



## The Temple on the Hill of the Whale

The stone heiau at Pu'ukoholā is one of the last major sacred structures built in Hawaii before outside influences altered traditional life permanently. Constructed in 1790-91 by Kamehameha I, this heiau, or temple, played a crucial role in the ruler's ascendancy. By 1790, Kamehameha, whom many believed destined to rule all of the Hawaiian islands, had invaded and conquered Maui, Lāna'i, and Moloka'i. Yet he was not able to lay full claim to his home island of Hawai'i because of opposition from his chief rival and cousin, Keōua Kūahu'ula. While on Moloka'i, Kamehameha learned that Keōua was invading his territory. Kamehameha sent his aunt to seek direction from the prophet Kāpoūkahiki, who told her that Kamehameha would conquer all the islands if he built a large heiau dedicated to his family war god Kūkā'ilimoku (Kū) atop Pu'ukoholā—"Whale Hill"—at Kawaihae.

Kamehameha set to work immediately. According to the prophecy, the builders had to follow rigid guidelines in order to please Kū the war god. To ensure perfection, the prophet Kāpoūkahiki served as the royal architect. Thousands of men camped out on the hills for nearly a year to work on the massive structure. Since the heiau had to be constructed of water-worn lava rocks, it is believed that rocks came from the seaside valley of Pololū. Workers formed a human chain at least 20 miles long and transported the rocks hand to hand to the top of Pu'ukoholā. Kamehameha himself labored with the others.

When news of the war temple reached the rival chiefs, they decided they must attack while Kamehameha and his warriors were occupied. At the least, the rivals would interfere with the ritually specified construction process, and Kū would be displeased. At best, the invasion would eliminate Kamehameha and the threat he posed to his rivals. The chiefs of Maui, Lāna'i, and Moloka'i reconquered their islands and, joined by the chiefs of Kaua'i and O'ahu, sailed to attack Kamehameha. Kamehameha counterattacked, routed the invaders, and resumed work.

In the summer of 1791, the heiau was finished. Kamehameha invited his cousin Keōua Kūahu'ula to the dedication ceremony. Perhaps awed by the power of the heiau and its god, perhaps resigned to his cousin's ascendancy, Keōua Kūahu'ula came willingly to what would be his doom. When he arrived there was a scuffle and, whether Kamehameha intended it or not, Keōua and almost all of his companions were slain. The body of Keōua was carried up to the heiau and offered as the principal sacrifice to Kū.

The death of Keōua Kūahu'ula ended all opposition on the island of Hawai'i, and the prophecy began to come true. By 1810, through conquest and treaties, Kamehameha the Great, builder of Pu'ukoholā Heiau, was the revered king of all the Hawaiian Islands.

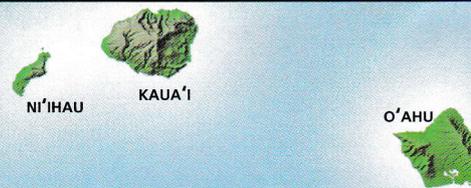
## The Island Kingdom of Kamehameha

From childhood, Kamehameha seemed destined for greatness. With the appearance of a bright, white-tailed star (possibly Halley's Comet) in the year 1758, Hawaiian seers predicted the emergence of a great leader. Kamehameha, "The Lonely One," was born around that time in the Kohala district on the northwestern tip of the island of Hawai'i.

Son of a high chief and a princess, Kamehameha began training as a young child to join the ranks of nā ali'i koa, the chiefly warriors. By young adulthood he was tall and muscular—every bit the powerful warrior his family had expected. In 1782, at the death of his uncle, Kalani'opu'u, who ruled the island of Hawai'i, Kamehameha inherited land on the northern part of the island and was given custody of his family's war god, Kūkā'ilimoku. As he gained power, he intended to one day rule all of the Hawaiian Islands.

