The Temple on the Hill of the Whale

The stone heiau at Puʻukoholā is one of the last major sacred structures built in Hawaiʻi 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, Lānaʻi, and Molokaʻi. Yet he was not able to lay full claim to his home island of Hawaiʻi because of opposition from his chief rival and cousin, Keōua Kūahuʻula. While on Molokaʻi, Kamehameha learned that Keōua was invading his territory. Kamehameha sent his aunt to seek direction from the prophet Kāpoūkahi, who told her that Kamehameha would conquer all the islands if he built a large heiau dedicated to his family war god Kūkāʻilimoku (Kū) atop Puʻukoholā—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 Kāpoūkahi served as the royal architect. Thousands of men camped out on the hills for nearly a year to work on the massive structure. Because 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 Puʻukoholā. 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, Lānaʻi, and Molokaʻi reconquered their islands and, joined by the chiefs of Kauaʻi and Oʻahu, 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 Kūahuʻula to the dedication ceremonies. Perhaps awed by the power of the heiau and its god, perhaps resigned to the ascendancy of his cousin, Keōua Kūahuʻula 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 to the heiau and offered as the principal sacrifice to Kū.

The death of Keōua Kūahuʻula ended all opposition on the island of Hawaiʻi, and the prophecy began to come true. By 1810, through conquest and treaties, Kamehameha the Great, builder of Puʻukoholā 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 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 Hawaiʻi.

Son of a high chief and a princess, Kamehameha began training as a child to join the ranks of nā aliʻi 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, Kalaniʻopuʻu, who ruled the island of Hawaiʻi, Kamehameha inherited land on the northern part of the island and was given custody of his family's war god, Kūkāʻilimoku. As he gained power, he intended to one day rule all of the Hawaiian Islands.

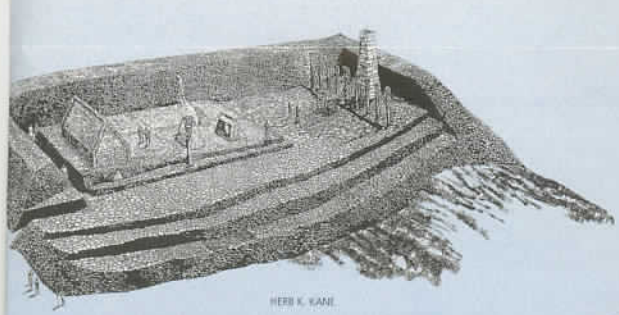
Unification, in his view, would bring peace to the continually warring chiefdoms throughout the islands. His rival for control of his home island was his cousin Keōua Kūahuʻula, with whom he battled indecisively in the 1780s. In 1790 Kamehameha successfully invaded Maui, Lānaʻi, and Molokaʻi with the aid of John Young and Isaac Davis, stranded British sailors who became his close advisors. The next year he returned to Hawaiʻi and defended his lands against the chiefs of Oʻahu and Kauaʻi in a naval battle off the coast near the Waipiʻo Valley. The island of Hawaiʻi finally came under his full control when his cousin Keōua was slain on the beach below Puʻukoholā Heiau.

In 1794 Kamehameha reconquered Maui, Lānaʻi, and Molokaʻi. Victory in a bloody battle on Oʻahu ended opposition there in 1795. Fifteen years later, peaceful negotiations finally brought him

Kauaʻi. 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.

Ceremony at Pu'ukoholā Heiau
HERB K. KANE



HERB K. 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 abolished the religious traditions of the past. Most temples, including Pu'ukoholā Heiau, were abandoned. Only heiau that served as mausoleums were maintained.

