

Sunset Paddle by Leslie Nafus

Perfect Conditions.

Conditions were perfect for an infrequent late afternoon kayak paddle. Typically, afternoon conditions do not allow for safe paddling. But today the water was calm, there were no strong trade winds, and no big surf. On the spur of the moment, my kayaking buddy and I decided to put out to sea in our single man sit-a-tops—with the dogs.

We loaded the dogs into the little boats, waded alongside into waist-deep water, slid aboard and paddled to where the reef blossoms just offshore from Sugar Beach and headed south. The water was crystal clear and visibility was good.

We spent an hour or so riding the gentle waves over the reef break. As the sun began to sink we turned back toward our launch point. The air glowed with golden light, as it often does with the arrival of a Maui sunset.

The Rarest of Rare.

Turtles surfaced to breathe and check us out with their wise, alien eyes. As we paused to rest, our paddles across our laps and backs toward the horizon, chatting and catching our breath, we heard it. We thought it was the blow of a whale—it was rumored that they were back—or perhaps a dolphin. Jerking our heads toward the sound behind us, highly alert, we saw the dark back of a mammal slide in an arc through the surface of the water. Then a head with bristly whiskers popped up directly beside us.

I was eye-to-eye with an endangered Hawaiian monk seal, less than fifteen feet away. As the seal swam alongside me, I felt some apprehension; it was longer than my kayak! It turned to look at the dog and me as we sat in the little boat. The dog and I stared back in wonder and curiosity. I slowly paddled parallel with it, while we took each other's measure. The seal blew out and then pulled a deep breath in and was gone, the sleek curve of its dusky back the last thing I saw.

Marvel & Enchantment.

The sun continued to sink as I marveled at the experience of looking into the eyes of a such rare creature. I thanked God for allowing me to be in this place at this moment, riding on warm waters and witnessing wonders. I saluted the sun with my eyes as it sank below the horizon.

Then I saw it. The green flash. I've only seen it a couple of times, after watching hundreds of sunsets. How fitting to see it today. I thought it was enough to enjoy the treat of a sunset paddle in calm waters. But the world added some extras this time, much to my delight.

That is Maui, I am finding. Just when you think you've seen it all, Nature stands on its tiptoes and you realize that you haven't even scratched the surface of this unrivaled, enchanted place.

Warmest Aloha.