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Kaluakauka Revisited: The Death of David Douglas in Hawai'i

In the forest under the shadow of Mauna Kea I have seen the bullock pit where the dead body of the distinguished Scottish naturalist, Douglas, was found under painfully suspicious circumstances, that led many to believe he had been murdered for his money. A mystery hangs over the event which we are unable to explain. From *Life in Hawaii* (1882), by Titus Coan.¹

HIGH ON THE SLOPES OF MAUNA KEA, in the *ahupua'a* (land section) of Laupāhoehoe, lies Kaluakauka, or the Doctor's Pit. It was near here that David Douglas, famous Scottish botanist, met his death in 1834. A mystery surrounded his death, a mystery that has persisted for 152 years, prompting many who have written about Douglas to speculate whether he was murdered, or whether he fell by accident into one of the bullock traps, or pits, which surrounded the watering hole for animals.

After giving a background of Douglas's explorations on the island of Hawai'i, this paper traces the various accounts of his death from original source material (and preserves original spelling) that include letters and journals of the missionaries and

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others. As time passed, accounts of Douglas's death became garbled and more bizarre.

Only 35 years old when he died, Douglas had already contributed greatly to science, particularly botany. He will always be remembered as one of the most famous of the pioneer botanists and is credited with discovering and introducing to England and Europe more than 200 species of plants.² Among several Hawaiian plants to which botanists have given his name are *Cyathodes douglasii*, the Pukeawe, and *Pandanus douglasii*, the Hala. But the most well-known plant to carry his name is the stately Douglas Fir, *Pseudotsugo Douglasii*.³

Douglas was born in Scone, Scotland, in 1799, the son of a stone mason, John Douglas. David Douglas showed great interest in natural history from an early age. His first employment was in the Scone Palace gardens, and later he worked in the Botanic Gardens in Glasgow. In 1823, he was employed by the Royal Horticultural Society of London as a scientific traveler and collector. After first spending time on the Eastern Coasts of the United States and Canada, he became the first botanist to explore remote Northwest America and California. He sent back to London hundreds of plants and seeds as well as some specimens of birds.⁴

DOUGLAS IN HAWAII

Douglas first visited the Hawaiian Islands, known then as the Sandwich Islands, in 1830, on his way from England to the Columbia River in the Pacific Northwest. On this brief visit, he climbed several peaks on O'ahu and was "splendidly" entertained by "Madame Boki", the wife of the governor.⁵

Douglas left the Columbia region in December of 1830 and traveled to California. It was while he was at Monterey that he acquired the title "Doctor." A boy had been injured, and there was no medical person in the area. Douglas was able to set the boy's broken arm and so earned the title "Doctor." In Hawaii, he was called *kauka*, the Hawaiian word for doctor.⁶

He visited Hawaii a second time in September of 1832 *en route*

from Monterey in California to the Columbia River. He was in the Islands for just a few short weeks. In spite of ill health, he managed to collect and ship to the Zoological Society in London a pair of live *nene*, or Hawaiian geese. He also made a number of astronomical observations that, unfortunately, were lost since cockroaches ate the paper. He met Richard Charlton, the British Consul to Hawai'i at that time, and made arrangements with him for a future visit.⁷

Douglas returned to Honolulu in December of 1833. He wrote to Dr. William Hooker, a friend and professor in Glasgow:

May 6, 1834, Woahoo, Sandwich Islands. . . . I arrived here on the 23rd of December, and after spending Christmas Day with two English ladies, the wife of our Consul, Mr. Charlton, and her sister, I started on the 27th for the island of Hawaii, which I reached on the 2nd of January, 1834. You know I have long had this tour in contemplation, and having spent three winter months in botanising here, I proceed to give you a short notice of my proceedings.⁸

He wrote of his explorations of the summits of both Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa as well as of Kilauea crater.

Between mountain climbing expeditions Douglas stayed in Hilo with missionaries, the Reverend Joseph Goodrich and the Reverend David Lyman, who were stationed there at that time. Mrs. Lyman, who kept a journal, wrote:

January 2, 1834. Mr. Douglas, a Botanist and Geologist, who is employed by a society in England to explore the Pacific, arrived at our station to-day. He is to spend some time in visiting the curiosities of this island. . . .

January 6, 1843. We now have Mr. Douglas boarding with us. Of course am obliged to have coffee in the morning and tea at night, and also to take a good deal of pains to have things in order, though I do not get English dinners. With Honolii for a guide and several natives to carry baggage, he starts for Mauna Kea to-morrow morning.⁹

Honoli'i had probably been chosen as a guide because of his command of the English language. He had spent a number of

years in America and had returned to Hawai'i with the first missionaries in 1820.¹⁰ Douglas referred to Honoli'i as "my guide, friend, and interpreter, Honori, an intelligent and well-disposed fellow. . . ."¹¹

On his way up Mauna Kea, Douglas made the acquaintance of a Mr. Mills and of Daniel Castle, partners in a sawmill located near Hilo.¹² The two men were also in the business of capturing wild cattle and had a lodge higher up on the slopes of Mauna Kea. Douglas used this lodge as his headquarters, arriving there his second night on the mountain. Despite a large number of Hawaiian helpers, Douglas also carried a heavy load himself and was tired when he reached the lodge. He wrote in his journal:

. . . for though the distance I had accomplished this morning was little more than seven miles, still the laborious nature of the path and the weight of more than 60 lbs. on my back, where I carried my barometer, thermometer, book, and papers, proved so very fatiguing, that I felt myself almost worn out.

