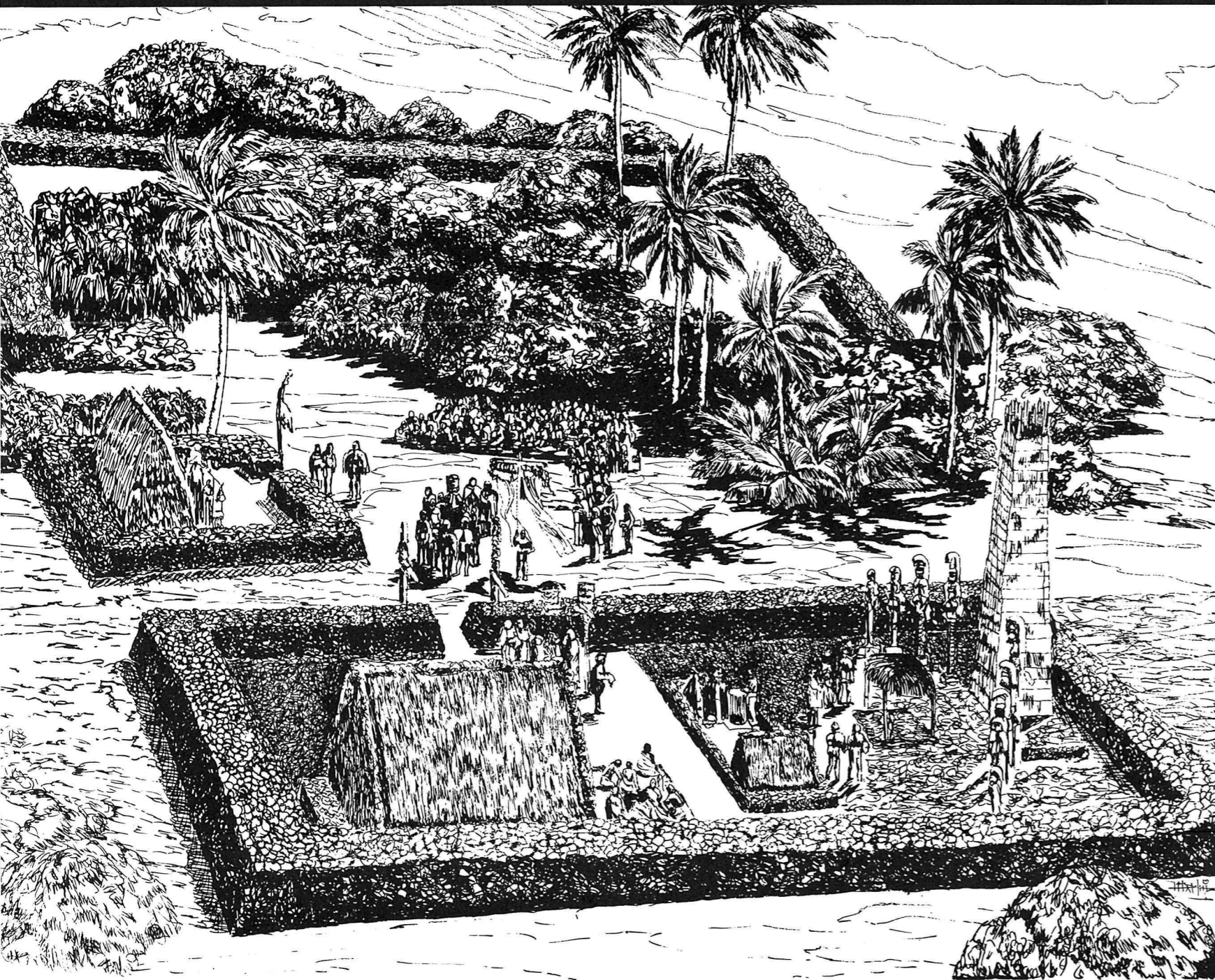


# Waha'ula Heiau

Temple of the  
Red Mouth

Hawaii Volcanoes National Park  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service



## THE WAHA'ULA HEIAU

Only 150 feet along the path from the Waha'ula Visitor Center, is the Waha'ula Heiau (Temple of the Red Mouth). Constructed during the 13th century by a foreigner from Kahiki (southern lands), Waha'ula changed the worshipping rituals of Hawai'i's people.

