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Kawamoto tears down wall, uses rocks to fill

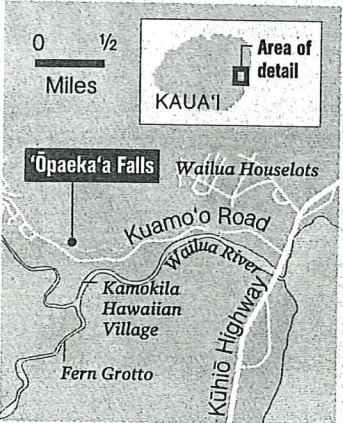
Deadly waterfall site increasingly popular

Guidebooks, Web sites suggest it's great place for taking 'hidden hike'

BY KEVIN DAYTON
Advertiser Staff Writer

A famous roadside Kaua'i waterfall where two women fell to their deaths Tuesday has been the scene of escalating risk-taking by a growing number of hikers, including some who clamber along the steep, slippery slopes near the waterfall with infants in packs on their backs, a longtime resident said.

"People do not listen to the warnings, and they still go down there," said Anita Perry, who has lived on Kuamo'o Road across the street from 'Ōpaeka'a



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Falls for 30 years. "We can't have a policeman around-the-clock there. They slip in there at

SEE WATERFALL, A12

Waterfall

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night and stay all night between the trees there.

"They have even put ropes to climb down from the top of the falls, and it's wet and slippery all the time," Perry said.

There are warning signs in the area, and a spokeswoman for the state Department of Land and Natural Resources yesterday said the state plans to put up fencing to discourage more people from hiking to the falls. The area is part of the Wailua River State Park.

Elizabeth Ann Brem, 35, of Encinitas, Calif., and her cousin, Paula Gonzalez Ramirez, 29, of Colombia, died Tuesday after falling 250 to 300 feet from a cliff on an unmarked trail near the falls. The pair were vacationing together, said Kaua'i County spokeswoman Mary Daubert.

The women were found about 35 feet from the falls by two other hikers, who called fire rescuers at about 1 p.m., fire officials said. Fire officials removed the bodies by helicopter.

Brem was the mother of two children and a law partner in the Orange County office of Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, working in business and commercial law. She specialized in securities and corporate acquisition litigation.

Earlier this year, Brem was appointed by California Assembly Speaker Fabian Núñez as one of 13 members of the California Coastal Conservancy, a state agency that buys, protects and restores coastal lands. The conservancy has an annual budget of \$53 million.

Brem was fluent in Spanish,

graduated summa cum laude and Phi Beta Kappa in 1993 from Barnard College, and graduated from Yale Law School in 1996, according to the law firm's Web site.

WARNING SIGNS

Deborah Ward, spokeswoman for the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, said the area has no maintained trails or state-sanctioned trails to the top or the bottom of the falls. State officials posted signs at a viewing area with railings after previous accidents at the site.

"We have signs there that say 'Danger,' 'Keep Out,' and 'Hazardous Conditions' because it's not in a maintained area, it's not a trail, and it's dangerous," she said. "We really want people to only go on maintained trails for their safety."

Ward said the state plans to fence the area that hikers have been using to reach the falls, but said people have ignored both fences and warning signs in other dangerous areas.

Perry said most hikers enter the falls area from Kuamo'o Road. There is no trailhead, and the hikers simply "look through the foliage and find whatever opening they can," she said.

From there they navigate a steep slope that leads to the top of the falls, and the women who died apparently followed that route, crossing the top of the falls before falling from a steep slope on the opposite side.

Kaua'i Fire Chief Robert Westerman said fire officials are called to that area a couple of times a year. "It's not a common call spot, but if it's a call there, it's usually because of a fall in the falls area," Westerman said.

The area is well-publicized in

guidebooks and Web sites, including some that suggest people make the trek to the falls as a rewarding "hidden hike."

Sue Kanoho, executive director of the Kaua'i Visitors Bureau, said her office has been contacting publishers of guidebooks and Web sites when the bureau learns the publications are encouraging visitors to Kaua'i to venture into dangerous areas or private property.

Some authors or publishers refuse to cooperate or make changes, and "the problem we're running into is free speech, so we can only make suggestions and hope they listen," she said.

STATE WARNING

Peter Young, chairman of the state Board of Land and Natural Resources, said through spokeswoman Ward that the state is involved in similar efforts to warn guidebook publishers who encourage tourists to try risky outings.

"We will continue to be in communication with Web sites and guidebooks to ask them to protect the resources and to keep people safe. They have a responsibility to keep people safe," Young said.

Perry, who lives across the street from the falls, said visitor traffic through the area has picked up dramatically over the years, and said the guidebooks aren't revealing any great secret.

"I don't know what they list it as, but it's not really hidden because it seems like everybody and his pet horse comes here to see it."

Neighbor Island Editor Christie Wilson contributed to this report. Reach Kevin Dayton at kdayton@honoluluadvertiser.com or (808) 935-3916.

