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Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau

Life—

That is what this place is about. Noncombatants in time of battle, defeated warriors, and kapu breakers could escape death if they could reach this sacred refuge. And from here came the call to life, for near the refuge lived the alii, or ruling chief, who proclaimed the great celebrations of life—festivities of thankfulness for rich harvests, successful battles, and marriages.

Here, you can learn about life in Hawaii before the outsiders came in the late 1700s. To them it was a delicate balance between a life-loving people in harmony with the land and powerful and vengeful gods who could take that life away.

PU'UHONUA O HŌNAUNAU: Place of Refuge of Hōnaunau

To the people who lived here in days gone by, the area was known as Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau, meaning the place of refuge of Hōnaunau.

It was a sanctuary that provided the people with a second chance—a second chance

them. And to promote life, the seasons for fishing, for taking animals, and for gathering timber were all strictly controlled by the *kapu* to provide for all.

When a *kapu* was broken, whether it was the *kapu* of getting too close to the chief or of

Others who sought refuge here were the *noncombatants* during a battle. The object of war in those days was the extermination of the enemy, which included anyone who belonged to the opposing side. Those too old, too young, or



for life itself. Who sought new life here and what had they done?

Some were *kapu breakers*—those who had broken the sacred laws, or *kapu*. The system of *kapu* in old Hawaii embodied the rules of life for the people. Under these rules a common person couldn't get close to the chief; couldn't walk in the chief's footsteps, touch the chief's possessions, or let his shadow fall on the chief's palace grounds. Everyday activities, too, were regulated by the *kapu*. Women couldn't eat the foods reserved for offerings to the gods; they couldn't prepare meals for men or even eat with

fishing at the wrong time, the penalty was the same—death. To break the sacred *kapu* was to offend the gods, and the people believed that the gods reacted violently toward an offender, most frequently with lava flows, tidal waves, famine, or earthquakes. So, to protect themselves from these catastrophes, the people pursued a *kapu* breaker until he was caught and put to death—or until he reached a *pu'uhonua*.

If he did reach a *pu'uhonua*, a ceremony of absolution was performed by the *kahuna pule* (priest), and the offender could then return home safely, usually within a few hours or by the next morning.

unable to fight could find safety in the sanctuary, for even in brutal war, life was preserved here.

Defeated warriors also came to the *pu'uhonua*, where they could wait in safety until the battle was over. Their allegiance would then be to the victor, and their life could go on.

No matter who came here or why, this was a place of sanctuary where all was forgiven. It was not a city of criminals as the name City of Refuge might suggest. It was sacred ground on which life began anew in ancient Hawaii.

PALACE GROUNDS

This place at Hōnaunau was also the home of the ruling chief, the source not only of the *kapu* that regulated life but of the celebrations that enriched life.

His courtyard adjoined the *pu'uhonua*, and the ten or more thatched buildings that formed his palace were in the coconut palm grove. Lesser chiefs hurried from one hut to another waiting upon the chief, perhaps preparing fish taken from the royal fishponds nearby. The small beach was reserved as a royal canoe landing for the chief and his attendants, and the wooden image in the water warned others that it was for the use of royalty only.



THE GREAT WALL

A massive stone wall, which is still standing, separated the palace grounds from the *pu'uhonua*. It was built of stones formed from lava that once flowed here, and each stone was carefully laid, with no mortar to hold it in place. Altogether, it measures about 305 meters (1,000 feet) long, in the shape of an "L", 3 meters (10

feet) high, and 5.25 meters (17 feet) wide.

Stone by stone the people worked to build this wall, perhaps as a monument to Keawe-ku-i-ke-ka'ai, the ruling chief at that time—about 1550. They must have been a determined people to have moved stones weighing several tons.

In a way, the surface of the wall reflects life as it was when the wall was built. Just as life then was joyous, yet demanding, the wall of carefully fitted stones has some smooth and some rough places. Both ends reach for the sea, just as life, then, was tied to the sea for food and travel.

The Great Wall was both a barrier and a link. It separated the palace grounds from the *pu'uhonua*, the royalty from the commoners. But it joined the people together in the belief that there was hope for life in that place set apart by the wall—the *pu'uhonua*.

It was not the stone wall, however, that gave sanctity to the area, but the *heiau*, or temple, that housed the sacred bones of the dead chiefs.