Before the time of Waha'ula, customs and rituals of the temples were less stringent. There was a basic understanding that every aspect of nature was the embodiment of some deity, and that the respect of nature in turn brought life.

The new rituals that were a part of Waha'ula changed that; simple rituals and offerings of fish or plants were not always enough to appease the gods. Man became the principal sacrifice while the chiefs communed with the gods on important matters and undertakings.

From here in the district of Puna, the practices of the luakini (human sacrificial temples) spread throughout Hawai'i. The luakini remained in use until the early 19th century, after which the advent of the foreigners and a change in customs, brought about new religions.

## WAHA'ULA VISITOR CENTER INFORMATION AND ACTIVITIES

The Congressional Act of June 20, 1938 officially added the Kalapana Extension Lands to Hawai'i National Park, now Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park. In doing so, one of the most traditionally significant sites of Hawai'i was added to an already geologically unique area, making the national park a showplace which intertwines traditions and sciences.

Other than the physical remains of Waha'ula, there is little left as a reminder of the events that occurred here. Fragmented chants and stories are all that remain of once rich oral histories that kept alive traditional knowledge.

Today, the Waha'ula Visitor Center sits along the outer boundaries of the heiau. There are displays and interpretive talks of cultural and ethnobotanical interest. There are also numerous trails throughout areas that serve as vivid reminders of Hawai'i's past.

## MILEAGE FROM WAHA'ULA

It is a 4-mile drive from Waha'ula to Kaimu (Blacksand Beach). The road passes the village of Kalapana which has prepared food and store facilities. The closest gas stations are in Pahoa, 12.5 miles away. Hilo is 20 miles past Pahoa. The Kilauea Visitor Center is 27.5 miles from Waha'ula via the Chain of Craters Road.

The ancient Hawaiians believed that the islands and all forms of nature were the embodiments of creative forces of nature and spirit beings. The first people that came to these islands from Kahiki (southern lands) brought with them their own rituals which they intertwined with what they encountered here.

Throughout the following generations, historic legends recorded the migrations between Hawai'i and Kahiki. People on double-hulled canoes crossed the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean, bringing with them valued plants, new customs and rituals. These events led up to the 13th century, when during a period of migrations a man of great spiritual power known as Pā'ao came to Hawai'i. Pā'ao was received as a chief by the people of Hawai'i. After some time here, Pā'ao told the chiefs that they had weakened and degraded their bloodlines by mingling with the commoners, thus setting aside their divine right to rule.

Pā'ao returned to Kahiki seeking a chief who would strengthen the Hawaiian chiefs' blood and ties with the gods. The chief Pili returned to Hawai'i with Pā'ao. They landed on the coast of Puna. Pili became established as the new chief and Pā'ao became his high priest. The two founded a dynasty which ruled Hawai'i through the time of their descendants, Kamehameha I and Hewahewa his high priest, rulers of the early 19th century.

It was shortly after Pā'ao's return to Hawai'i that he determined that Pūlama would be the site of a new heiau (temple). Women were not allowed to assist with the construction of the heiau, nor were they permitted within its consecrated walls. After the heiau was completed and dedicated, it became known as "Waha'ula-Red Mouth," because its new rituals required human sacrifices at times. The sacrifices were made to give strength to prayers or pay the penalty for breaking the gods, or temple's restrictions. They might also be offered when a chief was asking for divine guidance or preparing for battle, or when natural phenomena, famine or pestilence occurred. Waha'ula was the site of

state worship for the supreme chief. The mana (spiritual power) of Waha'ula lasted for five hundred years, while many other luakini type temples rose and fell into disuse because their mana had failed.