Unification, in his view, would bring peace to the continually warring chiefdoms throughout the islands. His rival for control of his home island was his cousin Keōua Kūahu'ula, with whom he battled indecisively in the 1780s. In 1790, Kamehameha successfully invaded Maui, Lāna'i and Moloka'i with the aid of John Young and Isaac Davis, stranded British sailors who became his close advisors. The next year he returned to Hawai'i and defended his lands against the chiefs of O'ahu and Kaua'i in a naval battle off the coast near the Waipi'o Valley. The island of Hawai'i finally came under his full control when his cousin Keōua was slain on the beach below Pu'ukoholā Heiau.

In 1794, Kamehameha reconquered Maui, Lāna'i, and Moloka'i. Victory in a bloody battle on O'ahu ended opposition there in 1795. Fifteen years later, peaceful negotiations finally brought him

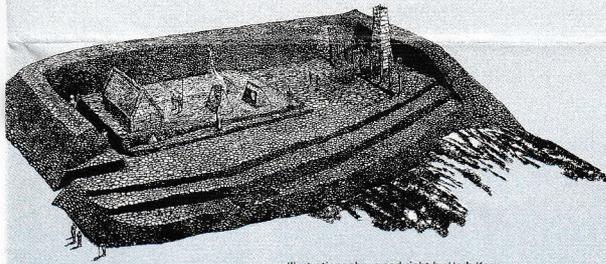


Kaua'i. By 1810, Kamehameha had established his island kingdom.

Kamehameha appointed governors to administer each island. He ruled according to Hawaiian tradition but outlawed some of the more severe practices such as human sacrifices. With John Young as his trading agent, he parlayed the sandalwood trade into great wealth for himself and his people. Kamehameha remained king of the islands until his death in 1819. The Hawaiian monarchy he founded lasted until 1893.



"A Ceremony at Pu'ukoholā Heiau" by Herb Kane



Illustrations above and right by Herb Kane

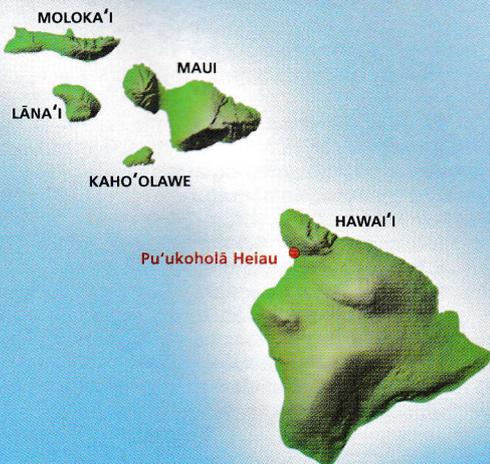
Pu'ukoholā Heiau measures 224 by 100 feet with 16- to 20-foot-high walls on the landward side and on the ends. Three long, narrow terraced steps cross the side that faces the sea, opening the interior to view from canoes floating offshore and, presumably, intimidating any attackers. At the time the temple was in use, there were thatched

houses and an altar for the ruling chief and his priests. Wooden images of Hawaiian gods stood on the platform and terraces. After Kamehameha I died in 1819, his son Liholiho abolished the religious traditions of the past. Most temples, including Pu'ukoholā Heiau, were abandoned. Only heiau that served as mausoleums were maintained.



Above: Pu'ukoholā Heiau as it may have looked. Left: Kamehameha in a feathered cape and headdress. The carved whale-tooth pendant is shaped like a tongue, symbolic of "one who speaks with authority." Below: The war god Kū, carved in the Kona style from 'ōhi'a lehua wood.

Illustration below by Karen Barnes



# Exploring Pu'ukoholā Heiau

## The Chiefly Warriors of Hawaii



Hawaiian chiefs, who attained their ruling status by heredity, nevertheless were often required to defend their territory by force. During his rise to power, Kamehameha I had four main battle chiefs from his home island in addition to his foreign advisors John Young and Isaac Davis. These chiefs led armies composed of nā ali'i koa and nā koa.

