

CITY OF REFUGE



NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK • ISLAND OF HAWAII • HAWAII

CITY OF REFUGE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK

Vanquished warriors, noncombatants, and taboo breakers escaped death if they reached the sacred land at Honaunau ahead of their pursuers.

This was no game of prisoner's base. The object of war in old Hawaii was extermination of the enemy, including any women, children, and old folks of the opposing side found in the heat of battle. Wars were frequent, expected, and part of the politics and human ecology of Hawaii before 1819. Noncombatants of both sides and defeated warriors sought sanctuary in Hawaii's places of refuge.

At any time a man or woman who broke the kapu, a taboo system of do's and don'ts, could escape the death penalty and all punishment by entering the sacred ground of a place of refuge.

All who applied to the place of refuge were admitted—those from any part of the island or those from another island. There was no trial to establish their guilt or innocence. War refugees stayed until the conflict was over, taboo breakers until they were dismissed by the priests—usually after a few hours or overnight. When they left, the protection went with them, and they were free to return home in peace.

The Refuge at Honaunau

The City of Refuge is more properly called the Place of Refuge at Honaunau, or in Hawaiian Pu'uhonua-o-Honaunau. Located on a 20-acre shelf of ancient lava that dips into the Pacific Ocean, the refuge is roughly square in shape, with the ocean fronting on two sides and a great wall extending along the other two sides. There is not even a trace of tradition about when the refuge at Honaunau first started, but it is believed to have been in operation before 1492.

While there were at least five other refuges on the Island of Hawaii, and one in every major district of the other inhabited islands of the Hawaiian chain, the one at Honaunau was considered the most important. It is also the only one which has lasted almost intact.

The place of refuge itself, adjacent palace grounds, royal fishponds, nearby stone platforms on which stood the houses of important chiefs, and temple structures are all within the City of Refuge National Historical Park.

The Great Wall

Although religious sanctions were the prime force in keeping a pu'uhonua going and enforcing its protection of refugees, evidently some degree of physical protection was needed. The great wall which forms the inland boundaries of the Place of Refuge at Honaunau was built about A.D. 1550. Tradition indicates that the wall was built by Keawe-ku-i-ke-ka'ai, a ruling chief of Kona, who lived about that time. The heiau (temple) 'A-lea-lea, whose large stone platform still stands inside the pu'uhonua, is also attributed to this chief.

The great wall averages 10 feet in height and is about 17 feet wide and 1,000 feet long. One leg of the wall starts at Honaunau Bay and extends more than 600 feet to the corner; the other runs from the corner toward the open sea and is almost 400 feet long. Its seaward end has been battered by tidal waves and once probably extended almost to the sea.

Hawaiian masons laid their stones dry, without mortar. In the great wall, the best or flat face of each stone has been set outward. Without wheels or metal tools, the workmen apparently used wooden pry bars, carrying sticks, rollers, and skids to move the stones. The largest stone in the face of the wall is 6½ feet high, more than

5 feet wide, and 2 feet thick. It weighs between 4 and 6 tons.

Tales tell of secret passageways in the great wall. Examinations of the wall have revealed that sections do have honeycombed interiors—evidently to save time and material in building—but the hollows are small, are unconnected, and are separated from the outer surface by at least 3 feet of solid masonry.

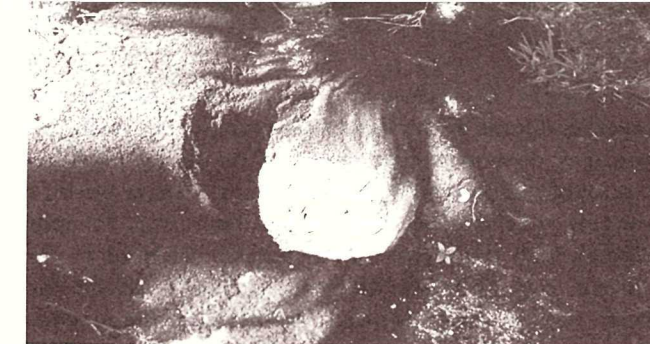
Temples Gave Protection

A pu'uhonua is a sacred refuge established by a ruling king. It operated in conjunction with a heiau (temple) whose gods protected the place of refuge and whose priests ran it. At the City of Refuge, the ruins of the first temple stand close to the sea. Most of the stones from its platform were used in building the second temple, 'A-lea-lea, built about 1550. This is the large temple platform inside the great wall. When the third temple was built, 'A-lea-lea's platform was used for recreation by the king and chiefs.

