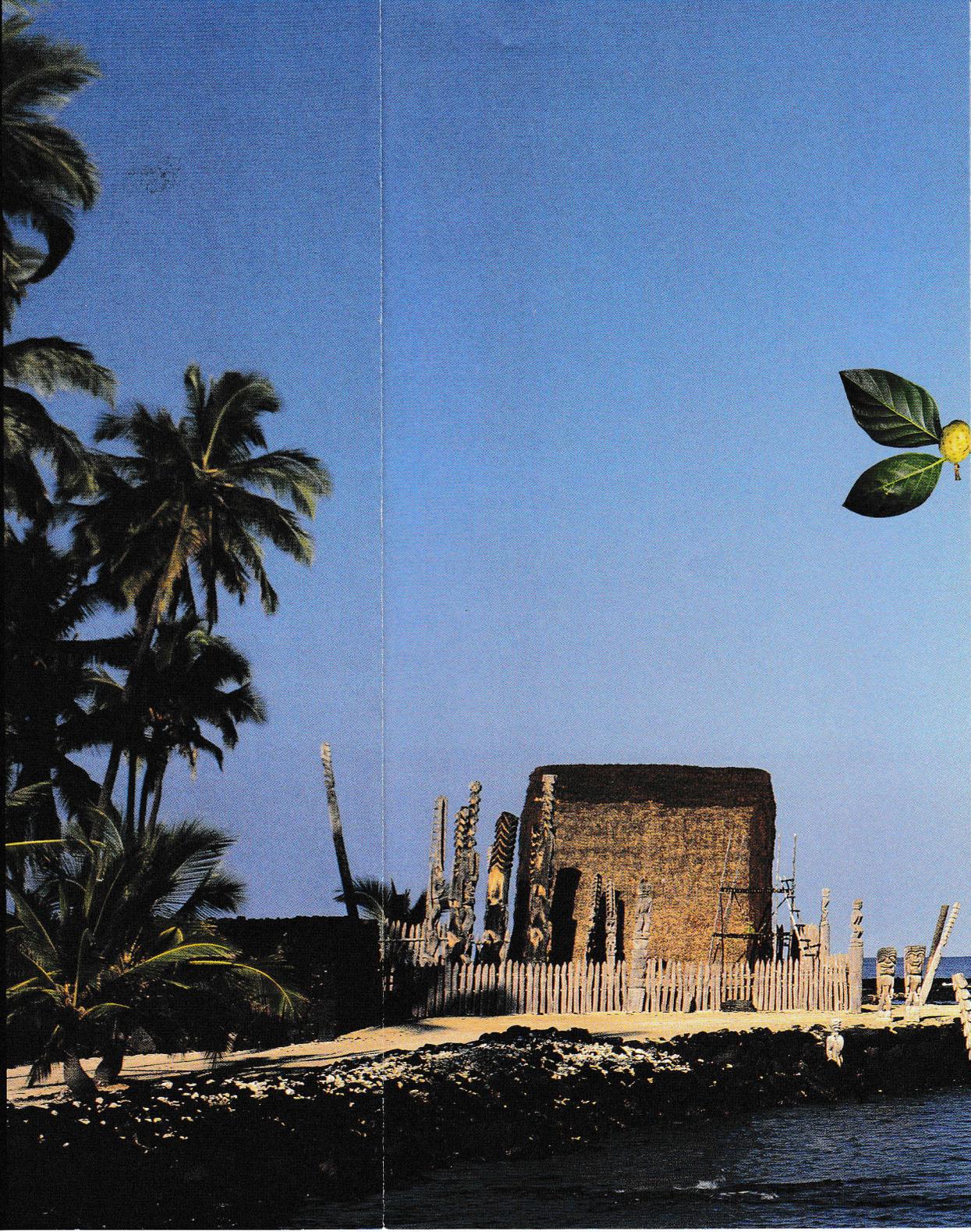
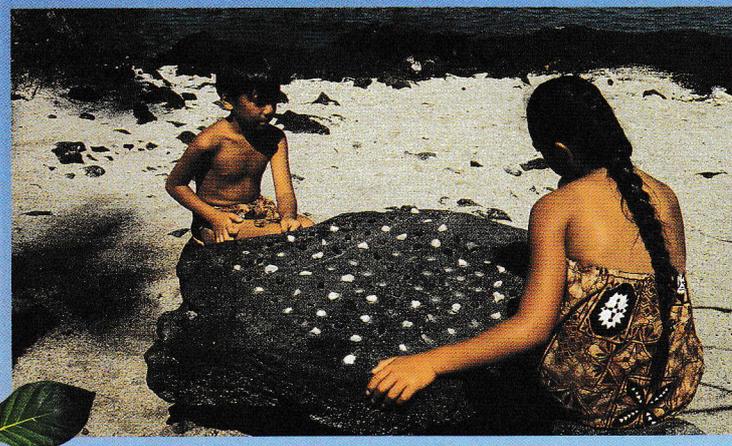


# Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau

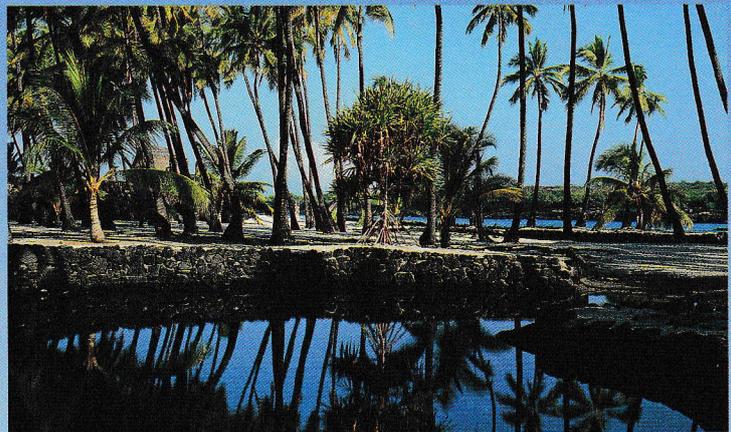
National Historical Park • Hawaii  
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Official Map and Guide





National Park Service



Laurence Parent

On the black lava flats of the southern Kona Coast, Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau preserves aspects of traditional Hawaiian life. Honau-nau Bay, with its sheltered canoe landing and availability of drinking water, was a natural place for the *ali'i*—royal chiefs—to establish one of their most important residences. Separated from the royal grounds by a massive wall was the *pu'uhonua*, a place of refuge for defeated warriors, noncombatants in time of war, and those who violated the *kapu*, the sacred laws. This place was used for several centuries. Then, in 1819, Kamehameha II abolished traditional religious practices and many of the old religious sites and structures were destroyed or abandoned. The temples of the *pu'uhonua* were left to the extremes of sun, wind, and sea. The area was set aside as a county park in the 1920s. In 1961 it became a national historical park to maintain a setting where many of the old Hawaiian ways carry on in the modern world.

## Royal Grounds

This was the home of the *ali'i* of the Kona District of the island of Hawaii. The royal grounds were within the *ahupua'a* of Honaunau, a political sub-district that descended down the slope of Mauna Loa and out into the ocean. The purpose of this mountain-to-sea method of land division was to provide residents with areas for farming, collecting drinking water, and fishing.

The royal residence had no single large structure that could be called a palace. Rather, the residence consisted of 10 or more thatched buildings within the coconut palm grove. Attendants and servants performed the daily tasks, hurrying

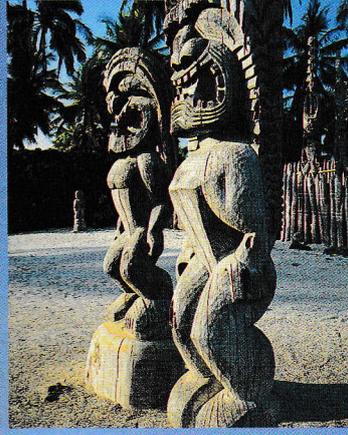
from one hut to another waiting on the chief or perhaps preparing fish taken from the royal fishponds nearby. The *ali'i* themselves might have been engaged in negotiating war or peace, or in recreational activities such as playing *kōnane* or riding wooden sleds down the *hōlua* course outside the village.

Like the royal grounds, the canoe landing on the beach was for the use of the chief and his attendants only; a wooden image in the water warned others of the *kapu*. But beyond the Great Wall—on the ocean side of the grounds—was a place that, if one could reach it, was open to all.





Douglas Peebles



Laurence Parent



Left to right: noni (Indian mulberry) leaves and fruit; *kōnane* players; the royal grounds; aerial view of the *pu'uhonua*; two *ki'i*, guardians of the place of refuge; ti plant. Background photo: Hale o Keawe with Keone'eleva cove in foreground.