HALE O KEAWE HEIAU

The religion of the people included the belief that the royal line of high chiefs had a special power—*mana*. It was a spiritual power found not only in their person but in their possessions and in the ground they walked on. *Mana* was determined by ancestry and rank, and after death it remained in the possessions of the chiefs and in their bones.

The Hale o Keawe heiau was built in honor of Keawe-i-keka-hi-alii-o-ka-moku, and his *mana* was in the *heiau* and protected

the *pu'uhonua*. After his death, his bones were placed in the temple, and the sacredness of the *pu'uhonua* increased, for by 1818 the bones of at least 23 chiefs had been placed there. The last deification was for a son of Kamehameha the Great.

This *heiau*, added at the end of the Great Wall in 1650, was the third one built here; the other two are within the walls of the *pu'uhonua*. The first must be studied further to determine its size and age; the second, 'A-le'ale'a, was built before 1550. Its huge stone platform was the foundation for thatched buildings and wooden images.

In 1819, Kamehameha II defied the *kapu* and abolished that system of religion, and all the



heiau and the *pu'uhonua* they protected ceased to function. The people were confused and uncertain about their future; and gone was the balance between life-loving people and the power and vengeance of gods who could take away life. Changes came quickly. People and ideas from outside this island world altered forever the old way of life.

A WALK THROUGH THE PARK

Here is a guide for a walking tour of the park. The numbers correspond to the numbered coconut markers you will find along the trail. Your path over the ground ahead is yours to choose. You need not stop at all markers or follow them in sequence. You need not go far or fast to experience and "feel" the land of the Hawaiians who lived here.

Their lifestyle before 1819 was rigidly controlled by the *mana* (spiritual power) and *kapu* (sacred rules of life). Intertwined with these beliefs was the promise of sanctuary, which was fulfilled in the *pu'uhonua*—a place of refuge set aside by the *alii*, or chief. Keep these things in mind and you will begin to understand the Hawaiian way of life as it used to be.

As you leave the visitor center, prepare to step back over 200 years. Relax, enjoy the breeze, the sun or rain, the sound of the waves, and the charm of the area. Look around you. Perhaps you will see Hawaiians dyeing their fishnets, pounding poi, catching crabs, gathering sea urchins and preparing them for eating, fishing, carving, or weaving. Stop and chat with them. Learn of their feelings for this land and their ancestors.

To begin your tour, we invite you to listen to the three taped messages located on the rail along the walkway. Look at the tile murals as you listen to the recordings. The chant you will first hear is the *kumulipo* or creation chant.

1 Palace Grounds. Imagine the palace grounds with several grass huts scattered here and

there; the chiefs, hurrying about, waiting on the high chief; the warriors, clad in *malo* (loincloths), guarding the royal grounds. Because the chief lived here, this area was sacred, and commoners were not allowed to walk on or even cast their shadows upon these grounds—the penalty was death!

Look up and around you. Are these trees and shrubs familiar? Most native plants served more than one purpose. For example, the coconut was used for eating, fibers of the coconut husk were used to make rope, and the leaves were used for shade. Notice, too, that most of the coconut trees have been trimmed; however, people have asked that we leave some trees in their natural state, and this we have done. So, if you walk off the beaten trail, please be on the watch for falling coconuts and coconut fronds.

2 House Models. These models represent the different types of houses and show how they were built. The larger structure is the type used by the high chiefs, and the smaller is the kind used by the commoners for storage. 'Ohi'a wood was used for the framework. *Ti* leaves and *pili* grass were used for thatching.

3 Kōnane (Pronounced kō-nāh-nay). This stone was specially made so that you can sit and play a game of *kōnane*, an old Hawaiian "checker" game still played by many. (Rules of the game are available at the visitor center information counter.)

4 Kanoa. These stone bowls were carved out with stone tools. What were they used for? Maybe to hold the dye for dyeing nets and clothing; perhaps as a place to make salt or

to mash the 'awa root in preparing a ceremonial drink.

5 Tree Mold. As the lava flowed to build this land on which you're standing, a tree fell and left a mold in the cooling lava. We do not know when this happened, but because everything has been built directly over the lava, it must have been long ago.

6 Keone'ele. This cove was the royal canoe landing. Thus, it was *kapu* (forbidden) to all commoners. The *ki'i* (image) standing in the water might have marked a *kapu* boundary. Today swimming is permitted here. However, because of the area's historical importance, we ask you not to sunbathe on this beach.