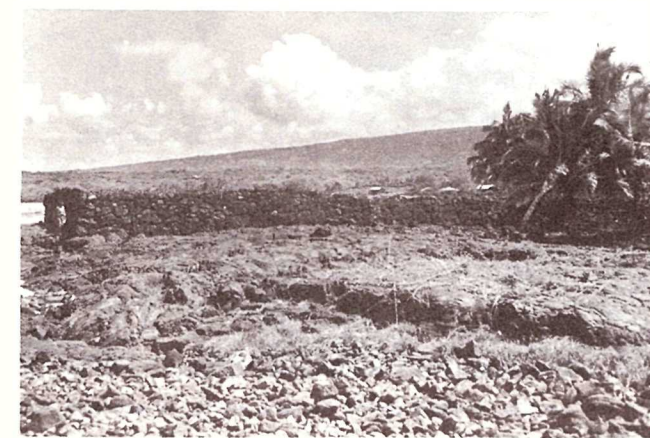
The gods of the Place of Refuge were the spirits of dead chiefs, spirits who could lead the souls of men to safety or destruction. Upon death, certain chiefs underwent a process of deification. After 1650 Keawe, a chief elevated to god status, became the major deity.



The great wall. A modern Hawaiian inspects the dry masonry of his ancestors.



This cuplike hole is one of two used for filtering awa. Used both as a drink and as a medicine, this beverage played an important role in the ceremonies and festivals of the early Hawaiians.



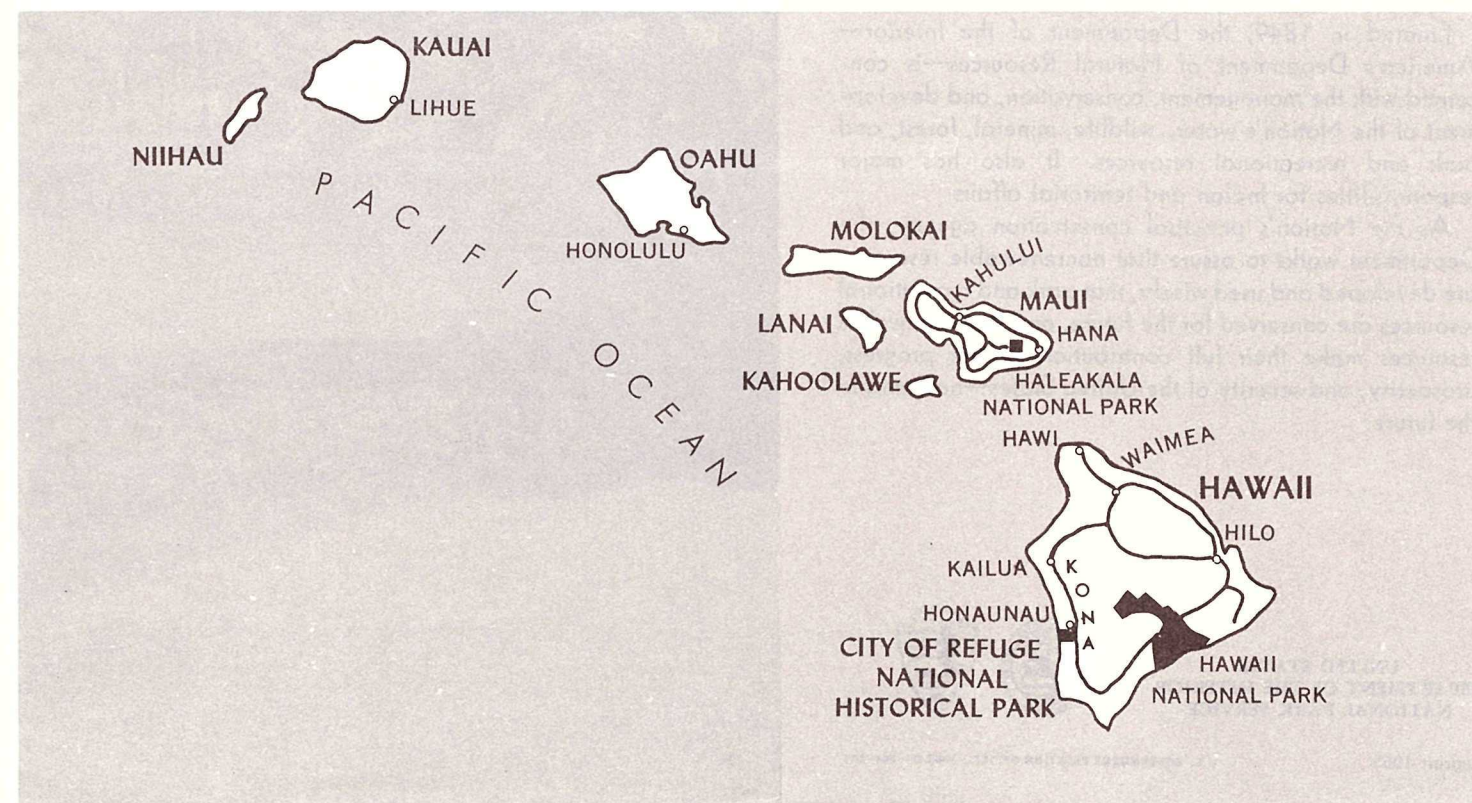
The largest of three temple (heiau) platforms within the Great Wall, Alealea measures 128 by 64 feet and stands 10 feet high. Rising in the background are the slopes of Mauna Loa.