HERB K. KANE

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-NPS / KAREN BARNES

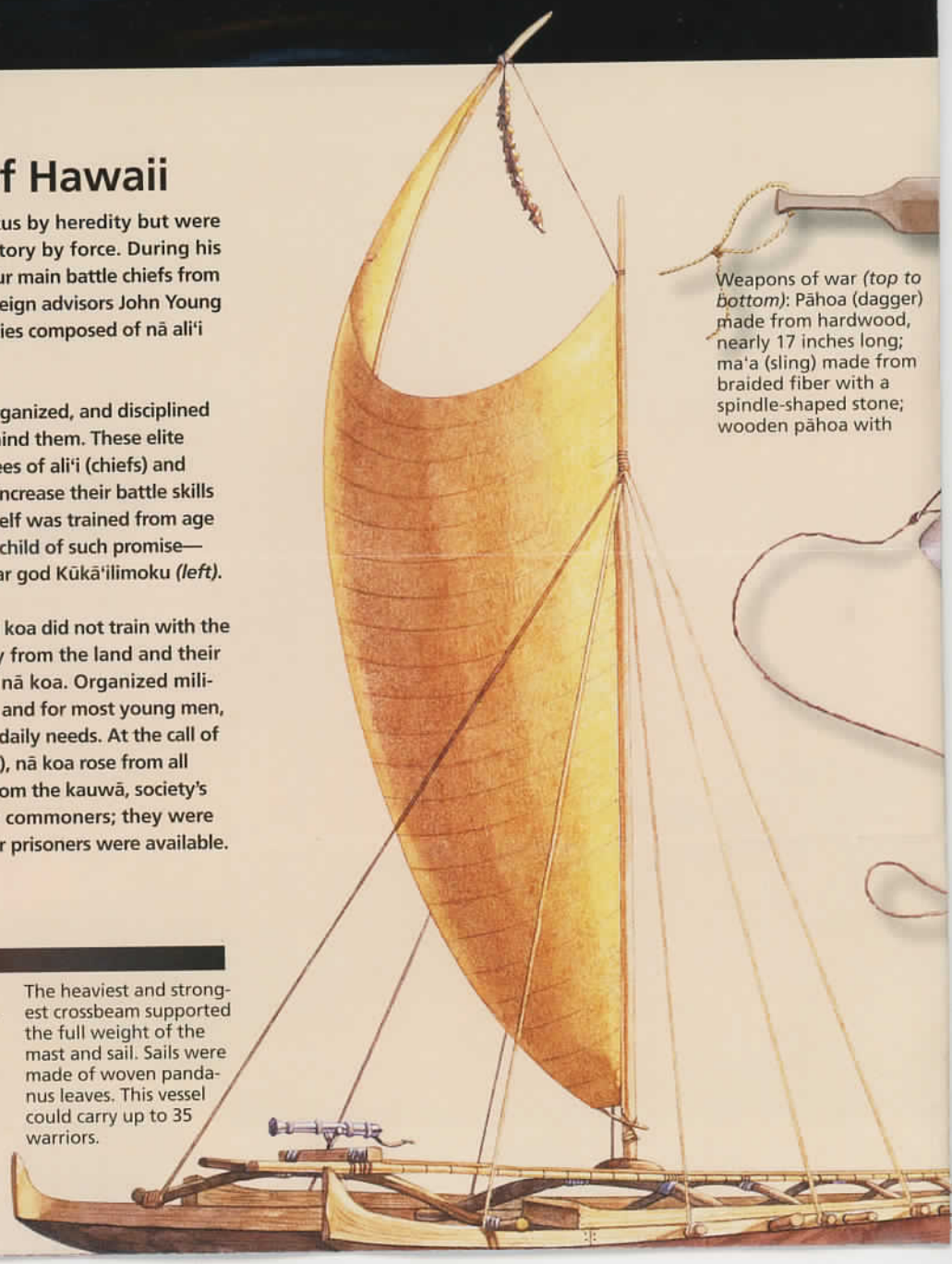
Exploring Pu'ukoholā Heiau

The Chiefly Warriors of Hawaii

Hawaiian chiefs attained ruling status by heredity but 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)*.

