

Adventures with Joey Cabell

Swimming Na Pali Coast

by Mike Doyle

The following story, excerpted from Mike Doyle's autobiography, "Morning Glass", is about a 1969 marathon swim he took with Joey Cabell along a 17-mile stretch known as the Na Pali Coast, on the Hawaiian island of Kaua'i.

Joey liked to have playmates along on his adventures—it was just that he ran out of playmates real quick. Joey always played hard, and there just weren't very many people who were willing to risk as much as he was, all the time, every day.

When Joey was on that high-energy level, that "papaya consciousness", hardly anybody could keep up with him. Rusty (Miller) and I were about the only ones who would even try.

Joey, Rusty, and I went on a five-day fast, living on nothing but fresh coconut and papaya juice. While we were sitting around Joey's house listening to music, Joey had an amazing idea. He had maps of the islands pinned all over his walls, and he'd been lying on the floor looking up at them. All of a sudden he said, "Let's swim around Kaua'i."

Rusty and I looked at each other. "You mean all the way around?"

"Why not?" Joey said. "I think it can be done."

It sounded to me like another one of Joey's ingenious schemes for dying young. And Rusty, who was usually one of Joey's prime playmates, wouldn't have anything to do with the idea. I said, "I don't know, Joey."

But Joey wouldn't give up on the idea...he just sat on it for a while. A couple of days later, he said, "Okay, then, let's just swim the Na Pali Coast."

I looked at one of Joey's maps and saw that the Na Pali Coast was about twenty miles of the most rugged and pristine coastline on Kaua'i. Sometimes people hike above the coast on the Kalalau Trail, and some of the beaches could be reached by boat if you swam the last mile or so. But most of the coast was totally inaccessible.

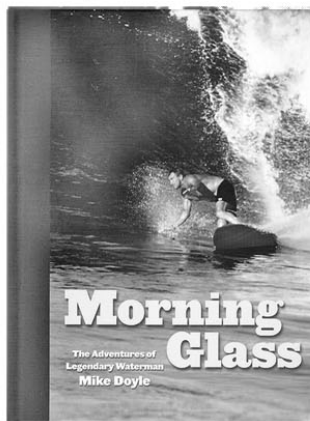
It didn't sound that great to me. Oh, it sounded exciting in a way, but I knew it would be very dangerous. But what could I

do? I was Joey's guest. I couldn't say, "I'll be right here. See you when you get back in a week."

"It's the wrong season," I said. "The water's too rough. We'd have to do it in the summer when there aren't any waves."

I thought that would put an end to it, but to my surprise, Joey just nodded and said, "How about July?"

In spite of my concern, over the next few weeks Joey's idea started to intrigue me. Without even knowing it exactly, I started to wonder how you might go about a swim like that. One day, I asked Joey, "What would we take?"



Joey had already thought it out. "We'll keep it real simple. Just take swim trunks and goggles. No food, no tools."

"Swim fins," I said.

But Joey shook his head. "No, if you do that your legs will get tired. It's better to just use your natural body."

Of course, Joey was right. The human body is designed for land or water. If you modify the way your legs naturally move in the water, you throw every-

thing out of balance and end up with leg cramps or some other problem.

Still I didn't commit myself to Joey's plan.

But that summer, in July, I found myself back in Kaua'i. at Joey's house, getting ready to swim the Na Pali Coast. Actually, there wasn't anything to do to get ready for a trip like that. We just drove to the end of the road, a Ke'e Beach, which was only about two miles from Joey's house, got out, and walked down to the sand, carrying nothing but a pair of swim goggles.

The Na Pali Coast is extremely rugged, with green 3,000-foot cliffs that are nearly vertical, and very few places to get out of the water. That stretch of coastline faces north, and gets some of the biggest surf in the islands. In the summer, it's usually calm there, but if a big swell did come along, we would have been battered against the cliffs.

As we started swimming, the ocean was nearly flat, and the water was crystal clear. Joey and I swam side by side for about two hours, staying about three hundred yards offshore. Then Joey started swimming further out. I knew he was trying to avoid the chop coming off the cliffs by swimming out where the surface was calmer. But I didn't want to go out there because I knew the waters off Hawaii were full of sharks. I wanted to stay close enough to land that I could get back to it quickly if something happened.