Burial caves are abundant in the cliffs rising from the shoreline near Honaunau.



This ramp was built in 1868 for horse traffic, and is today the main connection between the northern and southern portion of the park.



The Hale-o-Keawe

The third temple was built about 1650 and was in use until 1819, when the taboo system was abandoned and the practices of the old religion forbidden. The pu'uhonua which the temple protected ceased to function in that year.

The third temple was called Ka Iki 'A-lea-lea (the small 'A-lea-lea), but was better known as the Hale-o-Keawe, or the house of Keawe. It was built in honor of King Keawe-i-Kekahi-alii-o-ka-moku, who reigned in Kona about 1650.

Upon Keawe's death, his bones were placed in the temple and he was declared a god, becoming the major deity of the pu'uhonua. From time to time the bones of other important chiefs who were declared gods were added to the temple. Their combined supernatural power kept the place of refuge sanctified and inviolate.

The last deification of a chief took place in 1818 for a son of Kamehameha the Great. By that year, the bones of at least 23 deified kings and chiefs of old Hawaii were inside the thatched temple. Each was in an individual container. In addition to the bones of chiefs-made-gods, the bones of certain other selected male members of the ruling family were honored by burial there. These lesser chiefs were not considered gods, and their bones were heaped "like firewood" in a corner.

No bones of women were permitted to rest in the Hale-o-Keawe, since women were considered inferior.

Royal Mausoleum

King Kamehameha the Great united the Hawaiian Islands into one kingdom about 1800. Because the bones of his ancestors and relatives were deposited there, the Hale-o-Keawe was not destroyed in 1819 along with the other temples. However, the bones of the deified chiefs and kings were removed in 1829, and the temple was razed, leaving only the stone platform. The present location of the deified bones is uncertain.

During the period when the Hale-o-Keawe was the only temple structure standing in Hawaii, it was visited, described, and sketched by Europeans. Some items from the temple are now in museums.

Palace Grounds and Village

Honaunau is the traditional seat of the kingdom of Kona. There the kings and their courts occupied the best dwelling areas on the inland side of the Great Wall, at the head of Honaunau Bay, and along the shore to the south. Homes of the common people—those who did the work and served the court and priests—were on the opposite shore of Honaunau Bay and inland from the chiefs' homes.

All houses were one-room structures of wooden framework covered with thatch. Commoners had small, crudely built huts, usually one to a family, which were used for storage and for shelter during the infrequent storms. A chief's establishment consisted of three or more houses, each used for a specific purpose. A king might have 10 or more houses.

Men wore loin cloths and women, skirts. Women made the cloth from bark. Feather cloaks and helmets were made by men only and worn by chiefs on state occasions and into battle.

Taro, from which poi was made, sweet potatoes, breadfruit, bananas, and yams were cultivated; birds were hunted, and pigs, dogs, and fowl were raised for food. The main protein in the diet was fish. Food was cooked by steam-roasting in ground ovens. Food for both men and women was prepared separately by the men, and the sexes ate apart.

Land transport was by foot, but the chief means of travel was by canoes made from single logs.