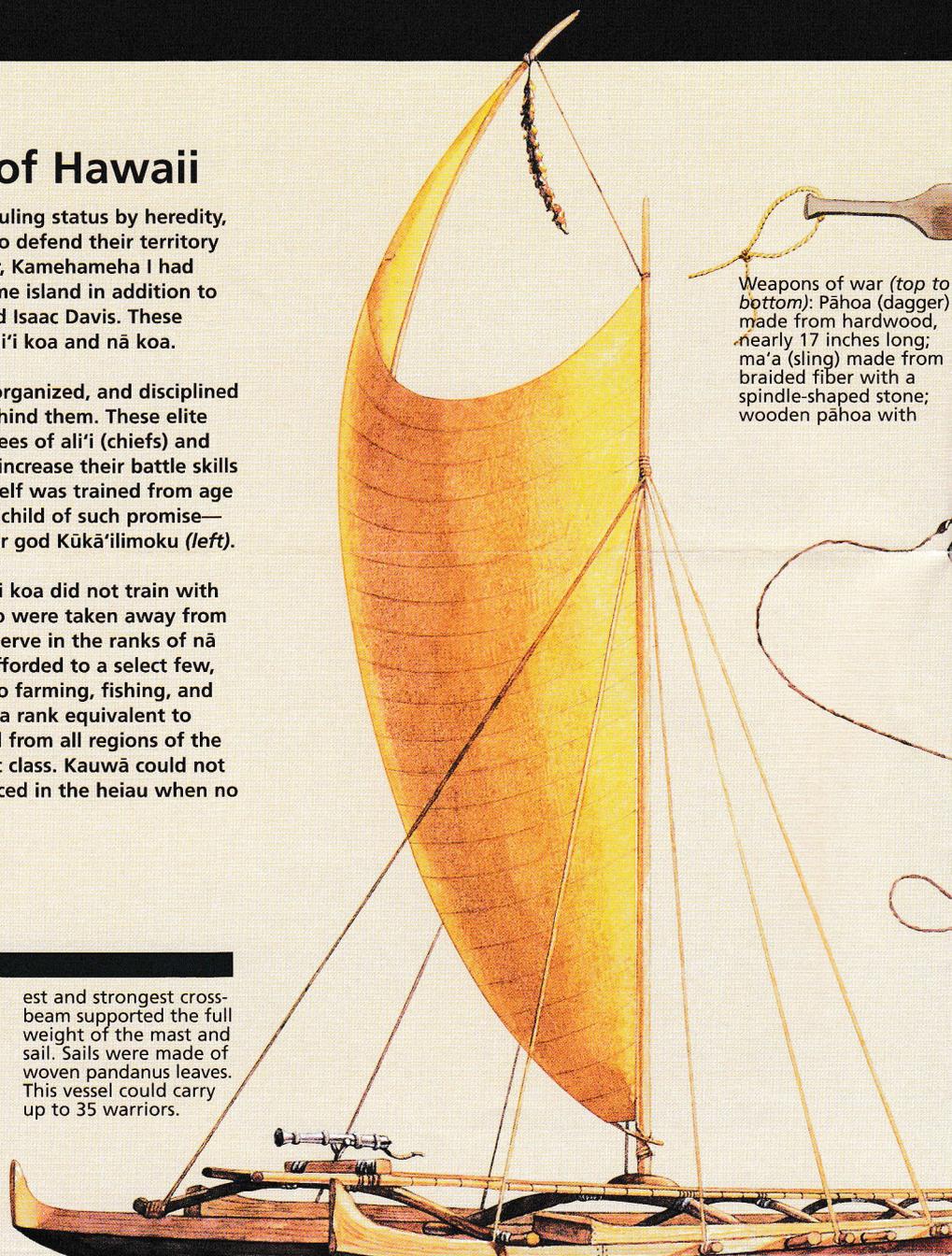
Nā ali'i koa were a highly trained, organized, and disciplined force with centuries of tradition behind them. These elite warriors were sons of varying degrees of ali'i (chiefs) and were trained by personal tutors to increase their battle skills and proficiency. Kamehameha himself was trained from age seven or eight, not surprising for a child of such promise—and whose family deity was the war god Kūkā'ilimoku (left).

