

DRIVING SAFELY TO THE SUMMIT OF MAUNA KEA

The drive to the summit of Mauna Kea is very dangerous and must only be undertaken by experienced drivers. Four-wheel drive vehicles are required above the Visitor Information Station located at the 9,000 ft. level. Individuals with certain health conditions should not travel to high altitude. Oxygen levels drop considerably (60% of sea level O²) at 14,000 feet, so be careful to minimize physical exertion. Be aware that there are no medical facilities or public services. Check one of the websites on the reverse side for more information.

Preparation

1. If you have a rental car, check your rental agreement, because most rental car companies prohibit driving their vehicles on Saddle Road.
2. Make sure that you have a full tank of gas. There are no gas stations between Waimea and the summit.
3. Make sure that the vehicle is in good working condition. Breaking down on the way to the summit of Mauna Kea can be a very harrowing and expensive experience.
4. Those interested in a summit visit and who prefer not to drive themselves may be able to schedule a trip with one of the tour companies operating tours of the summit. Reservations should be made in advance. More information can be found online.
5. Dress warmly. The temperature at the summit is usually below freezing, especially at night.
6. It is important to stay hydrated. Bring along bottled water.

Travel Route from Waimea

1. From Waimea, proceed south on Mamalahoa Highway (Rt. 190) to the Saddle Road. Turn left onto Saddle Road

- and proceed to mile marker 28. Travel time from Waimea to the Mauna Kea Access Road is approximately 40 minutes.
2. Turn left onto the Mauna Kea Access Road at mile marker 28. Take the Mauna Kea Access Road to the Visitor Information Station. Travel time from the beginning of the Mauna Kea Access Road to the Visitor Information Station is approximately 15 minutes.
 3. Stop at the Visitor Information Station to acclimate. You should plan on acclimating to high altitude for roughly one (1) hour before proceeding to the summit, especially if you are a first time or infrequent visitor.
 4. The road from the Visitor Information Station to the summit can be dangerous. It is an unpaved cinder road with steep inclines and extreme switchbacks. Travel time: 30 minutes, weather conditions permitting.
 5. Total travel time with time to acclimate: approximately 2.5 hours.

Driving Safely on Saddle Road

Saddle Road is a dangerous two-lane road with many curves and hills creating limited lines of sight. There are several areas with single-lane bridges. Watch for yield signs. There are numerous potholes and rough road edges. There are often no shoulders, leaving very little room for driver error. Vehicles will often be driven down the center of the road for a more comfortable ride, so be extremely careful when you come around a corner or over a hill. It is not uncommon to experience changing weather on Saddle Road, such as rain, fog, or wind that can create even more dangerous conditions. Keep an eye out for animals in the roadway. Cows and feral pigs are difficult to see at night. The speed limit is 45 mph on Saddle Road, but in several areas suggested speeds are much lower.

Note: Saddle Road is currently under construction. A short section of the new highway was opened in June 2007. Watch for construction vehicles and detours.

Driving Safely on the Mauna Kea Access Road

The access road from Saddle Road to the Visitor Information Station has many steep inclines. The speed limit is 30 and 40 mph, as posted.

The road above the Visitor Information Station to the summit requires a 4-wheel drive vehicle. Above the Visitor Information Station the road is not paved. It is a cinder road with many steep inclines, sharp turns, no guardrails, and the road surface is extremely rough. The following precautions must be taken:

1. Use 4-low wheel drive to travel up and down the access road.
2. Watch for on-coming traffic as it may be on the wrong side of the road attempting to avoid fallen rocks and grader debris. Trucks may be forced to travel on the wrong side of the road in order to get traction.
3. Periodically the road grader will be used to smooth the road surface. It is not unusual to be forced to travel out of one's lane to avoid the debris. Travel very carefully and slowly.
4. Speed limit on the upper summit access road is 20 or 25 mph, as posted. Slower is better!

Sun glare can be extremely dangerous at certain times of the day, especially near sunrise or sunset. You can be driving directly into the sun. Wear UV protected sunglasses when driving and avoid driving at sunrise and sunset.

For more information, please contact:

Mary Beth Laychak
Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope
Corporation
(808) 885-7944
or email outreach@cfht.hawaii.edu

The following websites and phone numbers may also be helpful in planning your trip:

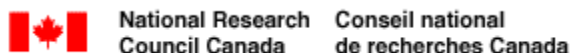
<http://www.cfht.hawaii.edu>

<http://www.ifa.hawaii.edu/info/vis>

<http://www.saddleroad.com>

For Weather and Road Reports,
please call:
(808) 935-6268

The Canada-France-Hawaii Telescope
Corporation operates the CFHT 3.6-meter telescope 365 days of the year at the summit of Mauna Kea on the Big Island of Hawaii. Support is provided by the National Research Council Canada, the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique of France, and the University of Hawaii.



University of Hawaii



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65-1238 Mamalahoa Hwy
Kamuela, HI 96743 USA

Tel: (808) 885-7944
Fax: (808) 885-7288

www.cfht.hawaii.edu

Canada – France – Hawaii
Telescope Corporation