He added that although he was able to dry out by the fire and have something to eat, he had to wait for a cup of tea until the slower guides, who were carrying the teapot, reached him. Douglas considered ". . . a little tea, the greatest and best of comfort: after hard labour."¹³

The next day his new acquaintances shot a young bull which they gave to Douglas for the use of his party. Douglas commented:

. . . the grassy flanks of the mountain abound with wild cattle, the offspring of the stock left here by Captain Vancouver, and which now prove a very great benefit to this island.¹⁴

Mrs. Lyman noted of this trip:

January 16, 1834. Mr. Douglas has returned from Mauna Kea. Ascended its height to be not far from 13,000 feet above the level of the sea. Hitherto it has been computed at 18,000 feet. He succeeded in finding fine specimens of minerals, and quite a collection of plants, flowers etc.¹⁵

Douglas next visited Kilauea crater and ascended Mauna Loa, again traveling with Honoli'i and a large retinue of Hawaiians. On the way to the summit of Mauna Loa, the Douglas party stopped at the village of Kapapala where Honoli'i preached a Sunday sermon. They were hospitably treated by the village chief who had provided a dwelling for them, but the fleas proved to be so bothersome that Douglas had his tent erected some distance away.

Douglas's little terrier, Billy, accompanied him on these trips and in all his travels. The botanist once wrote in his journal:

. . . my old terrier, a most faithful and now to judge from his long grey beard, venerable friend, who has guarded me throughout all my journeys, and whom, should I live to return, I mean certainly to pension off on four penny-worth of cat's-meat per day.¹⁶

Mrs. Lyman's journal continues:

February 7, 1834. Mr. Douglas returned this day, noon, having been absent a little more than two weeks. He visited Mauna Loa, describes it to be an immense dome of volcanic origin, with an open crater on the summit, about 24 miles in circumference, (He found the snow to be 5 or 6 feet deep—traveled 17 miles on snow.) and was not able to ascertain the depth, as his line would admit of measuring only 1200ft., neither could he see the bottom with his glass.¹⁷

While Douglas was in Hilo in mid-February, a very strong earthquake occurred. He recorded his observations of it:

. . . on the 19th of February, at Byron's Bay (Hilo), as is my usual practice when time permits, I was making a series of observations . . . we accordingly experienced a dreadful earthquake, which lasted thirteen seconds. . . .

He described the quake in detail, then added:

The number of undulations was great, for the thirteen seconds appeared incredibly long; and a rustling of the leaves of the trees,

though calm, and in the thatch of the adjoining houses, accompanied the noise. The sea receded about a mile, for a few minutes; and a part of the volcano fell in. The ground continued to be thus slightly, but sensibly agitated during the whole night; and Mr. Goodrich's house, of wood rolled like a ship in a storm, but did not fall. . . .¹⁸

Douglas returned to Honolulu near the end of March, but when it appeared that his passage to England would not be for some time, he decided to return to the island of Hawai'i for further exploration. In his letter to Hooker of May 1834, he had written: "I go immediately to Hawaii to work on these mountains. May God grant me a safe return to England. . . ."

Mrs. Lyman noted the arrival of the John Diell family whom Douglas had planned to accompany to Hawai'i:

July 12, 1834. . . . Mr. Diell (the seamen's preacher) wife and little one arrived in the vessel, to spend a few days at Hilo, visit the volcano, etc. They stop with me. Mr. Douglas left Oahu in another vessel about the same time they did, expects to land on the other side of this island and cross the mountain. He is hourly expected and will accompany them to the V. [Volcano]¹⁹

The missionaries looked forward to his visits. Emma Lyons Doyle, a granddaughter of the missionary, the Reverend Lyons of Waimea, wrote about Douglas:

He was loved on Hawaii, this amusing Britisher who must always have his tea! In the Lyman home at Hilo he became as one of the family. Tactfully he brought home household supplies, and once delighted the heart of his missionary hostess by the gift of a French muslin dress.²⁰

When Joseph Goodrich wrote to Levi Chamberlain, who was in charge of the mission property in Honolulu, he included a list of goods needed by the Hilo mission station and "a little tea, not for our use, but as Mr. Douglas is here and is fond of it."²¹

Douglas had taken passage from Honolulu on the schooner

Minerva and had disembarked at Kohala on July 9th, intending to take the overland route, known as Laumai'a Trail, which skirted Mauna Kea at about the 6,000 foot level. (The trail, which was popular with people traveling to Hilo along the Hāmākua Coast because it lay above many deep gulches and ravines, is still used today as a jeep trail.)

When Douglas went ashore on the north end of the island, a Black man, named John, was with him. Herein lies part of the mystery surrounding Douglas. John was a servant of the Reverend John Diell, Chaplain of the American Seamen's Friend Society in Honolulu. John had somehow become separated from the Diells and had joined Douglas at Lāhainā.²² Since Douglas planned to meet the missionaries in Hilo, John was to accompany him on his hike over Mauna Kea. There is no record, however, of what became of John; he simply disappeared.

THE FIRST ACCOUNTS OF DOUGLAS'S DEATH

The first account of the death of Douglas appeared in Mrs. Lyman's journal:

July 14, 1834. This has been one of the most gloomy days I ever witnessed. . . . Mournful to relate Mr. Douglas is no more . . . just as Mr. Diell was about to go down to the beach to meet Mr. Douglas, we were informed that his corpse was at the water's edge in a canoe. . . . The report is that Mr. Douglas left the vessel at Kawaihae to cross over by land, engaged a foreigner for a guide and several natives to take along his baggage. The guide accompanied him till they passed all the pit falls dug to entrap wild cattle on the north side Mauna Kea, he then left him to return. Soon after Mr. Douglas went back a short distance for something and in retracing his steps fell into a pit (into which a bullock had previously fallen) and was found dead a short time afterward. This was Sat. Morning. Sunday he was taken the shortest distance to the sea side, wrapped in a hyde, put on board a canoe and brought here as he was taken from the pit. His close are sadly torn and his body dreadfully mangled. Ten gashes on his head.

