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New Photo Exhibit at Hamilton Library: 100 Years of Hiking with the Hawaiian Trail & Mountain Club

Honolulu – 2010 marks the centennial anniversary of the Hawaiian Trail and Mountain Club (HTMC). To celebrate this milestone, Nathan Yuen, photographer and Club member, is the guest curator of the exhibit, “100 Years of Hiking,” that opens June 1st in UH Manoa Hamilton Library’s Gallery. The Club has forged many trails over the past 100 years and maintains over 60 trails per year. While the trails are kept open for Club hikes, the entire community has benefited – generations of island residents have accessed the mountains due in large part to HTMC’s labor.

HTMC has a rich heritage intertwined with the history of Hawai‘i. The Club was founded in 1910 by Alexander Hume Ford, a benevolent figure in Hawai‘i’s past who sought to preserve old Hawaiian trails at a time when old Hawaiian ways were being lost and fading from memory. He also founded the Outrigger Canoe Club in 1908 to revive the ancient Hawaiian water sports of surfing and outrigger canoeing. In 1926, he lobbied Lion’s International to remove restrictions that limited membership to white men which enabled the Lion’s Club of Honolulu to form. Ford is best known in history for the Pan-Pacific Union he founded in 1911 that worked to promote inter-racial harmony and a better understanding between the nations of the Pacific in the years leading up to World War II – an effort in which he ultimately did not succeed – hence the war in the Pacific.

The first board of HTMC included Lorrin A. Thurston, one of the most controversial figures in Hawaiian history. Thurston was a prominent lawyer, politician, and businessman, and was publisher of the Commercial Pacific Advertiser – forerunner of today’s Honolulu Advertiser. In 1893, Thurston lead the committee of safety in a coup that overthrew the Hawaiian monarchy and deposed Queen Lili‘uokalani. Thurston was also an amateur volcanologist and avid hiker who discovered Thurston Lava Tube -- named after him -- and owned the Volcano house on the rim of Kilauea Caldera. Thurston lobbied for 10 years to have Kilauea, Mauna Loa and Haleakala included the national park system. He is recognized as “father” of Volcanoes National Park.

Another historically significant person on the Board was Ralph S. Hosmer, Hawai‘i’s first forester. Hawai‘i began to suffer from environmental degradation not long after the arrival of Captain Cook who charted Hawai‘i’s position on maps and allowed Western ships to follow in his wake. The sandalwood trade with China; the release of cattle, goats, sheep, and pigs into the native forests, and the indiscriminate felling of trees for plantations, lumber and firewood severely deforested the islands. Since cloud formation and rainfall rely on forested mountains, the water supply also began to dwindle. So alarming was the situation in 1903, that the sugar plantations successfully lobbied the territorial legislature to create a Board of Agriculture and Forestry to reverse the situation. Hosmer and the forestry movement set aside thousands of acres as forest reserves, removed feral farm animals, and planted millions of trees. Had decisive action not been taken to halt the process of desertification, many parts of the islands would be little more than arid deserts today.

In the early years of the Club, efforts were made to locate old Hawaiian trails over steep mountain passes used in pre-contact times that could shave days off a journey to the other side of the island. On Maui, attempts were made to find the treacherous route taken by Kalanikupule in his desperate escape from Kamehameha over the Iao-Olowalu Pass following his defeat in Iao Valley at the battle of Kepaniwai in 1790. On Kaua'i, the Club retraced the incredibly steep trail from Koke'e into Kalalau used by Ko'olau, the leper, in 1893 to escape deportation and quarantine in Kalaupapa, Molokai. On Oahu, the Club discovered an ancient Hawaiian trail over the Koolau range in 1922 that provided a shortcut from Kamiloiki Valley in Hawaii Kai to Waimanalo.

There were close connections between Club members and the University of Hawaii and Bishop Museum. The trails forged and kept open by the Club enabled biologists to access the interior mountains where biologists surveyed and cataloged hundreds of plant and animal species found only in the Hawaiian Islands. Sadly, many of these endemic species are rare if not endangered today but can still be found in remote difficult to reach parts of the mountains. John Donagho, professor of math at Hawaii College in 1909 was the map maker for the Club.

Over the past 100 years, HTMC participated in many search and rescue missions to look for missing, lost and/or injured hikers. No less than 16 people have been rescued with HTMC help -- the most publicized being the rescue of two Danish girls who were missing for 8 days in 1999. The girls had climbed to the summit of Ohulehule above Kahana Valley but could not come back down. Club members who had a hunch that they might be trapped there, climbed the peak, and found the girls alive. The rescue was a media event in Denmark and a grateful visitor industry awarded the rescuers with their highest commendation.

The Club has amassed a valuable body of knowledge about Hawaii's mountains such as where the trails inter-connect and where sources of water are located which is passed from one generation of hikers to the next. Hiking with HTMC offers a safe way to experience the mountains first-hand from veteran hikers who know which forks in the trails to avoid (pig and hunter trails) and which path to take when low-hanging clouds conceal the way. To learn more about hiking with HTMC go to the Club website at <<http://htmclub.org>>.

The photo exhibit at the University of Hawaii Hamilton Library includes 112 images that celebrate hiking in Hawaii and the founding of the Club in 1910. The exhibit features historic photos from Ray Jerome Baker, a past HTMC president, whose body of work fills the historic collections of the Bishop Museum, Hawaii State Archives, and Hawaiian Historical Society, as well as other photographers from the period -- Tai Sing Loo, W.C. Mendenhall, and Robert Wenkam. The exhibit also features present-day photos from Nathan Yuen, curator of the exhibit, John Hoover, Metod Lebar, August Smith, and Drew Erickson. Also included in the exhibit are vintage hiking, backpacking, and camping equipment from the period and video clips taken on selected Club hikes. The exhibit runs from June 1 -- August 30, 2010 in the Bridge Gallery of UH Manoa' Hamilton Library. Library hours are from 8 AM -- 5 PM, Monday -- Friday and 12 noon -- 5 PM on Sunday. Admission is free.