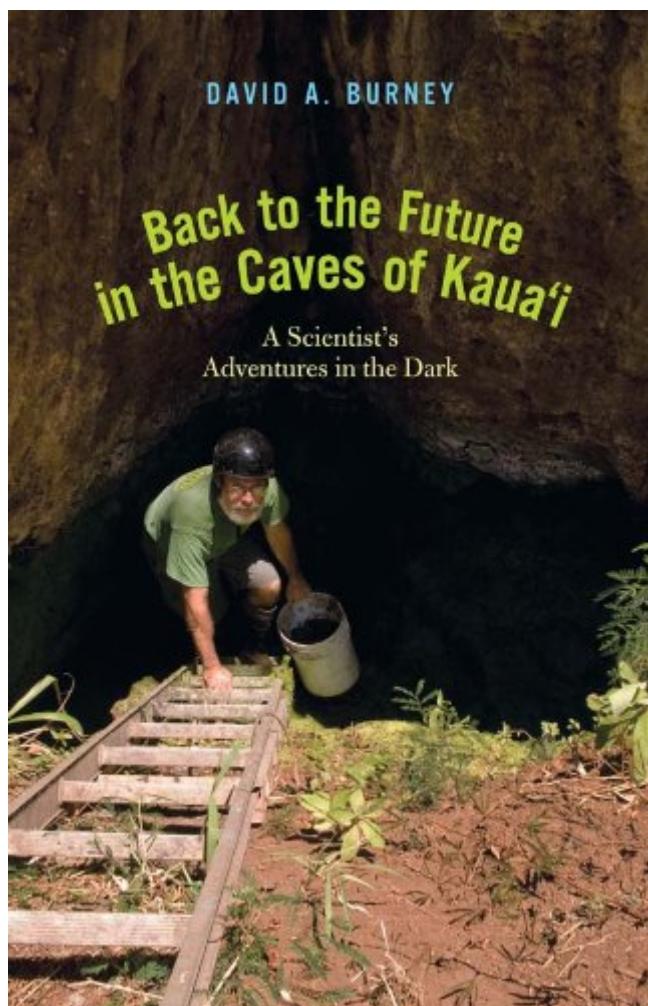


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# Back To The Future In The Caves Of Kaua'i: A Scientist's Adventures In The Dark



## Synopsis

For two decades, paleoecologist David Burney and his wife, Lida Pigott Burney, have led an excavation of Makauwahi Cave on the island of Kaua'i, uncovering the fascinating variety of plants and animals that have inhabited Hawaii throughout its history. From the unique perspective of paleoecology—“the study of ancient environments”—Burney has focused his investigations on the dramatic ecological changes that began after the arrival of humans one thousand years ago, detailing not only the environmental degradation they introduced but also asking how and why this destruction occurred and, most significantly, what might happen in the future. Using Kaua'i as an ecological prototype and drawing on the author’s adventures in Madagascar, Mauritius, and other exciting locales, Burney examines highly pertinent theories about current threats to endangered species, restoration of ecosystems, and how people can work together to repair environmental damage elsewhere on the planet. Intriguing illustrations, including a reconstruction of the ancient ecological landscape of Kaua'i by the artist Julian Hume, offer an engaging window into the ecological marvels of another time. A fascinating adventure story of one man’s life in paleoecology, *Back to the Future in the Caves of Kaua'i* reveals the excitement—and occasional frustrations—of a career spent exploring what the past can tell us about the future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Back to the Future in the Caves of Kaua'i: A Scientist's Adventures in the Dark. David A. Burney. Yale University Press, New Haven; 2011. 6 by 9 inches, xv+198 pages. Hardbound ISBN 978-0-300-15094-0, \$28; softbound ISBN 978-0-300-17209-6, \$18. In pursuit of his interest in paleoecology, or the study of how the arrival of humans has changed ecosystems worldwide, the author began an investigation in Makauwahi Cave on the southeastern coast of the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i. A solution cave in eolianite limestone that also spent some time as a sea cave, it now consists mainly of a large, open collapse sinkhole. Excavation and coring of the deposits on the floor of the sink have disclosed a lot of information about the changes in the island's flora and fauna since the arrival of Polynesians about a thousand years ago and then Europeans in 1788. Before its discovery by man, the only mammal on the island was a bat. A large fraction of the plants and animals on the Hawaiian islands were unable to cope with the Polynesian's rats, dogs, and pigs and the European's goats, not to mention many invasive plants introduced accidentally or on purpose. Many have gone extinct, and hundreds of officially endangered species hang on only in remote and inaccessible areas. More recently, the author and his wife have spearheaded restoration of the ancient ecology in the sinkhole and some of the surrounding area. The Makauwahi Cave Reserve is now a popular attraction due to the thriving native plants. The book is in a popular style, but has many references to the scientific literature. Very readable, if not exactly cavy in the usual sense. (Review was originally written for cavers.)

