this vog blurs the views down to the shore, but the coffee trees take it in stride, actually enjoying its slight acidity for their growth.

Although our lava flows have been predictable for decades, they could very well flow through Kona coffee lands again, as it did last time in the 1950s. Those would be the long, thin streams of lava, only affecting few of the local farms. So there would be plenty of time to get away. The land would lay fallow for only a few years, until our native Ohia tree would take root in the barren terrain, breaking the jagged lava rocks apart with their mighty roots, producing just enough soil for the coffee trees to grow again.

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www.BlueHorseKona.com

Flash Flood!

In 2007 the heavens opened up over our farm. Within a few hours we measured 7" of rain, which is more than the spongiest pumice stone can handle. Raging flood-waters came rushing down from the mountain, barreling across our farm road. Called a "500 Year Flood," the misnomer stands for the actual 500:1 chance of such an occurrence in any calendar year. A gulch was carved through our orchard, and our neighbor's small coffee shack was washed away. No one was hurt, thankfully. We were grateful, however, that the flood deposited tons of nutrient-rich mountain soil around our terraced trees. Nature gives and takes.



Our neighbor Benny's shack and old pulping mill while being destroyed in the '07 flood.

Hurricane!

Yes, we do have hurricanes here in Hawaii, even despite tourist brochures avoiding the topic. One piece of advice given by locals, DO NOT to give them our Hawaiian names. Well, after the one named 'Iniki' devastated the island of Kauai in 1992, they are now back to Hilda, Marty, Hugo and the likes.

One named 'Flossie' in '07 appeared as intending serious business. A CAT 4, with 125 mph winds, headed from the Baja California directly towards us. Everyone was nervously shopping for emergency supplies, tying down loose equipment and farm animals. Yet the old dude filling my gas tanks tried to calm me down, "Mauna Loa [the volcano] takes care of us. Deflects everything—highest mountain in the Pacific!" Exactly what the forecasters said would be only local lore and not to rely on. But Flossie indeed stopped right at Mauna Loa, and disappeared from the radar. Here's the [actual animation of Flossie](#) by the Hurricane Center. Not a drop of rain on our farm! Which brings us to the next topic, our current drought.

Drought!

El Niño is a recurring weather pattern in the Central Pacific, caused by a huge body of warm water, deciding to migrate every few years. Besides influencing the world's weather patterns, it certainly interrupts our predicted rainfalls along the Kona Coffee belt.

Currently our 'wet' season ended, lasting from July to December. However, as a result of El Niño, barely an inch fell in the last months, and nothing in January at all. Even the old-timers say that it was never this bad. Our higher altitude trees seem to fare a bit better, but right now the jury is still out as to which trees (and farms), will make it out unharmed. Next seasons lack of leaves, and therefore the growth and size of fruits, will be seriously affected.

Good thing is that slightly 'stressed' trees work harder, and produce fewer, yet more flavorful coffee beans. And so they did! Our '09 harvest was indeed smaller, but one of our tastiest crops yet!

Mahalo to all of our Kona coffee friends. For the time spent to read our news letter and enjoying our beans. Contact us for a leisurely personal tour of our plantation, your special orders or with any questions you might have. Till next time!

Fire!

Last but not least are the drought based forest fires that are occurring above our coffee farm. At the 6,000ft altitude the jungle above the South Kona coffee farms opens up to cattle land, with wide prairie like grass ranges. Back in December of 2009, a rare lightning bolt or a tossed cigarette by a hunter, caused a smoldering wild fire. Quickly it burned hundreds of acres of dry brush and grass, and then entered a dry patch of the impenetrable jungle. Over the holidays, fire crews with D-10 bulldozers and water bearing helicopters, worked round the clock trying to contain it. We checked up on them occasionally, and they did a heroic, and brave job. At night the cold smoke drifted down to our farm, which is 5 miles below in distance. We kept our windows closed, but the house still reminded us of camping outdoors, and waking up to last evening's spent campfire. The sunrises were magnificently tinged in all kinds of smoky pastel colors, pockets of it lingering till the morning breezes sent them away.

And so it goes.

Mother Nature never sleeps here in Hawaii and is packed with excitement—maybe one of the reasons why its Kona coffee is so 'ono' (delicious).

*"I could hear it coming,
rustling softly through the
coffee trees, stirring the
monkey-pods, and sighing
through the sugar-cane.
On the lanai the hush still
reigned. Then it came, the
first feel of the mountain
wind, faintly balmy,
fragrant and spicy, and
cool, deliciously cool, a
silken coolness, a wine-
like coolness—cool as only
the mountain wind of
Kona can be cool."*

From 'The Sheriff of Kona'
by Jack London, 1908



50 lbs of our medium roast rotating on the cooling tray.

We sometimes get inquiries from folks who want to find the VERY BEST KONA COFFEE. Here's what we more or less say: "The best is not necessarily the most expensive. The best is not automatically a luxury-labeled product. The best is only known to an insider, so make that only known to you!"

We're glad that you found the Blue Horse Kona Coffee Farm, enjoy our coffee, and read our newsletters. *Mahalo nui loa!*

Hau'oli Makahiki Hou! or in plain english: Have a Happy New Year!



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