Weather again slow

Odds for survival of two considered bleak; 'big search probably is over'

BY WILLIAM M. WELCH
USA Today

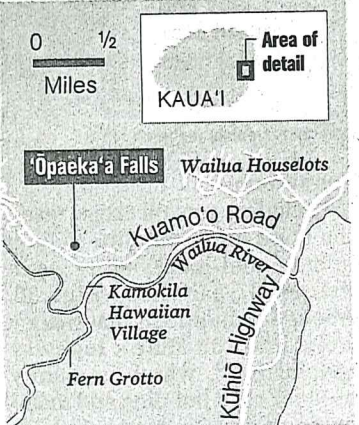
HOOD RIVER, Ore. — Much of the search effort for two men missing on Mount Hood was pulled back yesterday as bad weather was forecast and the odds for survival appeared bleak, the lead rescue organizer said.

"The big search probably over," Hood River County Sheriff Joe Wampler said.

The sheriff said he would so need to decide whether he and the searchers "are spinning wheels."

A camera found on the back of Kelly James, who was found dead in a snow cave the two men had dug out, produced photos that raised doubts about whether his two partners, Brian Hall, 37, of Dallas, and Je-

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2 women die in fall from cliff on Kaua'i

Hikers from California were on unmarked trail touted by books, Web

BY JAN TENBRUGGENCATE
Advertiser Kaua'i Bureau

LĪHU'Ē, Kaua'i — Two California women died yesterday after falling from a cliff while hiking on an unmarked but well-publicized trail near Opaeka'a Falls in Wailua.

Kaua'i Fire Department officials said the women fell 250 to 300 feet to the bottom of the cliff. They were found about 35 feet from the waterfall by two other hikers, who called authorities about 1 p.m. The circumstances of the incident were not clear yesterday, and it was not known whether anyone witnessed the fall.

Preliminary indications suggested the victims, who were not immediately identified, had hiked out on a path that is not an authorized state trail, but which is actively promoted on recre-

SEE HIKERS, A12

Hikers

CONTINUED FROM A1

ational activity Web sites. The area is under the control of the Division of State Parks through its Wailua River State Park.

"It's clear that anything that may look like a trail around Opaeka'a is not a state-sanctioned trail," said Craig Koga, head of the state's Na Ala Hele Trail and Access System on Kaua'i.

The state has a small parking lot and restrooms, with viewing areas behind railings, providing classic views of the roadside Opaeka'a waterfall. The fall has a straight drop from the upper Opaeka'a Stream to the lower, about a mile before the stream flows into the Wailua River.

Police closed the parking lot at the Opaeka'a Falls lookout while the bodies were recovered, and reopened it about 5 p.m.

There is no state trail from the lookout on Kuamo'o Road to either the top or the bottom of the scenic waterfall, and state officials have posted warning signs at the viewing area after previous accidents there. But some visi-

ON THE WEB

The state Na Ala Hele trail system: www.hawaiitrails.org

Some Web sites recommending the unmarked Opaeka'a Falls trail:

- "Opaeka'a Falls conceals a terrific hidden hike. ... Getting down to the falls is tricky. ... The reward at the bottom of the hill is a beautiful, private view of the Opaeka'a Falls and lush surrounding jungle." — www.bestplaceshawaii.com/tips/hidden_places/opaeka_a_falls.html

• "Most people don't know there is a way down to the bottom of the falls, probably because it is pure wilderness on state land. ... Don't blame the state if you find the going difficult." — www.hawaiianstyletravel.com/KauaiGuide/Guide793.htm

• "Definitely find a way to view the stunning Opaeka'a Falls. ... The path descends a hill that is steep and slippery, so you'll want to hold on to tree branches along the way." — www.ssqq.com/travel/hawaii2007.htm

tors arrive armed with information about "secret" trails, which they find in some of the guidebooks and Web sites promoting hikes that are off the beaten track.

While most Web sites simply recommend the view from the park, a few describe the way to the bottom of the waterfall, generally terming the hike difficult but worthwhile. One calls it a "terrific hidden hike."

Sierra Club Hawai'i chapter head Jeff Mikulina said remote, isolated, unmaintained trails to

spectacular sites are alluring but often dangerous.

"This is a tragic lesson to stay on marked trails, for your own safety and the protection of the environment," he said. "What looks like a hiking trail might be nothing but a pig trail."

Kaua'i hiker Rayne Regush said she has seen people pulling their cars to the side of the road and pulling on hiking boots near the Opaeka'a Lookout. She has wondered what they were doing.

"We're really concerned about

people that don't have the full story when they head into the wilderness," said Bob Masuda, deputy director of the state Department of Land and Natural Resources, which operates state parks.

"Our trails are clearly marked with signs, and when they are damaged, our people immediately install signs to indicate that," but unmarked trails are not inspected and not repaired, he said. As a result, when conditions are dangerous, visitors receive no notice, he said.

Masuda said he is very concerned about visitors being led on to dangerous trails by printed or electronic guides.

"Clearly, when people make such recommendations, they should make them in consultation with people knowledgeable in the field," he said.

Last week, a 25-year-old Chicago man died after jumping off Kipū Falls, which is reached via a trail that is unmarked and on private property, but which also appears in guidebooks and Web travel guides.

Reach Jan TenBruggencate at jant@honoluluadvertiser.com or (808) 245-3074.

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