## Place of Refuge

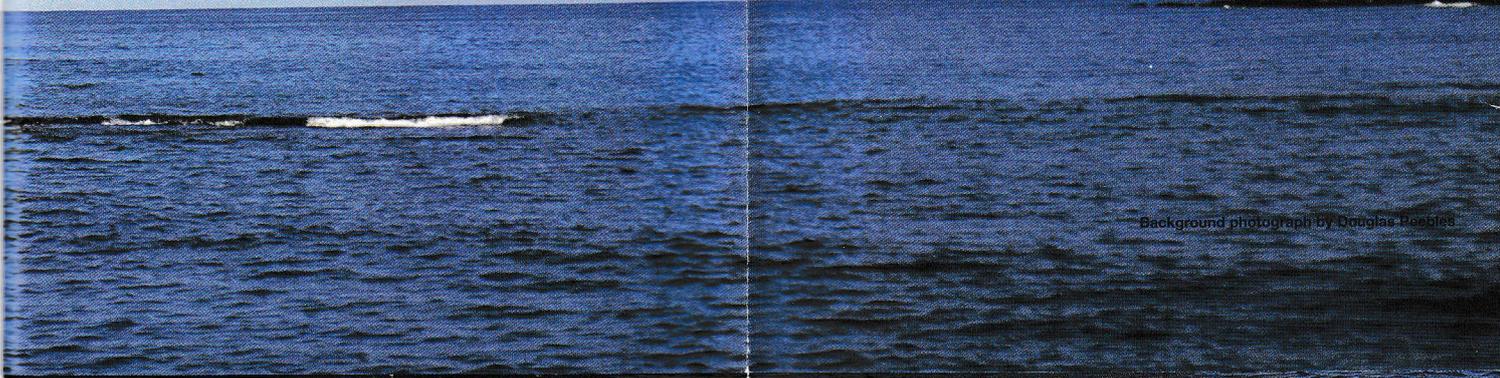
A massive stone wall—built about 1550 and still standing—separates the royal grounds from the *pu'uhonua*. It was not the stone wall, however, that bestowed sanctity to the area; it was the sacred bones of the chiefs. Hawaiian tradition holds that the *ali'i* possessed *mana*, spiritual power. The Hale o Keawe, the most recently built *heiau* in the *pu'uhonua*, was constructed around 1650 in honor of Keawe'ikekahial'i o kamoku, the great-grandfather of Kamehameha I. After the death of Keawe, his bones were placed in the temple. As he was an especially important chief, the *mana* of Keawe was believed to protect the entire *pu'uhonua*.

The *pu'uhonua* was a sanctuary that provided the people with a second chance. No blood could be shed within its confines. But who sought new life here and what had they done? Some were the non-combatants during war. The object of war in those days was to exterminate the enemy, which included anyone who belonged to the opposing side. Those too old, too young, or unable to fight could find safety in the sanctuary. Defeated warriors also came to the *pu'uhonua*, where they could wait in safety until the battle was over. Their allegiance would then be to the victor. During the Battle of Moku'ōhai in 1782, an enemy of Kamehameha

sought refuge here and later became the king's prime minister.

Then there were those who had broken the *kapu*. According to the *kapu*, a common person could not look at or get close to the chief, walk in the chief's footsteps, touch the chief's possessions, or let his shadow fall on the palace grounds. Everyday activities, too, were regulated by the *kapu*. Women could not eat the foods reserved for offerings to the gods; they could not prepare meals for men or even eat with them. In order to provide for all, seasons for fishing, for killing animals, and for gathering timber were all strictly controlled. When a

*kapu* was broken the penalty was always death. Otherwise the gods might react violently, perhaps with volcanic eruptions, tidal waves, famine, or earthquakes. To protect themselves from catastrophes, the people pursued the *kapu* breaker until he was caught and put to death—or until he made his way to a *pu'uhonua*. If he did reach a *pu'uhonua*, a ceremony of absolution was performed by the *kahuna pule* (priest). The offender could then return home safely, usually within a few hours or by the next day. The spirit of the *pu'uhonua* was respected by all.



Background photograph by Douglas Peebles

## A Walking Tour of the Park

Points of interest are marked with numbered posts along the way.

**1 Royal Grounds** Imagine the scene: Warriors keep watch while workers pound taro and take fish from the ponds. Two courtiers play *kōnane*. Suddenly, activity ceases as the high chief, accompanied by his wives and warriors, arrives by canoe and steps ashore. If you are a commoner in these ancient times, you cannot go inside the royal grounds or cast your shadow within. The penalty for violating the *kapu* is death!

**2 Temple Model** The framework for this half-size reconstruction of the Hale o Keawe temple is 'ohi'a wood tied with coconut-fiber. *Ti* leaves were tied on as thatching.

**3 Kōnane** Pebbles for this traditional Hawaiian game are arranged on a replica *papamū*, or stone playing surface. To play, ask at the visitor center for the game rules.

**4 Kānoa** Bowls carved into the rock may have been used to hold dye, evaporate ocean water to make salt, or pound the 'awa root to prepare a ceremonial drink.

**5 Tree Mold** More than 1,000 years ago, lava from Mauna Loa surrounded everything in its path and knocked down a tree that once stood here. Look around for other tree molds.

**6 Keone'ele** This cove was the royal canoe landing, forbidden to all commoners. Watch for sea turtles, but do not approach them.

