

Cyclists, wild pigs, mongoose share the road

When I go touring, I look for the road less traveled. That's why my wife and I chose Hawaii for a winter trip instead of Oahu.

"On my left," I said to Sheree as we pedaled about 10 miles south of Pahoehoe. It was my signal to Sheree that two wild pigs were on the road. About a mile later, "on your right" meant a mongoose was joining us.

I wasn't surprised that we would share the road with wildlife. Oahu has 876,000 residents and countless tourists crammed onto 597 square miles while Hawaii has 150,000 residents, a limited number of tourists on 6,423 square miles.

Room to roam comes with a price – less services. Hilo (40,000) on the east side and Kailua-Kona (37,000) on the west side are the largest cities on the island. Lodging is sparse for about 100 miles around the southern tip. If one chooses to rent a vehicle and do day rides, one needs to rent a vehicle in advance. Often there are no extra rental vehicles at the airport. Few businesses are open on Sunday.

More than one cyclist has been caught off guard by the idyllic tropical island stereotype. In our case, it was 38 degrees when we left Boise but 80 degrees/humid in Hilo. We did a 34-mile loop to the picturesque Akaka Falls. The ride included a four-mile stretch in which we gained 1,600 feet in elevation.

We went prepared with extra water. Others do not. Baker Tom, known for his malasadas (Portuguese donuts) in Papaikou, noted that he regularly deals with parched cyclists who underestimate their hydration.





Lodging is less expensive on Hawaii than Oahu but gasoline is nearly a dollar higher on the islands than the mainland. Fuel for our bikes was local fare – from fruits to Baker Tom’s malasadas to Seaside Restaurant’s fresh fish in Hilo. I also consumed a pastry in Naalehu at Hana Hou’s, the southern-most restaurant in the U.S.

One of the more-unique experiences was to have a picnic in what used to be Kalapana. Lava flows

buried the town, including 165 residences, in 1990. That meant we were sitting on land younger than us.

“This is about as far off the beaten path as you can get in Hawaii,” noted William Walters. The Kalapana area is “wonderfully undeveloped . . . the landscape consists of green jungles, streaked with stark, barren lava flows.”