About every half-hour, I would look up and try to find Joey. Even though I was probably a stronger swimmer than he was, he had pulled ahead of me because he was swimming in smoother water. After a while I lost sight of him. And the thought occurred to me that we might never see each other again.

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The only diversion was in watching the ocean bottom, which was about sixty feet below, and extremely beautiful, with interesting patterns of light and shadow, and a great number of small fish. Some of the fish were following close behind me, and it was fun watching them play.

At four in the afternoon, after about six hours of constant swimming, I happened to look up and see Joey squatting on the rocks next to the cliffs, waving to me. I was ready for a break, so I swam in and joined him.

We were both hungry, so we made a dinner of the limpets (like miniature abalone) that live on the rocks. The Chinese really covet them, but they had become very hard to find in the islands. At this remote site, though, they were abundant. We pried them off with our fingers and ate them raw.

Joey knew the geography of the coastline better than I did. He knew all the points and landmarks, so he said, "Let's swim for about another half-mile, then go up to the Valley of the Lost Tribe."

It was about five-thirty and still sunny when we stopped at the beach below the Honopu Valley. According to Hawaiian legend, the Honopu Valley, "The Valley of the Lost Tribe", was the home of an ancient tribe of people known as "Mu". There is evidence of an ancient settlement in the valley that supports the legend, but as we walked up into the valley we could see signs of a later settlement as well. We could see the terraces where the natives had cultivated taro fields and orchards; there were some old pieces of machinery lying around, and there were coffee trees, orange trees, and tangerines—all overgrown now, but still producing fruit.

We ate some of the oranges, then went back down to the beach. The night was cool—too cool, really—but after seven hours of swimming, we were exhausted. The sand was still warm, so we just pulled it over us like turtles and fell asleep without any trouble.

We woke up at about five o'clock, when the sky was just starting to get light. We were both eager to get in the water. Not only did we know the water would be warmer than the cool air, but were working on "papaya consciousness" now, full of energy and eager to get moving. We slipped on our goggles, dived in the ocean, and started striking for the west.

By now, I felt more comfortable in deep water. There were still sharks out there somewhere, but I had become more like a creature of the ocean myself, and I was able to put them out of my mind. I swam even farther outside than Joey did.

There were long periods of time, hours, when nothing at all happened—just the steady pound of my heart and the rhythm of my stroke. But then two Ono, each about four feet long, started following us. At one point they pulled up right below us, less than twenty feet away. Having them there was almost like having someone to talk to. But after following us for a mile or so, they turned and went their own way.

I became totally at ease in the water, staying within my natural stroke, a pace I felt I could keep up indefinitely. I wasn't thinking about getting to the end of the swim, because I didn't even know where the end was. Only Joey did. Besides, I didn't really care anymore. I was totally enthralled with the adventure.

In the afternoon, we edged closer to the cliffs. As we swam over a shallow reef, out the corner of my eye, I saw something big, moving only three or four feet below the surface. Joey saw it, too. We immediately stopped swimming and started looking underwater. All around us was a churning mass of turtles, most of them about four feet in length. Some of them were swimming idly, but most of them were eating a type of green moss that grew on the rocks.

In the islands, if you see a turtle, that's considered a big deal. If you catch a turtle, that's an even bigger deal. It thrilled us to know there was a place on the islands the fishermen couldn't get to very easily, and that turtles like these were thriving. Joey grabbed on a turtle by the shell, I grabbed another, and we stood up on the reef, laughing and showing them off to each other. When we tossed the turtles back into the water they went right back to munching the moss, as if we weren't even there.

Joey and I continued swimming until seven o'clock that evening; then, several hundred yards ahead of us, we saw a thirty-foot boat at anchor. As we drew closer to it, we saw a little cove. Inside the cove were anchored a couple more small boats.

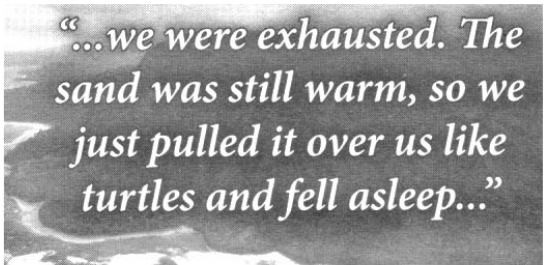
We weren't happy to see signs of civilization. In a way, we resented anybody else being there. Joey said, "Let's just swim on by," and I quickly agreed. But we had only gone a few yards when we realized that was a foolish idea. It was already starting to get dark, and we might not find another good place to stop for the night. Without even saying a word to each other, communicating only by body movements, like fish, we turned and swam toward the cove.