We did a tour while in Hawaii to the cave and it was so interested! I haven't read this book yet but I'm glad to support a good cause.

Dr. David Burney weaves an incredible tale of Hawaiian natural history in this book, written in a popular style. It is a tale of former abundance and subsequent extinctions and change. The story is one of great loss, but, it is also a tale of discovery and hope. Dr. Burney and his wife, Lida, are restoring bits of the Kauai lowland habitat that we have remaining. The book is a detective novel and scientific treatment rolled into one. The future of the site is the real treasure and the work of the on-going restoration deserves a wider audience. This book will help in this effort.

Clear, uncluttered, written simply and honestly. A great read and a chance to learn how pursuit of

the truth in science ultimately leads to things that matter, and in this age, it's the fate of our biological inheritance.

This was one of my first Kindle buys for my new Paperwhite and I was very disappointed to learn that the illustrations were not licensed for the Kindle edition, instead I'm advised to consult a paper edition of the book! It would be nice if that fact could be displayed prominently in the description. To 's credit, they do take returns on ebooks and give full refunds.

As a sustainability advocate, I was very interested in Dr. Burney's theory that mankind has a habit of decimating a great deal of the flora and fauna that it comes in contact with. In this respect, I compare Burney book to the writing of Jared Diamond in the book Collapse, where strong parallels between mankind's dietary and farming habits result in extinction of species and ruination of the land. Although the indigenous Hawaiian people did not extinct themselves, unlike the Rapa Nui Islanders or the Anasazi tribes, it is evident from Burney's research that a great number of species of bird, duck and owl existed in the Kauai coastal area along with endemic trees and plants that ceased to exist as the population of Hawaiians increased. This is not to say that the Hawaiian people were not good stewards of the land. Indeed, the Hawaiians had many admirable agricultural practices that we are trying to recreate in modern times in the taro fields of Hanalei and Makaweli River valley. The population so successfully flourished on Kauai, that -- in order to feed the increasing number of Hawaiian people -- they used the nearest available resources. As a participant in the early digs at the sinkhole with Lida, Dave Burney, their children and Stors Olsen, I was privileged to have taken a glimpse of this rich and colorful history of the island I call home. I remain privileged to be friends with such great people as the Burneys and fellow members of Malama Mahaulepu, and I have watched in amazement over the years as the area around the sinkhole transformed from a dense tangle of scrub weeds, kiawe and Haole Koa, into a beautifully landscaped outdoor arboretum of endemic, indigenous and native Hawaiian plants and trees. The Burneys are living treasures on this island, which has greatly benefitted from their tireless endeavors. Everyone should read this book as an inspiration to take responsibility for a small corner of the place they call home: to nourish the land on which they live, and the land, in turn, will nourish the soul.

Very nice product - sharp, good weight, looks great. very fast, receive it next day. good . for my family , very nice .

Dr. Burney tells the interesting story of how he and his wife Lida are attempting learn from the past in order to help turn the tide of extinction in Kaua'i. They make many complex concepts understandable and interesting. Those involved in use of native plants, ecology, restoration, and conservation will gain an understanding of what goes on in the trenches and behind the scenes in the scientific community. They point out the importance of dedicated volunteers to the global task. Their story will inspire people involved in these efforts around the world.

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