Because of their high status, nā ali'i koa did not train with the maka'āinana (commoners), who were taken away from the land and their tasks only in time of war to serve in the ranks of nā koa. Organized military training was a luxury afforded to a select few, and for most young men, duty meant tending to farming, fishing, and other daily needs. At the call of the kālaimoku (a rank equivalent to prime minister), nā koa rose from all classes and from all regions of the islands except from the kauwā, society's outcast class. Kauwā could not mingle even with commoners; they were sacrificed in the heiau when no lawbreakers or war prisoners were available.

Above: The war god Kū depicted in the form of a feathered deity with dogs' teeth and mother-of-pearl eyes. Right: This double-hulled canoe, with an English swivel gun mounted at the bow, was a formidable

war vessel. These crafts were based on traditional Polynesian designs dating back several centuries. The boat's two hulls were individually constructed of wood, then connected with crossbeams. The heavy-

est and strongest cross-beam supported the full weight of the mast and sail. Sails were made of woven pandanus leaves. This vessel could carry up to 35 warriors.



Weapons of war (top to bottom): Pāhoa (dagger) made from hardwood, nearly 17 inches long; ma'a (sling) made from braided fiber with a spindle-shaped stone; wooden pāhoa with



sharks' teeth bound to its edges; niho 'oki (curved wooden knife) with single shark's-tooth blade. The warrior at right wields a wooden

ku'ia (fighting quarter staff), about six feet long with points on either end. At far right, the warrior's club, or newa, has a carved stone head lashed to its wooden base with fiber cord.



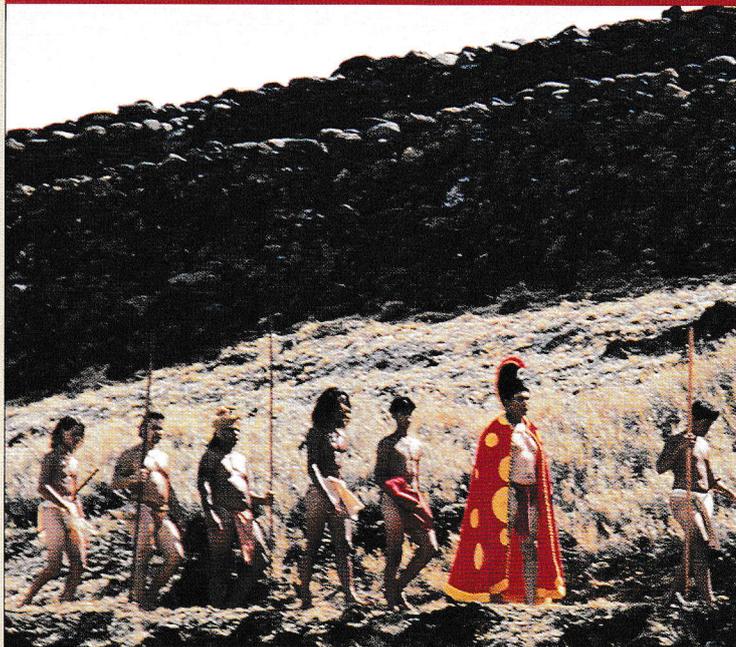
Like high chiefs, warriors usually had body tattoos. Patterns signified the wearer's family ties, loyalty to a particular chief, and 'aumakua (family guardian spirit). Warriors usually wore headgear indicating military rank and social status, along with providing protection.



As part of their training, to maintain constant readiness for attack or defense, nā ali'i koa routinely fought mock engagements called kaula kio. An impressive showing in one of these fights would bring a youth to the attention of his superiors and even to the chiefs.

In 1793 Kamehameha himself put on a demonstration where he dodged six spears hurled toward him.