Mrs. Lyman expressed doubts concerning Douglas's death, doubts repeated by others many times:

A carpenter was engaged to make a coffin and a foreigner to dig his grave under a bread fruit tree in Mr. Goodrich's garden. Whilst engaged in digging the thought occurred to him that Mr. Douglas was murdered. He suggested it to Mr. Goodrich and Diell. Their suspicions were at once excited. They left digging the grave and concluded to preserve the body in salt and send it to Honolulu that it might be more satisfactorily determined how the wounds were inflicted. . . . The whole is involved in mystery.²³

Reverends Goodrich and Diell then started a letter on July 15th to Richard Charlton, the British Consul in Honolulu, which they were to continue over several days as information reached them:

. . . doubts were suggested by a foreigner who was assisting us, and who has for some time been engaged in taking wild cattle, whether the wounds on the head could have been inflicted by a bullock. Mr. G. said that doubts had similarly arisen in his mind while examining the body. . . . How had Mr. Douglas been left alone without any guide, foreign or native?—Where was John, Mr. Diell's coloured man. . . . How was it that Mr. D. should fall into a pit when retracing his steps, after having passed in safety? And if a bullock had already tumbled in, how was it that he did not see the hole necessarily made in its covering? . . .²⁴

On July 16th they added to the letter to Charlton:

As neither the guide nor any natives have arrived, we have employed two foreigners to proceed to the place where the body was received on the sea-shore, with directions to find the persons who discovered it, and go with them to the pit, and after making as full inquiries as possible, to report to us immediately. So far as we can ascertain, the guide is an Englishman, a convict from Botany Bay, who left a vessel at these islands some years ago. He has a wife and one child with him, and to this circumstance in part may be attributed his delay.

One of the foreigners sent on this mission was Charles Hall who was to become a pioneer coffee planter on the Kona Coast of Hawai'i.²⁵ In 1834, however, he was still practicing his trade of carpentry and was also hunting bullocks, so he was familiar with the mountain. Twelve years later, in 1846, a visitor in Kona met Hall and wrote in his journal:

Mr. Hall called. . . . He is an American & has spent many years on the Islands, has been employed in beef-catching & is familiar with the mountainous regions. When the death of Douglas (in 1834) was known at Hilo he was sent by the Missionaries to the pit to gather information. There had been a heavy rain the day before he reached the place and all tracks were obliterated. He obtained the head of the bullock & took it to Hilo. The horns he says were blunt & nearly an inch through at the extremities, the animal being old. He thinks it impossible that the wounds on Douglas's head especially on the temple, which was about $1\frac{1}{4}$ or $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches deep, 2 inches long & half an inch thick could have been made by the horns or hoofs. Davis,²⁶ at whose house Douglas lodged the night before, affirms as Mr. Hall says that he saw Douglas have a large purse of money which he took to be gold. None of any consequence was found after his death. Mr Hall says he has no doubt in his own mind that Douglas was murdered by Ned. . . .²⁷

Returning to contemporary events and before Hall returned with the gory bullock head, Edward (Ned) Gurney, the guide the missionaries had been awaiting, arrived in Hilo. Goodrich and Diell continue their letter to Charlton:

Three o'clock p.m. Edward Gurney, the Englishman spoken of before, has arrived, and our minds are greatly relieved, as to the probable way in which the fatal event was brought about. He states that on the 12th instant, about ten minutes before six in the morning, Mr. D. arrived at his house on the mountain, and wished him to point out the road, and go a short distance with him. Mr. D. was then alone, but said that his man had gone out the day before (this man was probably John, Mr. Diell's coloured man). After taking breakfast, Ned accompanied Mr. D. about three quarters

of a mile, and after directing him in the path, and warning him of the traps, went on about half a mile further with him. . . . Just before Ned left him, he warned him particularly of three bullock-traps, about two miles and a half a-head, two of them lying directly in the road, the other on one side. . . . Ned then parted with Mr. D. and went back to skin some bullocks which he had previously killed. About eleven o'clock, two natives came in pursuit of him, and said that the European was dead; that they had found him in the pit where a bullock was. . . . Ned, who, leaving his work, ran into the house for a musket, ball, and hide; and on arriving at the pit, found the bullock standing upon poor Douglas' body, which was lying on the right side. He shot the animal, and after drawing it to one side of the pit, succeeded in extricating the corpse. Douglas' cane was there, but not his dog and bundle: Ned knowing that he had the latter with him, asked for it. After a few minutes search, the dog was heard to bark, at a little distance a-head on the road to Hilo. On coming up to the spot . . . the dog and bundle were found. On further scrutiny, it appeared that Mr. D. had stopped for a moment and looked at the empty pit . . . and that after proceeding about fifteen fathoms up the hill, he had laid down his bundle and returned to the side of the pit where the bullock was entrapped . . . and that whilst looking in, by making a false step, or some other fatal accident, he fell into the power of the infuriated animal, which speedily executed the work of death. The body was covered in part with stones, which probably prevented its being entirely crushed. After removing the corpse, Ned took charge of the dog and bundle, also of his watch and chronometer (which is injured in some way), his pocket compass, keys, and money, and after hiring the natives to convey the body to the shore, a distance of about twenty-seven miles, came directly to this place.

Mrs. Lyman in her journal repeated much the same account as told to the missionaries by Edward Gurney. However, she added, with some skepticism:

This is the story of the man and perhaps it is true. It looks very probable, but I must confess I am a little suspicious. The probability is the matter will be investigated by the English consul.²⁸

Several accounts of Douglas's death and burial were given by Honolulu residents and indicated a good deal of concern. Stephen Reynolds, a merchant in Honolulu, heard the news of Douglas's death on July 19th and recorded in his journal:

Am 7—Schr New York arrived of the Harbor with colors half mast. She beat in. At 8 we learned the Death of Doctor David Douglas on Hawaii. His body was found in a Bullock Pit where there was a wild bull.

Reynolds related a somewhat different behavior on the part of the dog which seems more realistic. He said:

It appears Mr. Douglas' little dog kept running about the hole and barking, which caused the native to go and look.²⁹

After the decision was made to ship the body to Honolulu, Diell and Goodrich added to their letter to Charlton:

. . . accordingly we had the contents of the abdomen removed, the cavity filled with salt, and placed in a coffin, which was then filled with salt, and the whole enclosed in a box of brine. Some fears are entertained whether the captain of the native vessel will convey the body. . . .

These fears were realized, and the body was not shipped until, later, finally arriving in Honolulu on August 3 in a most offensive state.

