

# RIDING THE RANGE

*on a new brand of Steed.*



*by Dinah Osborne*



Planning a weekend getaway to North Kohala, I suggested we do something exciting and different. Several people recommended that we have some fun on the ATV's, so I contacted Bill and Sandie Wong, owners of ATV Outfitters Hawaii, located in Kapa'au. We were greeted warmly, and quickly decked out with headgear and gloves, ready to hit the trails and let the fun begin.

After instructions from Bill and a *check-out ride*, we were feeling comfortable and confident on our 4-wheeled steeds and were off to see the Kohala countryside! We traveled through the old sugar plantation lands and abandoned railroad beds to the edge of the Kohala sea cliffs. Often this area is a playground for the whales, although today close to the shoreline, only a huge sea turtle slowly meandered its way through the surf.

It's a real 'ohana affair. Sandie photographs the guests and their son Chris often operates the gates. At several stops Bill and his hanai son, Fred, share stories about the history of Kohala and King Kamehameha, such as his surfing days near the point where the lighthouse is located today (pictured below). Bill and his family have a closeknit relationship with this land. His ancestors came to Kohala three generations back to help build the railroad for the Kohala Sugar Plantation

Other fun adventures you might want to experience while in North Kohala:

**Kohala Mountain Kayak Cruise** offers recommended kayak trips down a scenic, three mile stretch of the Kohala irrigation ditch. Prepare to get wet!

**Hawaii Forest & Trail: Pololu Valley** by mule, "Valley Waterfall Adventure" and other hiking adventures to pristine and spectacular mountain and coastal areas.

lines, the air is clear and the sky blue. We're having a ball. We pause for a few moments to watch the first steps of some newborn calves while they curiously peer back at us.

The ride is over before we know it, and back at the shop and gift store, smiles on all faces tell the story of a great time. Sandy explained that *kids* of all ages come to ride these ATV's. A retired couple from Mauna Lani brought six groups during their winter holiday this year to enjoy the adventure. They say, "There's no other way to see or experience the beauty and hidden treasures of the Big Island like we can here." Bill and Sandie have the chauffeured *Scenery Machinery ATV* so kids under sixteen can join the fun along with the older *kids*.

Bill confides, "Our dream was to share our home in a real way – the 'aina, ocean, mountains and our heritage – so our guests will have an appreciation of how special Hawaii is. That's my passion."

The **Nanbu Hotel of North Kohala**, once a crumbling, decrepit emblem of the dying sugar industry in Hawaii, has been totally renovated and once again taken its place as the town center of Kapa'au.

During the early years, North Kohala was isolated from the rest of the island. Until the early 1980's, only a narrow, winding mountain road offered travel over land, and most visitors arrived by sailing ship into Mahukona Harbor. The 16-room Nanbu Hotel, originally built in 1898, was well known to the visitors of the sugar mills in the area.

The Hotel prospered until the decline of the sugar industry, when it fell into disrepair and was finally abandoned. In 1998, with the building on the verge



of collapse, it was totally renovated in the original style and color. Currently, the Nanbu houses galleries, jewelry and antique books shops, and office space. Espresso and gourmet sandwiches are served in its open-air garden courtyard, a favorite hang-out for the morning coffee crowd.

The Nanbu is significant as a rural, simplified example of the Italianate architecture which was typical in Hawaii. Although this type of rural hotel was abundant during the rise of the plantations, the Nanbu is one of the few remaining in the state. It is listed on the State of Hawaii Register of Historic Places — yet another historically significant site in this birthplace of Kamehameha.