By the time of Kamehameha I, only Waha'ula and five other luakini temples remained in use on the island of Hawai'i. They had survived new rulers and reconstructions because their mana had prevailed. The time of Kamehameha I saw great and tragic changes in Hawai'i. The arrival of foreign ships brought new gods and ways of living; customs and beliefs quickly changed. Kamehameha I attempted to blend the beliefs and knowledge of his ancestors with knowledge of the foreigners, trying to take the best of both. Upon the death of Kamehameha I in May of 1819, his son and heir Liholiho was persuaded to set aside the religious rituals of his ancestors and people.

Liholiho was the last of Hawai'i's ruling family to use any of the state heiau. Interestingly enough, Waha'ula, the first of the luakini temples, was also the last one to be used by Liholiho, who was himself a descendent of the first chief to use the temple.

In 1819 there was an unsuccessful rebellion in an attempt to save the old order and rituals, but by the end of 1819, temple rituals ceased, and the heiau were abandoned. In 1824 a royal decree was issued which ordered the destruction of all objects associated with the heiau that had not already disappeared or been destroyed. The events of 1819 through 1824 guaranteed the wiping out of any clear traditional understanding of Hawai'i's religious past.

**FOR MORE READING**  
JOHN PAPA 'I'I **FRAGMENTS OF HAWAIIAN HISTORY**  
DAVID MALO **HAWAIIAN ANTIQUITIES**  
SAMUEL KAMAKAU **KA PO'E KAHIKO**  
FORNANDER **COLLECTION OF HAWAIIAN ANTIQUITIES**  
THRUM'S **HAWAIIAN ANNUAL**  
MARY PUKU'I **POLYNESIAN FAMILY SYSTEM IN KA'U HAWAI'I**