Stephen Reynolds entered in his journal:

Sunday Aug. 3. Fine morn. Lorient arrived. Bro't the body of Mr. David Douglas from Hilo. Mr. Charlton had it taken on shore and examined by the Doctors of Challenger (British "sloop of war" in port), Rooke, Peabody, Thomas examined it—smelled very bad. Discovered nothing.

On Monday August 4, he recorded that Doctor Douglas was buried at 11:00 p.m.

Levi Chamberlain, a missionary in Honolulu who also kept a daily journal, gave additional information:

Monday Aug. 4th, 1834. The remains of Mr. Douglass which were brought down in the *Loriot* which arrived yesterday were this afternoon interred in the common burial ground. The church service was read at the grave by an officer of the sloop of war *Challenger* now in the roadstead.³⁰

Charlton, the English Consul, wrote to James Bandinel, a clerk in the British Foreign Office, on August 6, 1834:

On the 3rd instant, the body was brought here in an American vessel. I immediately had it examined by the medical gentlemen, who gave it as their opinion that the several wounds were inflicted by the bullock. . . . The next day, I had his remains deposited in their last resting-place; the funeral was attended by Captain Seymour and several of the officers of His Majesty's Ship *Challenger*, and the whole of the foreign Residents. . . .³¹

In the meantime, Gurney brought Billy, the faithful little terrier down from Mauna Kea and gave him to the missionaries. They, in turn, sent him to Honolulu in the care of a Captain Martin,³² to be delivered to the British Consul, Charlton. Charlton had the dog sent back to England in charge of Captain Peter Corney of the brig *Eagle*. Billy was then given to James Bandinel.³³ Perhaps Billy did receive his penny-worth of cat's-meat each day after all.

Some of Douglas's other belongings found their way to odd places. One man mentioned seeing "poor Douglas' snowshoes" among other objects of interest on display in 1839 in the basement of Bethel Church.³⁴ In 1846, Chester Lyman called on Dr. Rooke and commented:

He has many fine philosophical instruments. . . . Some of his instruments e.g. pocket compass, standard Ther[mometer] and some others belonged to David Douglas. . . .³⁵

Doctor T. C. B. Rooke, adoptive father of Queen Emma, had been one of the doctors who had examined Douglas's body in Honolulu.

LATER ACCOUNTS OF DOUGLAS'S DEATH

Concern over how Douglas met his death did not abate but, in fact, continued. In 1835, the Englishman, Dr. Meredith Gairdner, was in Honolulu for his health and wrote Dr. Hooker in England about Douglas:

. . . the minds of the residents and particularly of the British Consul . . . [are] by no means satisfied that he came by his end by mere accident; they say that it is impossible for a man in daylight to fall into one of these pits in which a bullock is trapped, for the animal breaks down the whole covering when he falls in, leaving a large and visible aperture. . . .³⁶

In January of 1841, Dr. Charles Pickering and J. D. Brackenridge, members of the United States Exploring Expedition, commanded by Lieutenant Charles Wilkes, visited the site of Douglas's death. They followed the same trail Douglas took and passed "Ned's house," which by then was deserted, and described the cattle traps to Wilkes who wrote:

They are situated in an open clearing, in the center of which is a low marshy spot, sometimes containing water, which the cattle come in search of. . . . These pits are covered with raspberry and other fragile bushes; which are covered again with soil, and the hoofs of cattle imprinted on them, to deceive. . . . The locality of these pits is in a dell, with banks sloping on both sides: the one to the northwest is about twenty feet high, while that to the southeast is about thirty feet. On each side, both above and below, thickets close the dell. . . . These pits are about seven or eight feet long, and four feet wide and are walled up: they are placed broadside to the water.

Wilkes added in his narrative:

There were many circumstances attendant upon the death of Douglass, leading to the suspicion that he had been murdered by Ned, at whose house he had breakfasted. The general character of Ned gave rise to a feeling that such was the fact, he having been a

run-away convict from New South Wales. It seems somewhat singular that Mr. Douglas should have laid down his bundle and returned after passing the pits; and it is remarkable too that his servant, who had parted from him the same morning, should also have perished. . . . Few deaths could be more awful than that which he is supposed to have suffered.³⁷

In 1896, an article appeared in the *Hilo Tribune* entitled, "Death of Prof. Douglas, a Bit of History. A Doubt Cleared up as to His Death." The newspaper had interviewed Bolabola, "a noted hunter and trailer, over 70 years of age, familiar with every inch of ground around the Mauna Kea slopes." Bolabola, who was about ten years old at the time of Douglas's death and lived with his parents near Ned Gurney's house, claimed, "The *haole* [foreigner] was murdered, we all felt so at the time, but we were afraid to say so and only whispered it among ourselves."³⁸

James Stevens, of Waimea, Hawai'i, who was interviewed at the age of 85, said he went to Humu'ula on Mauna Kea at the age of 10. He knew Bolabola was a respected man who had stated that the general belief among the *kama'aina* (native born) was that Douglas had been murdered.³⁹

In 1906, A. B. Loebenstein, a surveyor on the island of Hawai'i, claimed in the *Hawaii Herald* that he had heard from the Native Hawaiians that Douglas was murdered in cold blood by a white man, a bullock hunter who was an escaped Botany Bay Convict. He said Douglas stayed at this man's house and was incautious enough to show some money. The bullock hunter was seen following him, but the natives were so afraid of the man that they never dared tell of it. Loebenstein repeated Bolabola's version of the death of Douglas and added, "for the first time there is published to the world the story of foul, black and cowardly murder."⁴⁰

Missionary families shared the opinion that Douglas had been murdered. Emma Lyons Doyle once wrote, to Mrs. Levi Lyman, that her mother had told her:

. . . that when some Sydney Duck, or Beachcomber, was dying in Waimea and Father Lyons was by his side, the dying man kept repeating in his delirium, 'I didn't do it! No! I didn't kill him!'⁴¹

The Lyons family assumed the "Sydney Duck" was Ned Gurney, and they continued to feel that he was guilty of murder.⁴² In 1920, the Reverend Titus Coan's son wrote to a gentleman in Hilo concerning Douglas:

Ned Gurney . . . killed him with an axe, took gold, and gave out that he had found Douglas's body under the hoofs of a bull in a pit: and for 60 years most people believed that a skilled mountaineer had walked into a trap! . . . But my father, among others, knew from the first who had committed the murder and Gurney raved about it on his deathbed.⁴³

NED GURNEY'S STORY

The reputation of escaped Botany Bay convicts in the early 19th century was not good. Reverend Dibble wrote:

Another class of persons found at the Sandwich Islands were deserters from Botany Bay. . . . This class usually have more mental capacity and more information than run-away sailors and are by no means less adept in vice and crime.⁴⁴

Edward Gurney, an Englishman who had been convicted of larceny at Old Bailey, London, on January 4, 1819, was sentenced to seven years imprisonment and transported to Australia. He had been a laborer or servant in England. He stood about 5'2" and had a florid complexion, grey eyes, and flaxen hair. Gurney was 19 years old when he arrived in Australia on September 1, 1819.⁴⁵

Gurney somehow was able to leave Australia on October 10, 1821, on board the cutter *Mermaid*. He and two fellow convicts served as crew for Captain J. R. Kent who was escorting the small *Prince Regent* to Hawai'i.⁴⁶ The *Prince Regent*, armed with six guns, had been built at Sydney by direction of the British government for presentation to Liholiho in fulfillment of Captain George Vancouver's promise made years earlier to Kamehameha I.⁴⁷

The ships reached Tahiti in February of 1822 where Daniel Tyerman and George Bennett from the London Mission Society joined the voyage to Hawai'i.⁴⁸ They arrived in Hawai'i in April

of 1822. The *Prince Regent* was finally delivered to Liholiho at Honolulu on May 1, 1822. The *Mermaid* departed from the Islands a few months later, minus three of its crew members, one of whom was Gurney.

Gurney's career in Hawai'i is far from clear. He claimed to have accompanied Chief Kalanimoku to Kaua'i in 1824 when the Chief attempted to quell a rebellion. Gurney eventually made his way to Mauna Kea and became a bullock hunter. In 1838, the Lyman family traveled over the Laumai'a trail on Mauna Kea and stayed at the mountain house of Ned, the bullock hunter. Henry Lyman, son of the missionary, said the house was a large native structure thatched with mountain grass and had a dirt floor piled with mats.⁴⁹

Gurney was still living in the Islands in 1839. In a letter dated December 9, he requested a piece of land from Kamehameha III in Kohala, reminding the King:

. . . one time you was kind enough to promise me a land and I have been in this country twenty years and resided with your brother and your chief part of the time when I thought that I had a home for my wife and family . . . the time your brother the late king was in England when I went with Mr. Pitt to Attoi [Kaua'i] I was promised a land on my return I was not in want of it that time for I had no family but now I got children to provide a home for I am constantly in the mountain myself and want someplace for them. . . .⁵⁰

The letter is written in fine penmanship, and there is no indication that it was written by any other hand than Gurney's. But no records have been found that he did receive this land.

Henry Lyman, who was with a surveying party in 1851, described an evening spent on Mauna Kea:

As we sat by the evening fire, roasting a joint of veal for supper, one of the guides brought up a handful of potatoes from a deserted plantation, once cultivated by Ned, the notorious bullock-hunter, long since summoned to his last assize, and now troubling the earth no more. . . .⁵¹

Over the years, many writers speculated upon Gurney's fate, and rumors abounded. Eugene Burns, a reporter for the *Star-Bulletin*, believed that Gurney escaped from the Australian penal colony on a slave ship, which later became the museum ship *Success* which traveled around the world, the last slave ship in existence. Burns wrote:

What became of Gurney is swallowed in tradition. Some affirm he bought passage with the blood money soon after Douglas' death, mindful of the natives who knew his secret; others maintain that he waited and in '49 joined the motley Botany Bay boys, who raised the very red in San Francisco and were the cause of the original vigilantes. . . .⁵²

SPECULATION CONTINUED

As the years passed, some of the stories of Douglas's death became more bizarre. In 1837, one journalist commented, "He [Douglas] was traversing the country with a guide . . . guide lost his way and was very nearly starved."⁵³ In 1889, William Heath Davis Jr. reflected:

. . . Dr. Douglass disappearing suddenly, began to be inquired about by many. The British Consul projected a search, assisted by the king, the American consul and other foreigners resident in Honolulu. Rewards were offered; and the governor of the island sent out to look for the doctor. After diligent search his body was found in one of the cattle pits, having evidently been there several days. . . .⁵⁴

After the turn of the century, in 1903, Albert F. Judd, son of the missionary Gerrit P. Judd, wrote to the surveyor Loebenstein concerning Douglas:

. . . When a negro, who had been his [Douglas] companion died in Hilo, in his last delirium he constantly protested that he was innocent of the murder of the professor.⁵⁵

In 1949, Otto Degener, botanist, stated in a letter to the editor to the *Star Bulletin*:

The late Mrs. Emma Taylor, famed Hawaiian scholar, informed me that jealousy was the motive for Douglas's death. Ned's native wife, and who can blame her, was becoming more interested in her stalwart guest than in her spouse, the run away Botany Bay Convict.⁵⁶

Today, in a guide book for The Pinetum at Scone Palace in Scone, Scotland, you may read how he was killed by a wild bison in the Sandwich Isles.⁵⁷

