

Archeology of Kalaupapa

National Park Service
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Kalaupapa National Historical Park



Photo Credit: Ricki Cooke

View Into the Past

The diverse archeological landscape of the Kalaupapa peninsula and surrounding areas offers important insight into the human story of life on Molokai's north shore in pre-contact, historic, and modern times. While often remembered as a place of exile for Hawaiian citizens who contracted Hansen's Disease, the archeology and ethnography of Kalaupapa reveal an earlier occupation of the landform by *kama`aina*, or Native Hawaiians. The role of the peninsula as a place of exile from 1866-1969 assisted in the preservation of the extensive pre-contact archeological complex.

History of Habitation

People lived on Kalaupapa Peninsula for centuries. Radiocarbon dating of charcoal deposits within the Kaupikiawa Cave on the peninsula indicate Hawaiians were present at least 900 years before present.

Native Hawaiians created land divisions called *ahupua`a*, which stretched from *mauka* (the mountains) to *makai* (the sea). Within each *ahupua`a* all the resources needed to sustain Hawaiian life were found. People gathered sea salt and fish from tidal areas, conducted agriculture in dryland and wet valley areas, obtained water from springs and perennial streams, and harvested higher elevation hardwood forests for wood.

At Kalaupapa, remains of permanent house sites still exist at the base of the *pali* (cliffs),

along with *lo`i* (taro patches), and terracing for agriculture. Families built temporary fishing shelters along the coastline. On the north shore, smooth cobbled canoe ramps made it easier to pull canoes up onto land and into canoe sheds built along shore. On the flat, wind-swept peninsula, low field walls remain which once retained water and blocked the wind for one particular dryland crop – sweet potatoes.

The peninsula was also well known for agriculture. During the California Gold Rush of 1849, agriculture intensified throughout Hawai`i to provide surplus potatoes, beans, onions, and squash for export to California. Old Hawaiian *nupepa* (newspapers) tell of the abundance of sweet potatoes being shipped from Kalaupapa ports.

Ho`oniho - Hawaiian dry set masonry

In every niche of the landscape, from the Kalaupapa *pali* (cliff) trail, the valleys and plain, and even within Kauhakō Crater there remains the distinctive signature of early Hawaiian life: dry set masonry.

Low rock walls extend for miles and miles across the windswept and more arid sections of the peninsula. Many of these walls are thought to have been used as property boundaries or as shelter for the cultivation of crops, such as sweet potato. Larger, more substantial walls were often used in the construction of *heiau* (temples), larger houses, and *ahupua`a* boundaries. One wall stretches two miles from the base of the cliffs to the tip of the peninsula where it joins a *ko`a*, or fishing shrine.

Such labor-intensive work is testament to the man-power once available on the peninsula and also to the overall population that supported these workers during such large scale projects.



Photo Credit: Ricki Cooke

Remnants of a fishing shrine adjoin an *ahupua`a* boundary rock wall.



Heiaus (temples) dedicated to different Hawaiian gods are found around the peninsula.

Ceremonial Sites, Unique Landforms, and Burials

Throughout the peninsula and surrounding valleys, numerous *heiau* (temples), ranging from large public *heiau* to small family shrines, attest to the significance of religion and ritual in daily life on the peninsula. Kalaehala *Heiau* at Wai`ale`ia was said to be a *ho`oulu`a* (fishing) *heiau*, dedicated to the gods Ku and Hina. Kananuolalo *Heiau* at Kalaupapa is believed to be a temple for *hana aloha*, compelling love.

Kauhakō Crater, located near the center of the peninsula, created the peninsula over 300,000 years ago. A collapsed lava tube stretching onto the peninsula created numerous caves which were inhabited. Within the crater, a density of enclosures, terracing, mounds, and modified outcrops are intersected by a paved and lined trail, indicating the interior of the crater was also utilized for agriculture and habitation. A small freshwater lake in the base of the crater may have served as a water source. On the outside slope of the crater, a *holua* slide remains, a stone slide built for the recreation of Hawaiian *ali`i*, or royalty.

The Kuka`iwa`a landshelf contains extensive evidence of use and habitation. The landshelf features an exposed tip of land bearing numerous alignments and a ceremonial platform feature, and within the dense native coastal forest of *lauhala* and *hau* archeologists have recorded

terracing, enclosures, and platforms extending up the landform.

Atop a volcanic hill called Makapulapai are 60 impressive stone platform and terraces believed to be burials. These burial monuments may have been constructed in the early 1700s for Ko`olau warriors slain during a battle over fishing grounds between the Kona and Koolau chiefs. A petroglyph remains on the boulder which relates to the battle story, depicting a human figure holding an adz or weapon. Many other burial sites are located throughout the peninsula, from pre-contact to historic cemeteries.



The battle of Makapulapai petroglyph is one of only two known on the entire peninsula.

Layers of History

Following establishment of the Kalaupapa Peninsula as a place of exile for Hansen's Disease patients in 1866, an exodus took place as the original residents of the peninsula left to make room for growing numbers of patients. As they moved off the peninsula, the places *kama`aina* (Hawaiian residents) left behind were reused by the patient-residents.

Some rock walls were reused as property boundaries; or the rock was crushed to make gravel for roads. Other walls were rebuilt by the patients. Artifacts within the walls reveal the multiple stories at their locations; archeologists often find *poi* pounders, historic bathroom fixtures,

historic bottles, and gaming stones (*ulu mica*) are found in the same wall. The multiple use of features has established an interesting layered, or multi-component archeology.

The establishment of Kalaupapa National Historical Park was accomplished through the effort of patient-residents with the goal of preserving the area's important pre-contact and historical resources. The National Park Service shares in the stewardship of these sites with the Hawaiian community. Today, Kalaupapa remains one of the richest and least disturbed archeological landscapes in Hawai`i.