The Park

City of Refuge National Historical Park is 111 miles from Hilo and 20 miles south of Kailua-Kona on the Island of Hawaii. Congress authorized the park in 1955, and after land acquisition it was officially established on July 1, 1961.

The park is open all year. Points of interest are visited on foot.

Much of the 180 acres in the park is covered with thorny vegetation introduced in the last century. The National Park Service is removing these exotic and undesirable plants and restoring the native vegetation. Prior to the introduction of non-native plants and trees to Hawaii, the Honaunau area was largely barren lava, with shady groves of coconut, pandanus (lau-hala), and kou along the coast. Pili grass, used for thatching houses, grew in soil pockets on the lava. Several native medicinal plants still grow in the park.

Numerous archeological ruins, burial and shelter caves, and trails are hidden in the brush, as are walls and structures of more recent times. Also found there are two royal sledding tracks called holuas. These tracks, a few feet wide and hundreds of feet long, were formerly covered with dry grass. Sleds carried chiefs down the slides in a game to see which chief could travel the farthest. Coves, cliffs, tide pools, and associated marine life are easily visited on foot along the mile-long seashore of the park.



On the papamu a game called Konane, similar to checkers, was played.



Tidal pools mark the park's coast.

Artist's conception of the Place of Refuge in the 1700's viewed from over the Pacific Ocean. Oil painting by Paul Rockwood.



How To Get There—Where To Stay

Airlines make scheduled flights from Honolulu to Hilo and Kailua-Kona several times daily. Unscheduled steamship transportation from Honolulu to the island of Hawaii is also available. Taxis meet all planes and ships. "U-drive" cars may be rented in Kailua-Kona or Hilo.

The Hawaii Visitors Bureau, a nonprofit organization with offices in Honolulu, Hilo, Wailuku, Lihue, and at 212 Stockton Street, San Francisco, will supply information about trips to and through the Hawaiian Islands.

Overnight accommodations, meals and other facilities are available 6 miles from the park at Captain Cook, and at Kailua-Kona, a resort center about 20 miles north of the park on State Route 11.

Administration

City of Refuge National Historical Park is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this park is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the scenic, scientific, and historic heritage of the United States for the benefit and inspiration of its people.

A superintendent, whose address is Honaunau, Kona, Hawaii, is in immediate charge of the park.

America's Natural Resources

Created in 1849, the Department of the Interior—America's Department of Natural Resources—is concerned with the management, conservation, and development of the Nation's water, wildlife, mineral, forest, and park and recreational resources. It also has major responsibilities for Indian and territorial affairs.

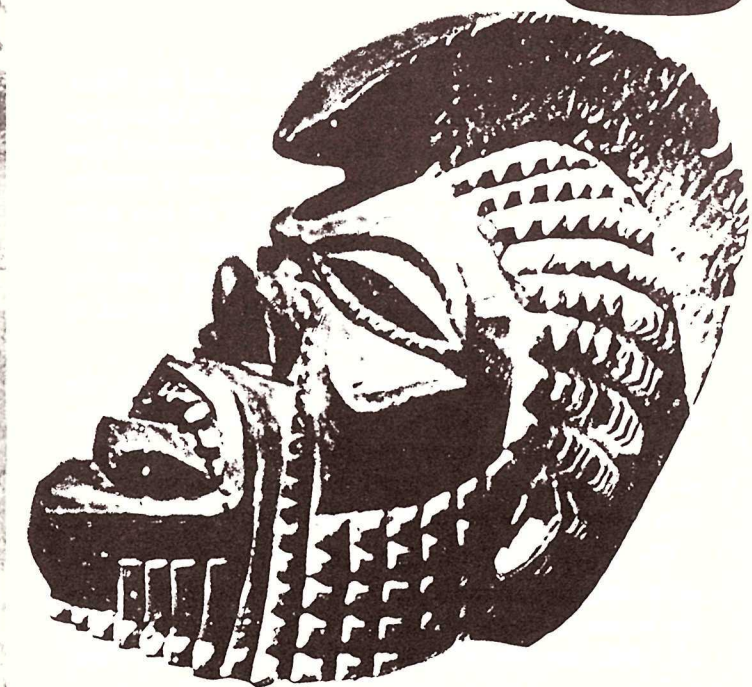
As the Nation's principal conservation agency, the Department works to assure that nonrenewable resources are developed and used wisely, that park and recreational resources are conserved for the future, and that renewable resources make their full contribution to the progress, prosperity, and security of the United States—now and in the future.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



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