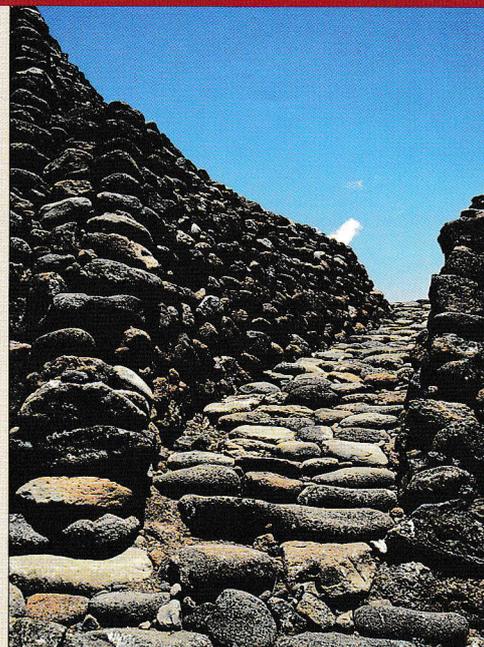
Though blunted spears were usually used in these mock encounters, even the most accomplished warriors were sometimes killed.



At the cultural festival held at the park each August, native Hawaiians and other Polynesian

peoples celebrate their centuries-old tradition through ceremonies, demonstrating ancient

crafts, and the wearing of traditional dress.



The rocks used to build Pu'ukoholā Heiau are volcanic debris rounded by the erosive action of

water. No mortar was used. Walls slant inward and spaces are filled with smaller pebbles.



The stone leaning post or kikiako'i, was used by Chief Alapa'i Kūpalu. It stood at

## General Information

**Administration** Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site is one of more than 380 parks in the National Park System. The National Park Service cares for these special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage. Visit [www.nps.gov](http://www.nps.gov) to learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities.

Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site  
P.O. Box 44340  
Kawaihae, HI 96743-4340  
808-882-7218  
[www.nps.gov/puhe](http://www.nps.gov/puhe)

**Getting to the park** The park is located on the island of Hawai'i, one mile south of Kawaihae off Hawaii 270. The island is served by Kona

International Airport and Hilo International Airport. Waimea-Kohala Airport, 12 miles east of the park, has commuter flights.

**For a safe visit** All natural and cultural features are protected by federal law. • Stay on designated trails. Carry drinking water; wear proper clothing, footwear, hat, and sunscreen; do not attempt hikes if you are not in good physical condition. • This region is prone to grass fires; smoking is prohibited. • Camping, picnicking, and swimming are not allowed within the park. They are permitted at nearby Samuel M. Spencer Park. • Use caution while entering and exiting the park road, and visiting the John Young's Homestead site. • The temples are fragile and are sacred to native Hawaiians; they are closed to the public. You can view them from below.

## A Walking Tour of the Park

The visitor center is open daily from 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. A self-guiding walking tour begins here; allow about one hour for your tour and note that the park road gate closes at 4 p.m.

**Pu'ukoholā Heiau** This temple was built by Kamehameha I in 1790-91. Its platform was crowded with ceremonial structures. Today, it is the location of cultural events.