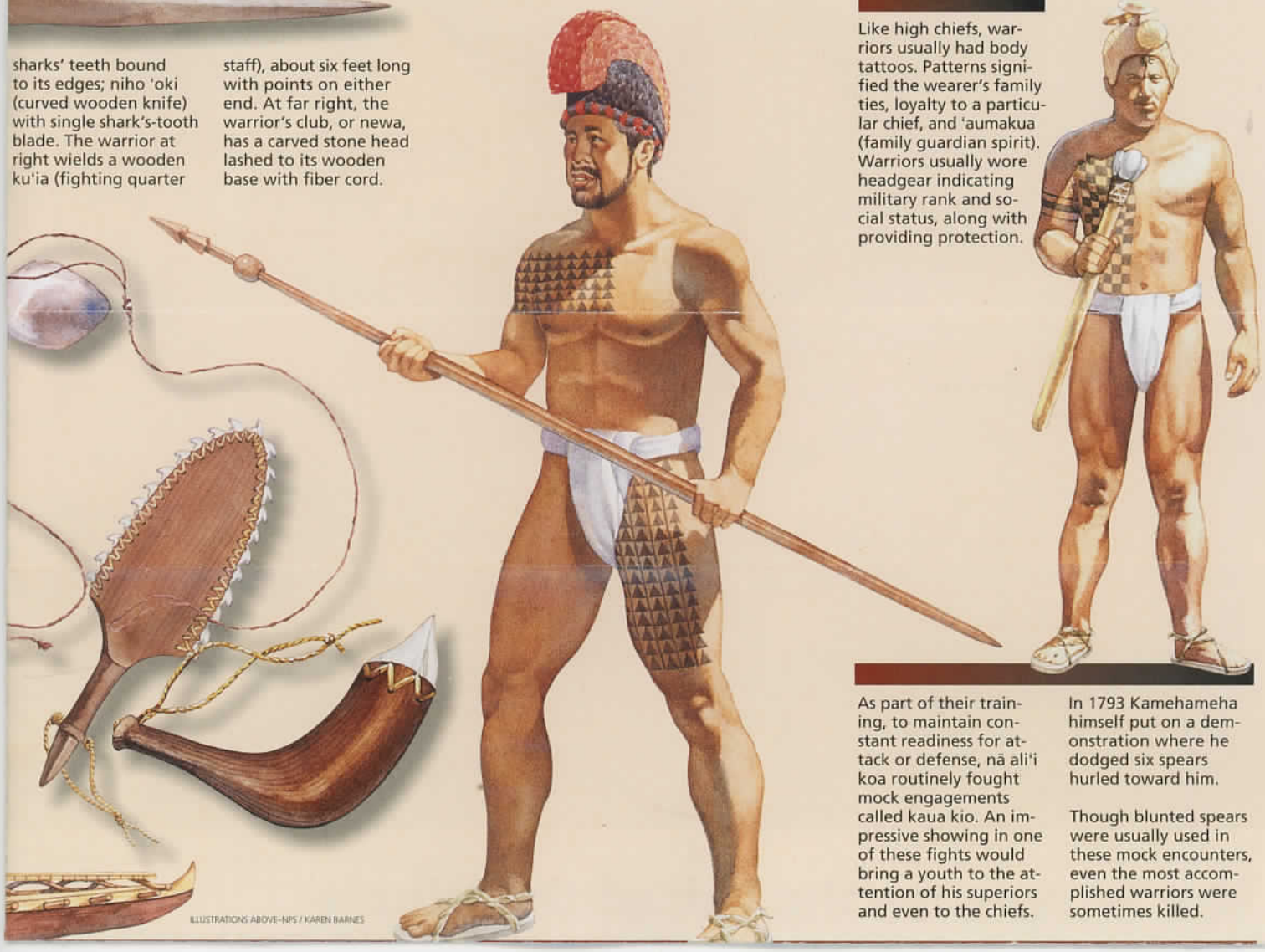
Because of their high status, nā ali'i koa did not train with the maka'āinana (commoners), who were taken away from the land and their tasks only in time of war to serve in the ranks of nā koa. Organized military training was a luxury afforded to a select few, and for most young men, duty meant tending 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.



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

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

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 kaua 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.

ILLUSTRATIONS ABOVE–NPS / KAREN BARNES

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 wearing traditional dress.

The rocks used to build Pu'ukoholā Heiau are volcanic debris rounded by the abrasive force 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 Kūpalupalu Manō. It stood at least six feet high and was originally closer to the ocean. It was accidentally broken in 1937.

General Information

Getting to the Park The park is on the island of Hawai'i, one mile south of Kawaihae off HI 270. The island is served by Kona and Hilo international airports. Waimea-Kohala Airport, 12 miles east of the park, has commuter flights.

For a Safe Visit Federal laws protect all natural and cultural features in the park. The temples are fragile and are sacred to native Hawaiians. They are closed to the public; you can view them from below. • Stay on designated trails. Carry ample 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 entering and exiting the park road and visiting the John Young's Homestead site. • For a full list of regulations, including firearms information, go to the park website.

Accessibility We strive to make our facilities, services, and programs accessible to all. For information, ask at the visitor center or visit our website.

More Information Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site is one of over 400 parks in the National Park System. To learn more about parks and National Park Service programs in America's communities, visit www.nps.gov.

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www.nps.gov/puhe

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A Walking Tour of the Park

The visitor center and the park road gate are open daily. *Note*: These hours change—check with the park. A self-guiding walking tour (allow about one hour) begins at the visitor center.