Once we hit the beach, it took us a couple of minutes to get our land legs. After two days in the ocean, our bodies felt heavy and awkward. Also, neither one of us was in a state of mind to see other people. Not only were our brains oxygenated by the exercise—that in itself is enough to alter your consciousness—but we felt like we had reverted back to being some kind of sea apes, totally acclimated to living in the ocean and unfit to socializing with land apes.

As we started walking up the beach, we could see the campfire ahead of us, as well as the silhouettes of thirty or forty people. It looked like some kind of big family camp-out. As we got closer, we could see a block hut, and outside that were tables heaped with food. Until we saw that, we hadn't realized how hungry we were.

It was almost totally dark now. We stood just beyond the glow from the campfire, eyeing the table of food like dogs begging for scraps. After a while, a little boy happened to look our way. He stopped, stared at us for a moment, then ran away. He must have said something to his friends, because two other kids came to stare at us, too. A few of the adults glanced toward us, but they couldn't bring themselves to actually see us. The only way to get to this place was by boat, and they knew very well that another boat hadn't arrived, therefore, these two hairy men lurking in the shadows weren't really there.

Joey and I couldn't organize our thoughts into speech. So we just stood there, hoping somebody would offer us some food. Instead, the adults began to ease away from us, dragging their curious kids along with them.



“...we were exhausted. The sand was still warm, so we just pulled it over us like turtles and fell asleep...”

Finally, after several awkward minutes, a Japanese guy with a goatee walked out of the block hut, carrying a platter of food. He took one look at us and said, “Hey, Joey!”

The Japanese fellow was a sculptor who had done all the word carving for one of Joey’s restaurants—relief panels of old Hawaiian scenes. In the past couple years, he’d earned several thousand dollars from Joey.

Joey nudged me in the ribs and said, “Hey, br’ah, we’re in there.”

The sculptor grabbed both of us around the shoulders and gave us a big hug. Then he started introducing us. “This is Joey Cabell! He owns the Chart House!” And all of a sudden the people recognized us as human beings. “The Chart House! We ate there. That’s a really great place!”

“And this is Mike Doyle.”

“Mike Doyle?” a woman said. “I saw you in the Makaha tandem a couple of years ago. I’m a big fan of yours.”

Now they insisted we share their five-course Hawaiian luau, which of course we were more than happy to do.

After dinner, we should have sat and talked with our hosts for a while, but as soon as our bellies were full, Joey and I started nodding off right there in the sand. Somebody brought us a couple of blankets, and we crawled off into the dark and fell asleep.

The next morning, we were rested and full of energy from our meal. We entered the water at dawn and swam without stopping until four o’clock that afternoon. That put us at Bark-ing Sands, the end of the Na Pali Coast and the place where the road coming from the other side of the island ends.

As we emerged from the water, a couple of Japanese fishermen watched us walk shakily up the road. Naturally, they were curious about how we got there. “Where are you coming from?” one of them asked.

“Ke’e Beach.”

That only made them more curious. “By boat?”

“No,” we said. “We swam.”

“You what!”

When we asked them if we could hitch a ride into the nearest village, they quickly gathered up their fishing gear and hurried us into their car.

On the drive back, my body was so relaxed, it almost felt like I was sedated on morphine. I told Joey, “All I want to do is get back to your house and take it easy for a couple of days.”

Joey nodded, but said, “First, I wanna stop and see the haole guy I know in Waimea. He’s got a mango plantation, and he said I could have some seeds. Our senses are so keen, this’ll be the perfect time to taste mangos.”

That was Joey. The guy never stopped. He couldn’t just plant any old mango seed—they had to be the best. So we went to the mango plantation, and I followed Joey up and down the plantation rows, sampling the fruit from maybe 200 mango trees, until he found what he thought were the perfect mangos.

We didn’t get home until long after dark.