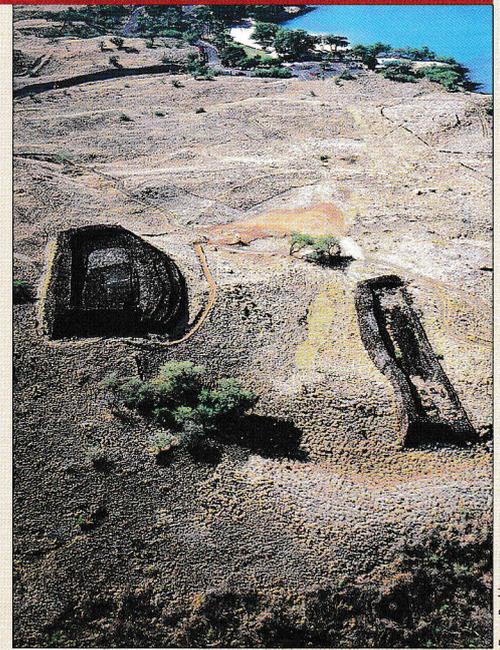
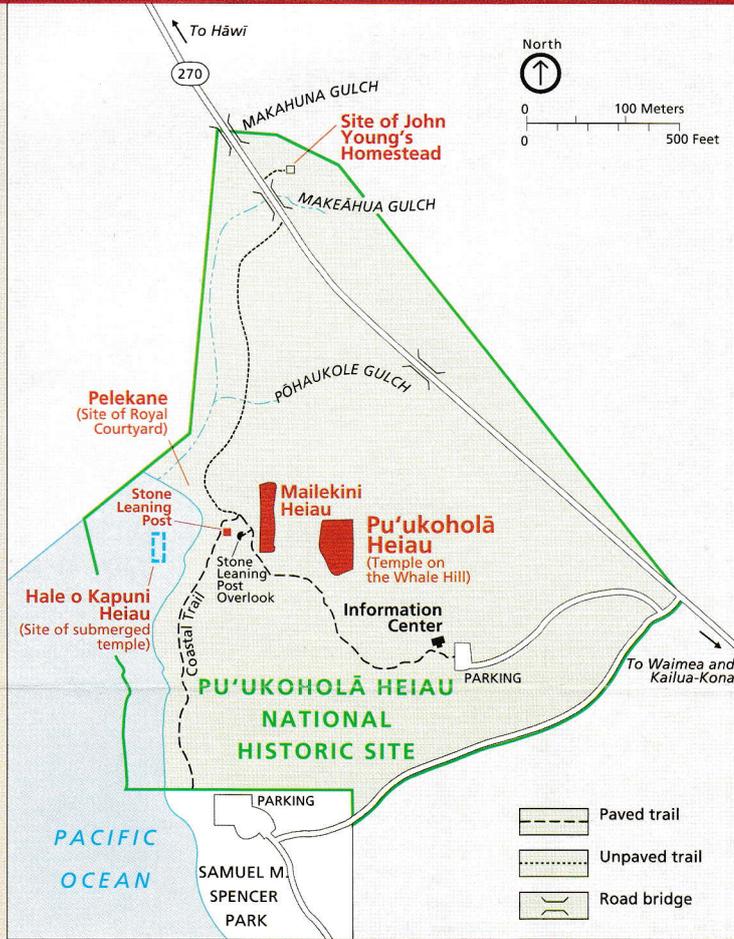
**Mailekini Heiau** On the hillside between Pu'ukoholā Heiau and the sea are the ruins of Mailekini Heiau, possibly a war or agricultural temple used by the ancestors of Kamehameha. This older temple was nearly equal in size to Pu'ukoholā Heiau but was not so finely crafted. During the rule of Kamehameha I, John Young helped the king convert this temple into a fort.



least six feet high and was originally closer to the ocean. It was accidentally broken in 1937.



Pōhuehue (beach morning glory) vines were traditionally used to slap the water's surface as part of a ritual to rouse the surf.

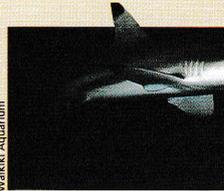


This view of the temples is computer-enhanced to eliminate an unused road. Efforts continue to recreate the historic landscape of the late 18th- and early 19th centuries.

**Site of John Young's Homestead** John Young was a British sailor stranded on Hawai'i in 1790. He became a trusted military advisor to Kamehameha, who made him governor of the island. Young also supervised trade with ships at Kawaihae for goods including foreign weaponry. Little is left of Young's housing compound. Young's European-style house was constructed of basalt, with mortar made of sand, burnt coral, poi, and hair. His wife, Ka'oana'eha (niece of Kamehameha), children, and servants probably lived in nearby houses of more traditional style. Young is one of only two foreigners buried on the grounds of the Royal Mausoleum in Nu'uano, O'ahu. Young's granddaughter was Queen Emma, wife of Kamehameha IV.

• You may walk or drive to the site; be very careful of the heavy traffic on Hawaii 270.

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Black-tipped reef sharks frequent the park's waters year-round. Sharks were believed to be 'aumakua, ancestral deities.

**Hale o Kapuni Heiau** Dedicated to the shark gods, this heiau lies submerged just offshore, possibly covered by silt that runs down from the gulches in heavy rains. The temple was last seen in the 1950s, when the rock platform was visible during low tides. The Stone Leaning Post overlooks the site of the shark temple.

**Pelekane** On the coast below Pu'ukoholā and Mailekini is the site of the royal courtyard at Kawaihae. After his father died, Kamehameha II returned here to prepare for his role as king.