## Waha'ula as it is today



# Waha'ula Heiau

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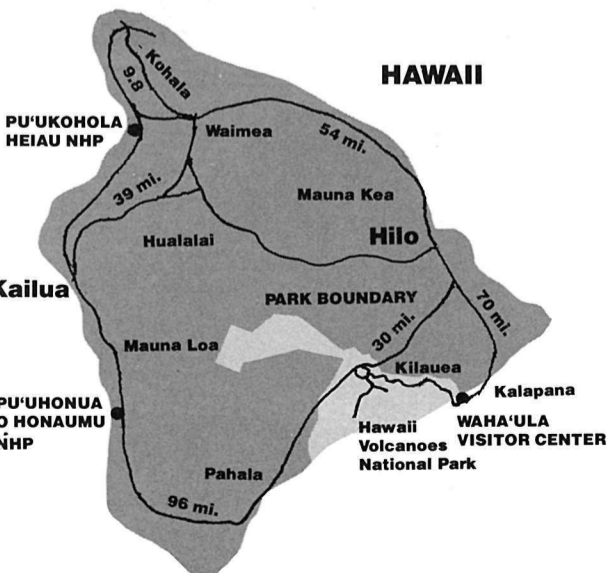
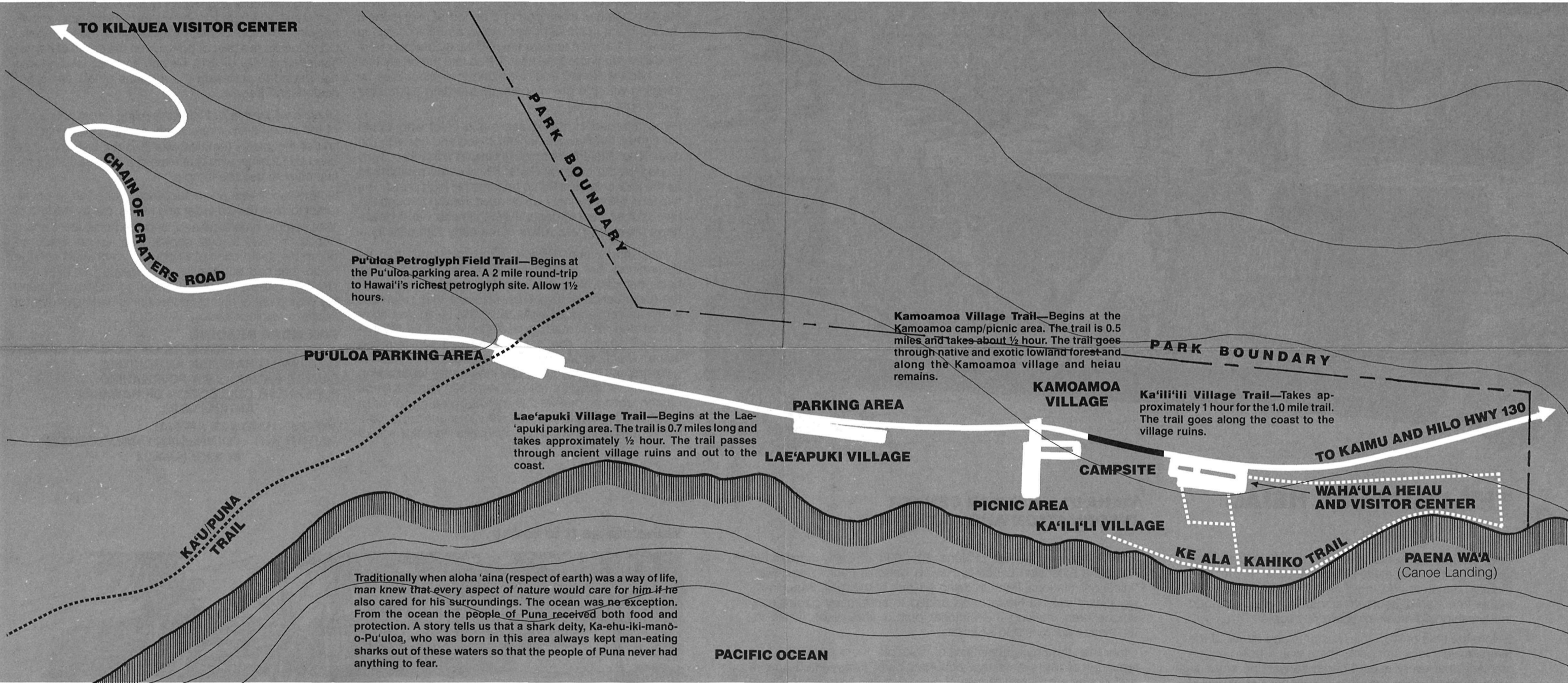
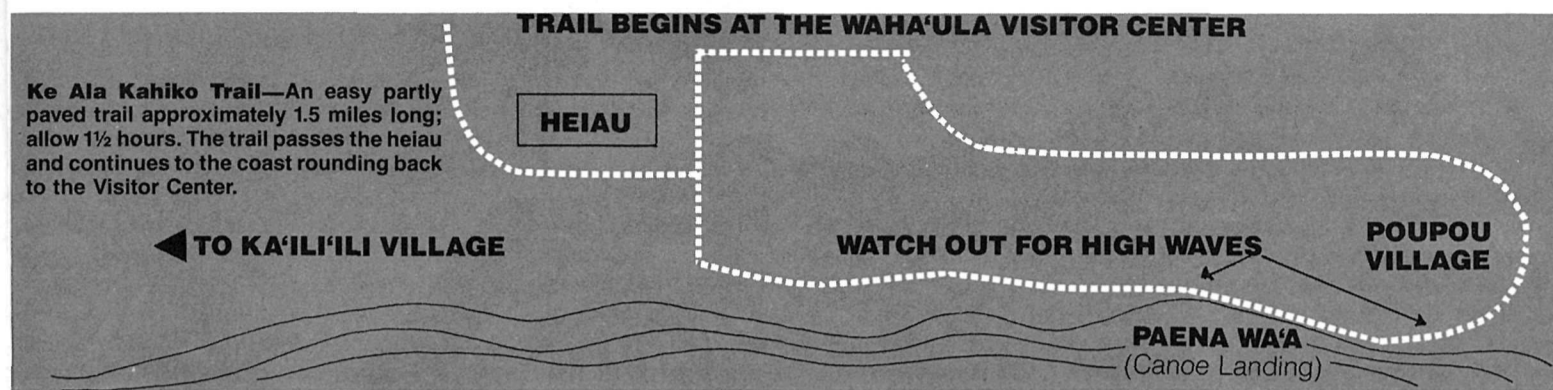
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## KE ALA KAHIKO/THE ANCIENT PATH

