

Follow the Paint

Victor, my son-in-law, programmed the launch trajectories of Tomahawk missiles on a Missile Cruiser, the USS Lake Champlain, for the U.S. Navy. On his last cruise to the Western Pacific (WESTPAC) he invited me to meet his ship at Pearl Harbor in Hawaii and sail home with him to San Diego on what the Navy calls, a Tiger Cruise.

I had never been to sea on a war ship, so I immediately said, yes. It was a great experience. We traveled for five days to get home and I learned a lot about the Navy and what it's like to live on a ship. The Captain provided several tours and demonstrations each day, like live-fire of 6,000 round-per-minute deck guns, walking among 20-foot long missiles below deck that are fired through hatches, fly-bys of Navy aircraft, surfacing of Navy submarines off the starboard, and the launch and recovery of helicopters. I thoroughly enjoyed being a Tiger for five days, and never got seasick.

When planning to fly to Honolulu, I decided to go a few days early, travel to the Big Island, and visit the laboratory on Mauna Loa where the concentration of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere has been measured since 1958. The measurements from this laboratory show carbon dioxide has increased by about 25% in sixty years. This is the basis for the hysteria surrounding global warming and I wanted to visit the lab to see how and where the measurements were made.

Fortunately, one of my old classmates from Colorado State University, was the director of the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) labs on Hawaii. He gave me permission to visit the lab but informed me it was difficult to find.

I asked, "Why is it so difficult to find?"

He replied, "Because it's off normal roads and there are few markers."

"You mean I can't just follow a gravel road?"

" No, " he said. "The path to the lab on the flank of Mauna Loa starts from a turnoff from the State highway to Hilo on the saddle between Mauna Loa and

Mauna Kea. You're going to Mauna Loa, not Mauna Kea. Mauna Kea is the volcano on the eastern side of Hawaii that has the telescopes on top and Mauna Loa is on the west side. You'll find a small sign with an arrow where you leave the main road and drive across sheets of lava to the carbon dioxide lab run by the Scripps Institute of Oceanography. The only markers along the route after you leave the highway are lines of paint."

"That doesn't sound too bad," I replied. "Just give me the directions to the turnoff and I should be able to follow the trail from there."

So, I flew to Honolulu, changed planes, and flew to the Big Island. Rather than tackle Mauna Loa late in the afternoon, I chose to spend the night on the Kona Coast, not far from the airport, and make my trek the next day.

It took me a couple of hours the next morning to drive to the saddle between Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea. And it took me another hour, driving back and forth along the road several times to find the turnoff. The sign was so small, I missed it. And, it didn't help that the sign was lying on the ground. Someone obviously didn't want visitors.

Once I was finally convinced I was at the correct location to leave the main road, I started across a sheet of lava. It was a conventional gray color and stretched as far as the eye could see. I drove for a mile with no evidence that a car had ever been there. I saw no lines of paint, tire tracks, or broken weeds. I thought I could see something off in the distance that looked like a small cluster of buildings, up the flank of what I took to be the volcano. But, how was I supposed to get from point A to point B on a monotonous layer of lava with no markers? Maybe it didn't matter since it all looked pretty much the same anyway.

But, then I saw it. A few hundred feet to the left of my path I saw a line of red paint across the rock. I drove over to the line and began to follow it. The starting point for the line was at least a mile from the main road. I guess someone was trying to discourage visitors by not providing clues near the turnoff. Boy, these guys either didn't like people or they had something to hide!

I continued following the red line for another mile and it began to get narrower and eventually ended. I looked ahead for more paint but didn't see any

until crossing a slight ridge. Another line began, but this time it was yellow. This happened several more times with the color changing to green, orange, and blue as I made my way slowly up the mountain.

Finally, about two miles from the metal huts I had seen in the distance from the turnoff, the trail of paint stopped completely. I had to guess the rest of my way across the shelves of lava, so I didn't end up in a ravine or too steep a ledge.

I finally made it to the lab and spent several hours looking at the equipment, the sampling locations, and taking pictures. Only one technician took the time to talk with me for a few minutes, so I concluded they really didn't want visitors.

Later, when I asked my friend in Hilo how they painted the line to the lab, he said, "We found some cans of old paint and had a guy sit in back of a pickup and drizzle it behind the truck as the driver drove slowly up the road. Why? Did you have trouble following it?"