

LAVA CAVES OF THE BIG ISLAND, HAWAII

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PHOTO: GARY WHITBY

Lava Tube, Olaa Section, Kazamura Cave, Hawaii, USA. (At 65.5 km it is the world's longest lava tube).

The Big Island of Hawaii is home to the longest lava caves in the world. In 2003, a group of ASF cavers had the opportunity to participate in survey and exploration of several systems on the island.

This presentation featured visits to some of the caves in the north west, south west, and eastern parts of the island including the two longest lava tubes in the world being Kazamura Cave, at over 65.5 km and Kipuka Kanohina (Kula Kai Caverns) at 22 km.

Virtually the whole island of Hawaii is in a hazard zone as judged by the United States Geological Survey (USGS). The USGS scale for the island runs from 1-9, with higher

number designations given to areas lying further from active eruption zones. The lava caves we visited were in a "zone 2" hazard area.

Hawaiian lava caves are difficult to survey in, as they contain magnetite and hematite in large enough concentrations to affect compass readings. The caves are braided and maze-like with multiple levels and confusing passages, and contain unusual lava formations and secondary deposits. Evidence of ancient habitation and Hawaiian artifacts have also been found in these caves. This presentation was a slide show featuring the ten days caving and surveying in these unusual and sometimes surprisingly colourful lava caves. ■