**7 Hālau** The *ti* leaves hanging from the roof of this work structure were tied to a rope and used to drive fish into the shallows—a fishing method called *hukilau*.

**8 The Great Wall** Separating the royal compound from the *pu'u-honua* is a wall up to 10 feet high and 17 feet thick. Stones were carefully fitted together; no mortar was used in construction. Built around 1550, the wall has been stabilized and repaired.

**9 Hale o Keawe** *Ki'i* (wooden images) stand watch over this reconstruction of a temple and mausoleum which housed the bones of 23 *ali'i*. *Ho'okupu* (offerings) were placed on the *lele* (tower).

**10 Pu'u-honua** Imagine another scene: You have broken a *kapu*. Pursued by warriors, you swim across the bay. Just as they close in, you reach the shore of the *pu'u-honua*. You are safe—no one may shed blood here—and you give thanks to the gods. Soon you will be absolved by a priest and allowed to return home.

**11 Keoua Stone** Mark Twain reported in his *Letters from Hawaii* that the stone was the favorite resting place of Keoua, high chief of Kona. The holes at the base may have supported posts for a canopy.

**12 'Ale'ale'a** During its time as the principal *heiau* for the *pu'u-honua*, this platform likely had *ki'i* and thatched huts. It was constructed in seven stages.

**13 Ka'ahumanu Stone** According to legend, Queen Ka'ahumanu, favorite wife of Kamehameha I, once swam a great distance to the *pu'u-honua* after a quarrel with her husband. She hid under this stone, but the barking of her dog gave her away. Her husband found her and they soon made up.

**14 Papamū** This is an original stone used in the game of *kōnane*.

**15 Old Heiau Site** These stones are all that remain of a very old temple, the name of which has been lost with time. One of the oldest structures in the *pu'u-honua*, it has been ravaged over the centuries by powerful ocean waves.

Continue your tour through the opening in the Great Wall.

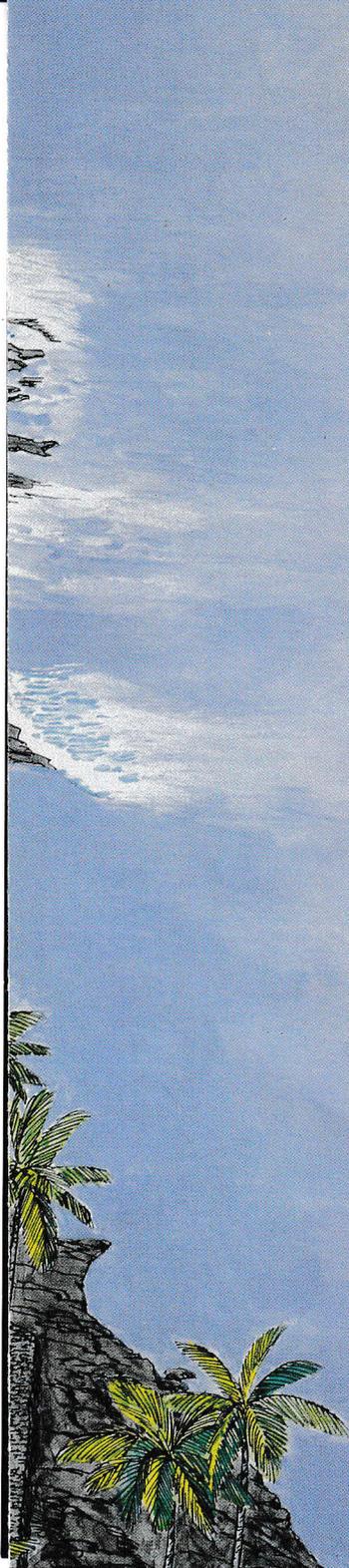
**16 Heleipālala** This pond—a mixture of springwater and saltwater—held food fish to be eaten by the *ali'i*.

**Getting to the Park** The park is located on the Kona Coast of the island of Hawaii. Take Hawaii 11 to Hawaii 160 (intersection is between mileposts 103 and 104); continue downhill 4 miles to the park entrance.

**Things to Do** The visitor center is open 8 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. year-round. A self-guiding tour takes you through the grounds. You may also wish to hike the trail to Ki'ilae Village, about 2 miles round-trip, where you will see volcanic features, ocean vistas, and the remains of many ancient structures. Each year, on the weekend nearest July 1, the park hosts a cultural festival celebrating traditional Hawaiian ways.

**More Information** Pu'u-honua o Hōnaunau is part of the National Park System, one of more than 370 areas that represent the nation's natural and cultural heritage. Write to: Superintendent, Pu'u-honua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park, P.O. Box 129, Honaunau, Kona, HI 96726; call 808-328-2288 or 2326; visit [www.nps.gov/puho](http://www.nps.gov/puho) on the Internet.

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Visitor Center

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