### Trail Information

Start the trail at the Waha'ula Visitor Center and continue past the heiau ruins. Numerous plants are marked along the trail, many are unique to Hawaii. Just past the heiau, the trail turns towards the coast, watch out for the waves that sometimes rise above the cliffs. The ocean was an abundant source of food for the ancient Hawaiian people. Today as you look at the cliff and in the water you can see the limpets, fish, seaweeds and turtles that were important food items traditionally. Before the trail turns from the ocean, just across from the blowhole is a paena wa'a (canoe landing site). It is a good example of how man worked with his surroundings.

By lashing logs to holes in the rock, men were able to launch and land their canoes as they went about their daily fishing and traveling. From there the trail turns into the forest. There are cracks in areas here that are holding places for brackish water. These areas made life along a dry coastline much easier. The last section of trail is notably different from the rest. It has been paved with water worn boulders. Placed here hundreds of years ago, this path is a remnant of a series of paths that joined one village to another. The trail ends back at the Waha'ula parking area. If you have any questions, please talk to the visitor center staff. ALOHA



## GLOSSARY OF HAWAIIAN WORDS USED IN TEXT

- HEIAU** Ancient Hawaiian temple
- HEWAHEWA** High priest to Kamehameha, descendent to Pā'ao
- KAHIKI** Southern/Distant lands
- KAMEHAMEHA** Chief who united the Hawaiian Islands/Descended from Pili
- LIHOLIHO** Son and heir of Kamehameha
- LUAKINI** Human sacrificial temple
- MANA** Spiritual power
- PĀ'AO** Priest who came from Kahiki and founded Waha'ula
- PILI** Chief who came to Hawaii with Pā'ao
- PŪLAMA** Land section, District of Puna
- PUNA** Land district, Island of Hawaii
- WAHA'ULA** "Red Mouth," First temple of its kind built in Hawaii

## HELP PROTECT YOUR PARK

To protect yourself and the natural beauty of the park, please pay special attention to these regulations. They are enforced by park rangers. Registration at Waha'ula Visitor Center is required for back-country camping and overnight hikes.

Fires are permitted only in designated camp and picnic sites. DO NOT leave your fires unattended.

Collecting rocks or artifacts and the picking of plants is prohibited.

Hunting is prohibited except by Citizen Hunters assisting in goat and pig management programs. Firearms are otherwise not to be carried or displayed unless broken down or in a case.

Pursuant to the Act of June 20, 1938 (52 Stat. 781; 16 U.S.C. 301b and 396a) Native Hawaiian residents of the villages adjacent to the Kalapana Extension Lands added to the park by the above act and visitors under their guidance are granted exclusive privileges of fishing or gathering of seafood from park lands (above the high water line).

Vehicles of all kinds are restricted to designated roadways.

Pets are to be under physical control at all times. No pets are allowed in the back-country.

Park roads are for leisurely driving only. Speed limits are posted.