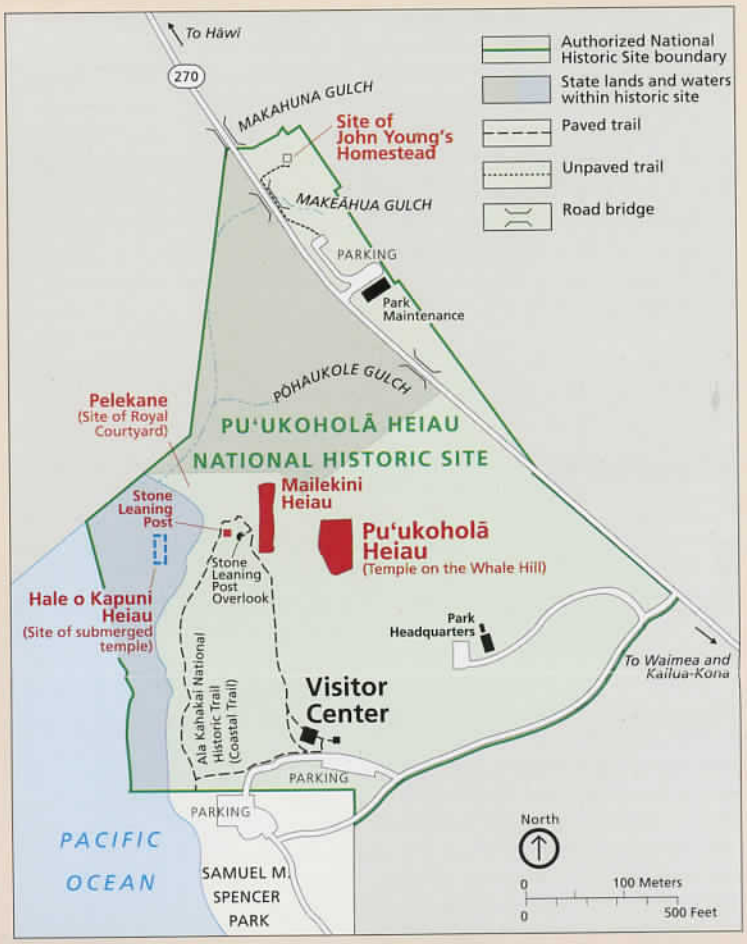
Pu'ukoholā Heiau Built by Kamehameha I in 1790–91. Today it is the setting for cultural events.

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 as big as Pu'ukoholā Heiau but not so finely crafted. During the rule of Kamehameha I, John Young helped the king convert this temple into a fort.

Hale o Kapuni Heiau Dedicated to the shark gods, this heiau lies submerged just offshore. 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.

HERB K. KANE

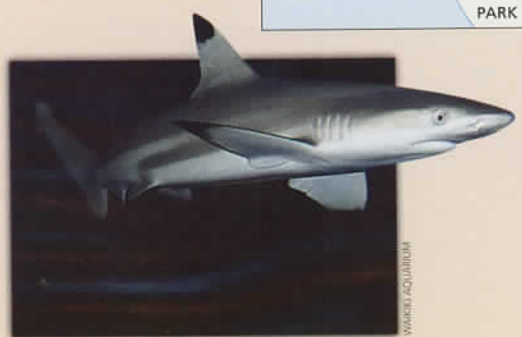
Artist's conception of John Young's homestead. The three foreground structures show native Hawaiian styles: terraces, paving, platforms, and mounds of dry-laid masonry. Those in the rear show Western styling: walls of stone set in mud mortar. Today only a few walls and foundations remain.



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.

Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail This trail was established in 2000 for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of traditional native Hawaiian culture and natural resources. A small section of this 175-mile trail corridor runs through the park.

Site of John Young's Homestead John Young was a British sailor stranded on Hawai'i in 1790. He became a trusted military adviser to Kamehameha I. Young served as governor of Hawai'i Island after Kamehameha designated him an ali'i nui (high chief), giving him the name 'Olohana. Young married Ka'oana'eha, the niece of Kamehameha. His granddaughter was Queen Emma, wife of Kamehameha IV. Today Young's homestead site has the remains of the oldest known European-style house in Hawaii.



WAIKIKI AQUARIUM

Manō (sharks) are believed to be 'aumakua (ancestral deities).

Black-tipped reef sharks frequent park waters year-round.

NPS / GREG CUNNINGHAM

Milo (*Thespesia populnea*), a coastal tree in the hibiscus family, was traditionally used for carving bowls, plates, and paddles.