

# Local map maker seeks to enrich lives

## Siemers brings visual arts and science together

By **Jon Letman**  
*Kaua'i People*

When Rob Siemers took a thematic cartography course during his senior year at the University of Colorado, he never dreamed one day he would be living on Kaua'i, making a living documenting the main Hawaiian islands as maps.

But after nearly a decade in Hawai'i, Siemers has re-searched, produced and published three detailed atlas-style fold out maps of Kaua'i, Maui and Hawai'i with a similar map of O'ahu in the works.

So how does a cartographer put a new shine on something as basic as a map of a place as thoroughly documented and frequently visited as Hawai'i? For Siemers, it's all in the content, presentation and accessibility of information.

The first thing one notices when unfolding an Island Atlas and Map by Environmental Designs Hawai'i, Siemers' company, is that, like the islands themselves, it is complex on many levels, a visual feast that invites exploration.

Siemers' maps are more than just depictions of places and names. They are, as their name suggests, atlases in a compact, folding format, heavy on facts but light in the backpack, a quality not lost on travelers. Imagine carrying a thin geographic encyclopedia in your back pocket.

Besides an overview map of the subject island and surrounding smaller, more detailed key area maps, Siemers' guides include a cultural resource map, mileage chart, translated place names and concise guide to the Hawaiian language as well as a factual overview. Each map has a brief historical summary, guide to beach and ocean safety, information on recreational facilities and detailed references for hiking, surfing, paddling and diving.

Furthermore, there is a climate map with rain, wind and swell analysis and another map detailing the subject island's

unique geologic composition just in case you want to compare the age of Na Pali lava with Makaweli lava.

That's a lot to pack onto a two-sided 28 x 18 inch sheet of paper and requires extraordinary organizational skills and a keen sense of aesthetics to make such an intricate map both user-friendly and visually pleasing.

Siemers manages all that and more.

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"The whole premise is to educate," Siemers says, "and hopefully increase consciousness of the natural and cultural environment."

A well designed, accurate map, the cartographer believes, can raise awareness and with that, foster a higher level of respect for one's surroundings.

"I hope to encourage users to ask more questions about where they are, immerse themselves in the colors of whatever place they occupy and discover more than they might have otherwise," Siemers says.

He sees Hawai'i, in particular Kaua'i, as a microcosm of the world.

"With its isolation and diversity, one can learn so much about humanity and how we interact and co-exist with our



photo by **JON LETMAN**

Rob Siemers has been studying the major Hawaiian islands as he documents them in his Atlas and Maps series, starting with Kaua'i.



photo by ELLE CALDWELL

Rob Siemers has been documenting the Hawaiian Islands for his Map series.

# Maps: 'premise is to educate'

Continued from page 4

environment and that is the essence of everything," he says.

In designing his maps, Siemers wanted to create a resource that would be useful for everyone - residents, visitors, students and kama'aina born and raised in Hawai'i.

"I imagine people studying the maps, asking questions and wanting to learn more about where they are."

Whether its bringing a greater understanding of orographic lifting on Mt.

Wai'ale'ale, the age of the rocks beneath one's feet or how to correctly read diacritical marks (kahako and 'okina) in Hawaiian place names, Environmental Designs Hawai'i maps are designed to educate.

"These maps have been a catalyst to learn more about the islands," Siemers says, explaining that for him, documenting the islands has been a constant educational experience, one based on existing maps, books, Global Positioning System, Internet resources, getting to know people and communities on each island, listening to the old stories and

going out to discover and explore on his own.

Using Geographic Information System and software like Illustrator, Photoshop and Quark, Siemers oversees all aspects of his maps including all text and graphic elements.

"I produced every color, every layer, every line ... taking into account the scale of the map and how much information to include," Siemers says.

For him, map making is a way to combine visual arts and science into something he hopes will enrich people's lives the way maps have enriched his own.

"I've always loved maps. Everywhere I go, I want to learn more about the place and maps have always helped me get in tune with a destination," he says looking out at the towering coconut palms swaying in the distance near Alakukui Point on Kaua'i's east side.

Siemers' love of maps and passion for studying the natural world should come as no surprise. He is the son of geologist Chuck Blay with whom he collaborated on Kaua'i's Geologic History reference guide, itself replete with maps, charts and tables. Siemers and his fa-

ther are currently working on a similar book for Hawai'i island.

"If it wasn't for my dad, I probably wouldn't be doing this."

Siemers recalls first visiting Hawai'i with his father when he was 15 years old. "I had just arrived from the Midwest and still remember the very moment I stepped off the plane. It was just like Kaua'i had this breath, the smell and the humidity. I just fell in love with it."

Siemers notes that while maps may be one of the oldest forms of communication, like any media produced today, they are in effect, outdated as soon as they are published.

"Maps are a snapshot of a time and a place," he says. "Ten years from now, how many more roads will there be? Will there be a beach here or not? Will there be more archaeological sites or fewer? What will the human impact be and what will we have learned? How will we have altered and interacted with our environment?"

It will be interesting to look at these maps and see how things have changed."



Photo by ANNE E. O'MALLEY

## BIG FUN AT KONG LUNG

Kilauea residents Gary Pacheco, left, and Gary Smith will give presentations and talk story at the Big Fun at Kong Lung community night on Saturday May 17 from 5 to 9 p.m. See Calendar section for more information.

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