GRAVESITE AND MONUMENT

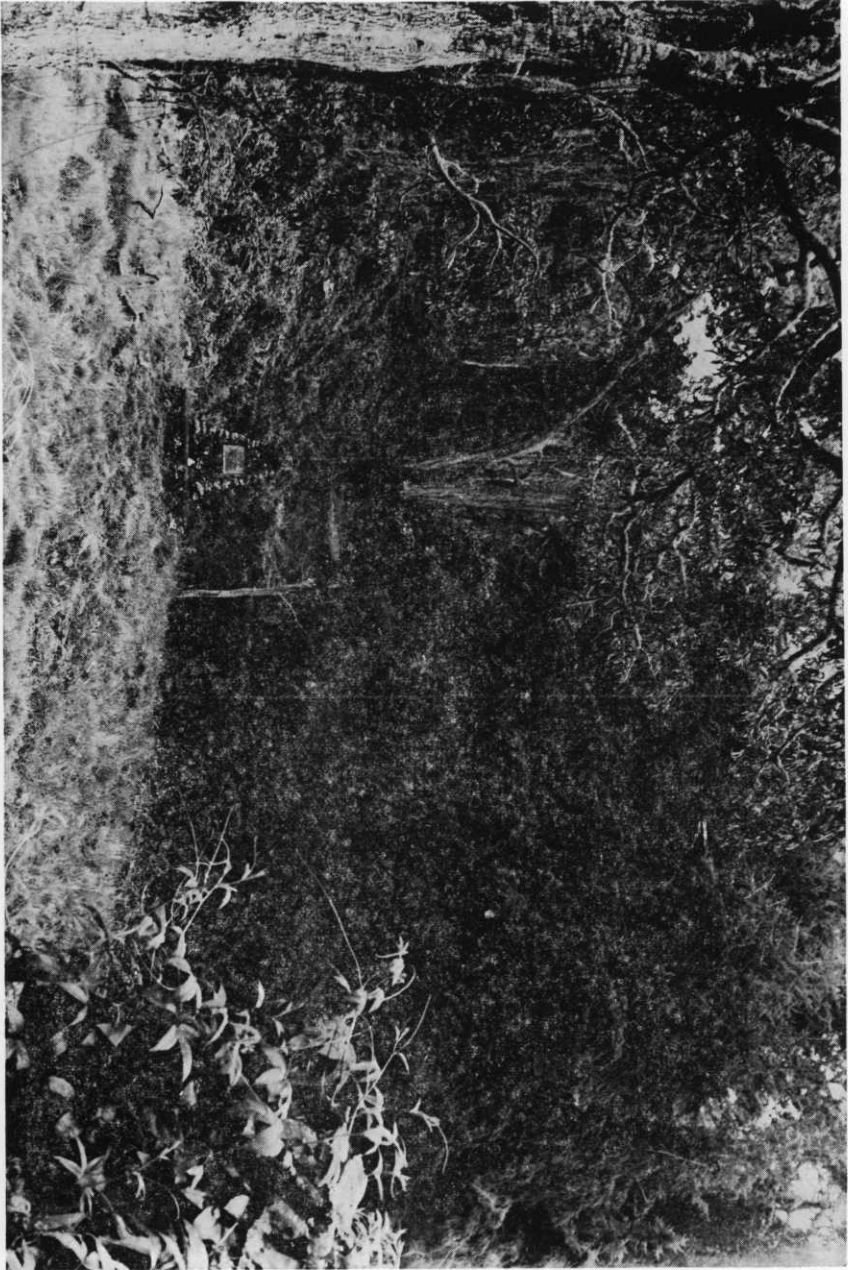
Over the years, there has also been some confusion about Douglas's gravesite because it was never properly marked. Charlton, in his letter to Bandinel, stated, "I have caused his [Douglas] grave to be built over with brick, and perhaps his friends may send a stone to be placed (with an inscription) upon it."⁵⁸

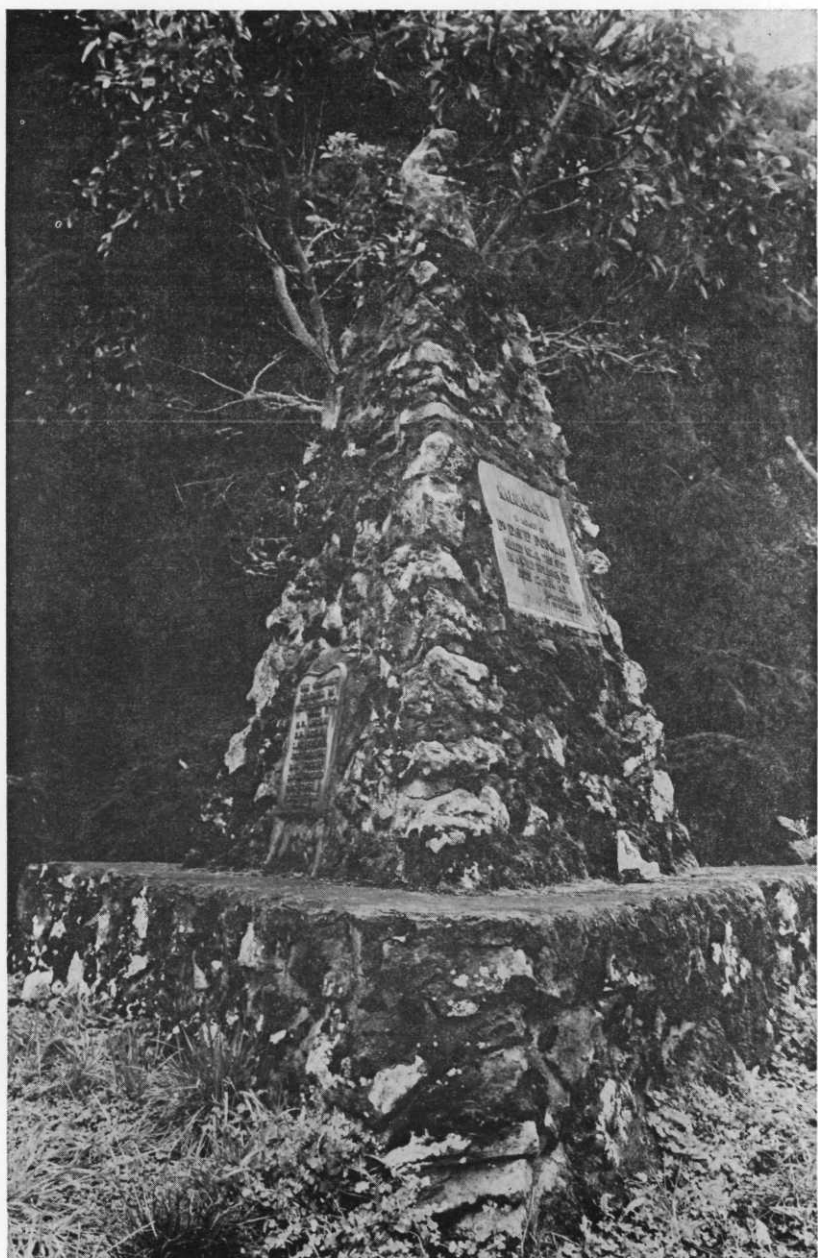
Richard Brinsley Hinds, who kept a journal of the voyage of the *Sulphur* and was in Honolulu in 1837, made this entry:

