



PAGING TECH SUPPORT *Paige Takeya*

TOC, Google Preserves Hawai'i's Landmarks

It's now possible to walk through the best of Hawai'i's hiking trails, national parks and botanical gardens without ever leaving home, thanks to a partnership between Google and The Outdoor Circle.

Google reached out to the club to participate in its Trekker program, an offshoot of Google Street View that seeks to bring world-famous landmarks and natural wonders to the internet.

The tech behemoth had previously worked with Hawai'i Visitors and Convention Bureau to document iconic sites like the Pali Lookout, Makapu'u Lighthouse, Byodo-in Temple and more.

This time, though, Google specifically reached out to The Outdoor Circle because of its ongoing Exceptional Tree Map project, which has taken the club all over the state to record and digitally catalog information about trees of interest.

"They wanted to work with an organization that is state-wide, knows a lot of different locations — environmental, historical, things like that," explains Myles Ritchie, programs director for The Outdoor Circle. "Based on that, they thought, OK, you guys have already been to all these different locations."

So, buoyed by a grant from Hawaiian Electric Co., the club accepted Google's proposal in February 2017.

Ritchie and a team of interns — Ben Ritchie, Ireland Derby and Richard Jansen — then journeyed all over the state, working with both government and community members to find sites of

environmental, cultural and historical interest.

It wasn't easy, says Ritchie with a laugh — in regards to the 50-pound, 15-camera Trekker backpack he had to wear most of the time at a constant 90-degree angle.

"You get really strong back muscles after a while," he says.

On O'ahu, the club documented Lyon Arboretum; Ho'omaluhia, Koko Crater and Wahiawā botanical gardens; Waimea Bay Beach Park and Waimea Valley, in addition to numerous sites on Kaua'i, Maui and the Big Island. (No secret locations were highlighted — so don't expect to see any illegal hikes like the infamous Stairway to Heaven on Google's databases. The club was emphatic that they only wanted to feature sanctioned, accessible areas.)

It is, Ritchie says, a valuable exercise on a number of levels.

"There's a visual archive of what these places currently look like, which could be valuable later if there's any change. You can look if there's any kind of climate change impact, if there's any invasive species coming in," he explains.

Trekker also allows those who may not physically be able to hike those trails or travel to Hawai'i to still appreciate what the state has to offer.

The Outdoor Circle's project with Google is over for now, but Ritchie says it may not be the end.

"The option is always there," he says, adding that they've received innumerable suggestions as to other public

and private sites to highlight. "We were lucky enough to get a grant from HECO to cover the costs for this; if one should come about in the future, we're totally open to doing it again."

In the meantime, though, The Outdoor Circle has plenty to occupy itself with. The Exceptional Tree Map project goes on, as does a Carbon Neutrality Challenge that asks students to calculate their carbon footprint and plant trees to become "carbon neutral."

For more information or to view the Trekker footage, visit outdoorcircle.org.

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Myles Ritchie, wearing the Google Trekker camera backpack, pauses on a trail on Kaua'i. He and a team of interns traveled all around the state to document landmarks, gardens and other sites of interest. PHOTO COURTESY IRELAND DERBY

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