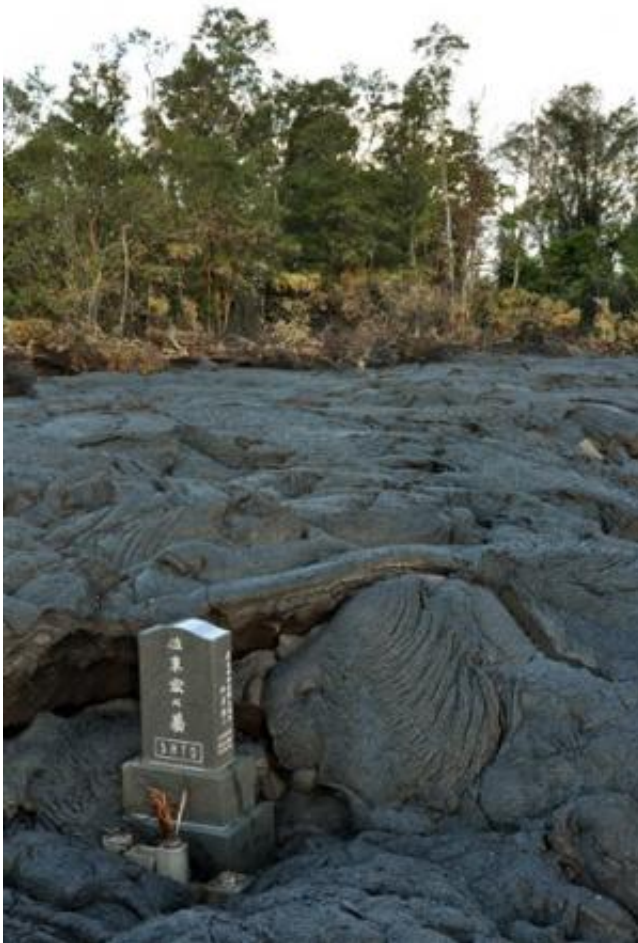


Family headstone spared by lava in Hawaii cemetery

November 4 2014, by Jennifer Sinco Kelleher



This Oct. 28, 2014, photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey with the permission of the Sato family, shows the Sato headstone still standing in a sea of black lava in a cemetery in Pahoa, Hawaii. As the slow-moving lava got closer to the Pahoa Japanese Cemetery, officials provided Aiko Sato an opportunity to visit. When she placed flowers at the headstone last week, she thought it would be the last time she would see it. But after lava flowed over the cemetery, Sato's

aunt was given a photograph taken by a geologist documenting the lava's advancement, showing the Sato headstone still standing in a sea of black lava. (AP Photo/U.S. Geological Survey)

As a volcano's slow-moving lava approached a cemetery in a rural Hawaii town, Aiko Sato placed flowers at the headstone of the family plot she's tended over the years, thinking it would be the last time she would see it.

"I made peace with myself," Sato said Monday of visiting the Pahoehoe Japanese Cemetery on Oct. 23. A few days later, when [lava](#) smothered part of the cemetery, the family believed the headstone was covered.

But a photo taken Oct. 28 by a scientist documenting the lava's progress showed the headstone engraved with the Sato name standing in a sea of black lava.

"I feel like it's a miracle," Sato, 63, said. "I know subsequent breakouts could cover the grave, but at least I know it survived like a first round."

The lava's flow front stalled over the weekend.

Sato's aunt, Eiko Kajiyama, 83, said she was heartbroken when she heard lava covered the [cemetery](#). When she got the photo from the scientist, she hugged and thanked him, she recalled.

The Hawaii Volcano Observatory normally wouldn't release such photos out of respect for the family of the deceased but provided the Sato family with a copy after a chance encounter between the family and an [observatory](#) scientist, observatory spokeswoman Janet Babb said in a statement.

Kajiyama said it feels like Pele, the Hawaiian volcano goddess, spared the headstone. "We're so thankful we know the tomb is still there." Her sister and brother, who died as infants, are buried there, along with the urns of her parents.



This Nov. 2, 2014 photo provided by the U.S. Geological Survey shows a breakout from an inflated lobe of the June 27 lava flow near the town of Pahoa on the Big Island of Hawaii. Overnight rain has reduced the smoke that's coming from a lava flow that remains stalled after slowly creeping toward a small town on Hawaii's Big Island, a responder said Sunday. (AP Photo/U.S. Geological Survey)

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