July 14th. . . . I requested an Englishman, Mr. Owen, to shew me the grave of Douglas, the Botanical collector for the Horticultural Society, who met with such an untimely death. . . . The body was bricked over sometime afterwards. This is somewhat damaged at the head and foot and is without slab, or word of any kind to say who lies beneath. Tho' it is distinguished from the rest by its red brick investment. All the others are enclosed by the sun-burnt bricks . . . adobes.⁵⁹

In 1840, Charles Wilkes commented:

FIG. 1. Kaluakauka site: David Douglas memorial cairn and stand of Douglas fir in Hilo Forest Reserve, Hawai'i. (J. C. Wright photo, 1974, supplied by Nathan Nāpōkā, State Historic Preservation Office.)





In the neighborhood of the old church, near the Mission, is the Burying Ground, which is a mere Common, and the graves are exposed to every kind of neglect. Foreigners, as well as Natives, are buried there. The only grave that was pointed out to me, was that of Douglas, the botanist, which was without any inscription whatever.⁶⁰

It was not until 1856 that a marker was erected for Douglas at Kawaiaha'o Church.⁶¹ By then the site of the grave was unknown, and the stone was mounted on an outside wall of the Church. As the years passed, it, too, began to crumble and was finally moved inside the church.⁶² At that time, the Royal Horticultural Society added a bronze tablet:

Here lies Master David Douglas, born in Scotland A.D. 1799. An indefatigable traveller, he was sent out by the Royal Horticultural Society of London, and gave his life for Science in the wilds of Hawaii, July 12, 1834. E'en here the tear of pity springs—And hearts are touched by human things.⁶³

In 1934, a hundred years after the death of Douglas, a group of men spearheaded by L.W. Bryan, forester, erected a stone cairn memorial to Douglas at Kaluakauka, near the place where his body had been found (figs. 1 and 2). They planted more than 200 Douglas Fir trees at the dedication. Many are still growing there today.⁶⁴ In 1977, the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, which considered the site of Kaluakauka of primary importance, was unsuccessful in having the site placed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁶⁵

Today, on the lonely mountainside, is a Hawaiian Warrior Visitors Bureau sign pointing to the trail leading to Kaluakauka. In the green dell, surrounded by the Douglas Firs, stands a stone cairn. The tablet on the cairn was prepared by members of the Hilo Burns Club, a social organization, no longer in existence, for people of Scottish descent. The tablet reads:

FIG. 2. Close up of David Douglas memorial cairn. (J. C. Wright photo, 1974, supplied by Nathan Nāpōkā, State Historic Preservation Office.)

In Memory of Dr. David Douglas, killed near this spot in a wild bullock pit July 12, 1834 A.D. This tablet erected 1934 by the Hilo Burns Club.

The many accounts of Douglas's death that circulated over the years do not clarify what actually happened to him. They merely deepen the mystery.

NOTES

- ¹ Titus Coan, *Life in Hawaii* (New York: Randolf, 1822) 225. Reverend Coan arrived in Hawai'i on June 6, 1835, a member of the Seventh Company of the ABCFM, and was stationed in Hilo where he remained until his death in 1882.
- ² "David Douglas, Botanist," *The Scots in Hawaii, Special Issue 27* (Honolulu: Caledonian Society of Hawaii, June 1984).
- ³ W. F. Wilson, *David Douglas, Botanist at Hawaii* (Honolulu: W. F. Wilson, 1919) 18.
- ⁴ Athelstan George Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir: A Biography of David Douglas, Botanist* (Cambridge: Harvard U P, 1947), an excellent biography. For a firsthand account of his exploration of North America, see *Douglas Journal, Journal Kept by David Douglas During His Travels in North America 1823-1827* (1914; New York: Antiquarian Press, 1959), hereafter cited as *Douglas Journal*. For a good account of his childhood and family background, see Sir William Jackson Hooker, "A Brief Memoir of the Life of Mr. David Douglas, With Extracts from his Letters," *Companion to the Botanical Magazine* 2, (1836): 79-82.
- ⁵ Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir* 166.
- ⁶ Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir* 189.
- ⁷ Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir* 192.
- ⁸ John Davies, *Douglas of the Forests* (Seattle: U of Washington P, 1980) 163. William Jackson Hooker, in 1820, was appointed to the Chair of Botany at Glasgow University where he and David Douglas first met. Douglas was a young gardener on the Botanic Gardens staff when Hooker recognized his talent, acted as his patron, and kept up a regular correspondence with Douglas for the rest of his life.
- ⁹ Margaret Greer Martin, ed., *The Lymans of Hilo: Part One, Compiled from the Journal and Letters of Sarah Joiner Lyman* (Hilo: Lyman House Memorial Museum, 1979) 63.
- ¹⁰ Lucy G. Thurston, *Life and Times of Mrs. Lucy G. Thurston, Wife of the Rev. Asa Thurston, Pioneer Missionary to the Sandwich Islands . . .* (Honolulu: Friend, 1934) 14.

- ¹¹ *Douglas Journal* 303. The Journal includes an "Extract . . . of a Subsequent Expedition in 1833-4".
- ¹² Irving Jenkins, *Hawaiian Furniture and Hawaii's Cabinetmakers 1820-1940* (Honolulu: Editions Limited, 1983) 13-9. Daniel Castle ran a water-powered sawmill, served as a carpenter for Governor Kuakini in Kailua, and did carpentry for the missionaries on the island of Hawai'i.
- ¹³ *Douglas Journal* 299.
- ¹⁴ *Douglas Journal* 299.
- ¹⁵ Martin, *Lymans of Hilo* 63.
- ¹⁶ Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir* 201.
- ¹⁷ Martin, *Lymans of Hilo* 54.
- ¹⁸ David Douglas, letter to Captain Sabine, 3 May 1834, James Tice Phillips Collection, Hawai'i State Library.
- ¹⁹ Martin, *Lymans of Hilo* 66-7.
- ²⁰ Emma Lyons Doyle, *Makua Laiana* (Honolulu: HSB, 1945) 52.
- ²¹ Joseph Goodrich, letter to L. Chamberlain, 10 Mar. 1834, HMCS.
- ²² Joseph Goodrich and John Diell, letter to Richard Charlton, 15 July 1834, in *Douglas Journal* 318-23. Letter also printed in *Ke Kumu Hawaii*, Nov. 1834.
- ²³ Martin, *Lymans of Hilo* 67-8.
- ²⁴ Joseph Goodrich and John Diell, letter to Richard Charlton, 15 July 1834, in *Douglas Journal* 318-23.
- ²⁵ *PCA* 13 Jan. 1866.
- ²⁶ Davis was also a bullock hunter and served as a herdsman for Governor Kuakini: Foreign Testimony Before the Land Commission, Book 5, John Munn's claim 60.
- ²⁷ Frederick J. Teggart, ed. *Around the Horn to the Sandwich Islands and California 1845-1850, Being a Personal Record Kept by Chester S. Lyman* (New Haven: Yale U P, 1924) 123-24.
- ²⁸ Martin, *Lymans of Hilo* 69.
- ²⁹ Stephen Reynolds, Journal, mf., HMCS.
- ³⁰ Levi Chamberlain, Journal, ts., HMCS.
- ³¹ *Douglas Journal* 323.
- ³² Teggart, *Around the Horn* 147, states this is probably Jeremiah Martin, from the West Indies, who was Captain of the *Keoua* when Chester Lyman was in Hawai'i in 1846.
- ³³ Harvey, *Douglas of the Firs* 237.
- ³⁴ E. Allison Kay, "The Sandwich Islands, from the Richard Brinsley Hinds' Journal of the Voyage of the *Sulpher* (1836-1842)," *HJH* 2 (1968) 128.
- ³⁵ Teggart, *Around the Horn* 74.
- ³⁶ Harvey, *Douglas of the Firs* 251-52.
- ³⁷ Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the Years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: Lee and Blanchard, 1845) 4: 204-05.

- ³⁸ *Hilo Tribune* 22 Aug. 1896.
- ³⁹ James Stevens, statement to Alfred W. Carter, 5 June 1937, Douglas folder, HMCS.
- ⁴⁰ *Hawaii Herald* 31 May 1906.
- ⁴¹ Emma Lyons Doyle, letter to Mrs. Levi Lyman, n.d., HMCS.
- ⁴² Doyle, *Makua Laiana* 54-5.
- ⁴³ Titus Coan, letter to Carl S. Carlsmith, 10 Jan. 1920.
- ⁴⁴ Sheldon Dibble, *A History of the Sandwich Islands* (Honolulu: Thomas G. Thrum, 1909) 185.
- ⁴⁵ Colonial Secretary's Letters, 1821, Convict Records, Sydney, New South Wales Archives.
- ⁴⁶ Colonial Secretary's Letters, 1821; Bernice Judd, *Voyages to Hawaii Before 1860* (1929; Honolulu: U P of Hawai'i, 1974) 18.
- ⁴⁷ Ralph S. Kuykendall, *The Hawaiian Kingdom*, vol. 1, 1778-1854 *Foundation and Transformation* (Honolulu: U P of Hawai'i, 1978) 76.
- ⁴⁸ London Mission Society Collection, HMCS.
- ⁴⁹ Henry M. Lyman, *Hawaiian Yesterdays* (Chicago: McClurg, 1906) 29.
- ⁵⁰ Edward Gurney, letter to Kamehameha III, 2 Dec. 1839, Land file, AH.
- ⁵¹ Lyman, *Hawaiian Yesterdays* 228.
- ⁵² *HSB* 23 Apr. 1938.
- ⁵³ Kay, "Richard Brinsley Hinds' Journal" 107-08.
- ⁵⁴ William Heath Davis, *Sixty Years in California* (San Francisco: A. J. Leary, 1889) 309-11, met Douglas in Monterey, California, in 1831. Davis Jr. was the son of Captain Davis, active in the Pacific-Northwest trade, and the brother of Roland Grimes Davis, a judge in Hawai'i.
- ⁵⁵ Albert F. Judd, letter to A. B. Loebenstein, 2 Mar. 1903, MS-SC—Judd, box 15, Bishop Museum.
- ⁵⁶ *HSB* 18 May 1938.
- ⁵⁷ The Pinetum originated with the planting of certain exotic coniferous trees in 1848.
- ⁵⁸ *Douglas Journal* 323.
- ⁵⁹ Kay, "Richard Brinsley Hinds' Journal" 107-08.
- ⁶⁰ Margaret Kirby Morgan, *David Douglas—Botanist*, Papers of HHS, no. 16 (1929): 41.
- ⁶¹ Wilson, *David Douglas* 16-7. The tombstone of white marble was sent from England by Julius L. Brenchley who had previously visited the Islands with Jules Remy.
- ⁶² *HA* 12 Nov. 1930; Rev. William Kaina of Kawaiaha'o Church, 6 Aug. 1987, states: "Last known information on gravesite was somewhere in the vicinity of the now existing Punchbowl St. It is believed that during construction of Punchbowl St. in the 1900's David Douglas' remains was located in a nearby area of Kawaiaha'o Church Cemetary. The exact location of the gravesite is unknown at this time . . .", Rev. William Kaina Correspondence, Kona Historical Society.

⁶³ Harvey, *Douglas of the Fir* 241.

⁶⁴ *HSB* 2 July 1934.

⁶⁵ National Register of Historical Places Inventory . . . Nomination Form: Kaluakauka. . . . Prepared by Laura E. Soulliers, Architectural Historian, 5 May 1977, State Historic Preservation Office.