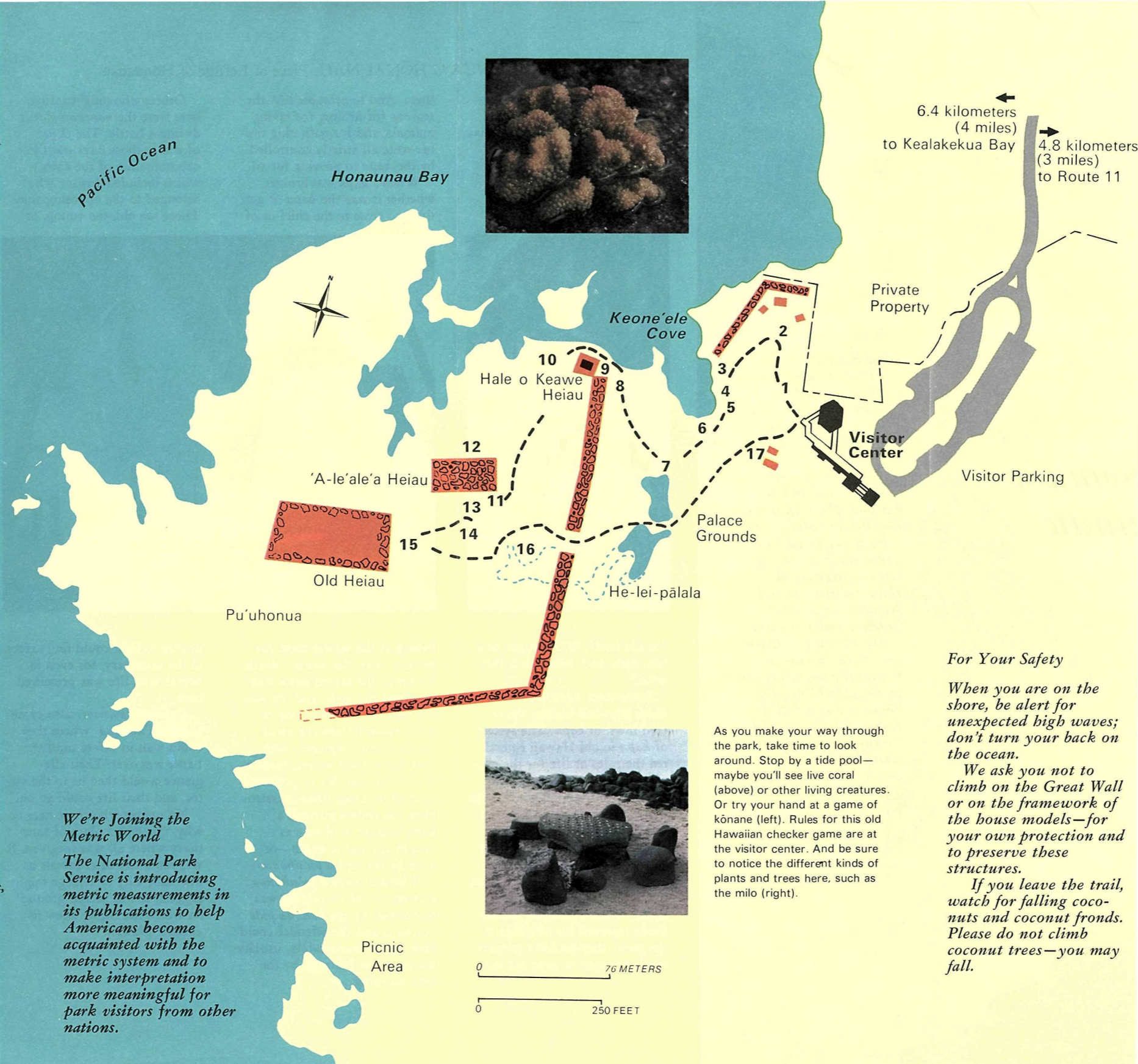
Nearby are Hawaiian canoes built in the old way; they're probably the only ones in existence. As in ancient times, the canoes are made of *koa* wood, with lashings of coconut fibers. No metal was used.

7 He-lei-pālala. This fishpond served only the royalty. Certain types of fish reserved for the chiefs were caught in the sea and placed in this royal fishpond for their use.

8 The Great Wall. Notice the large stones fitted together like a jig-saw puzzle in the dry masonry work. Also notice the height, length, and width of the wall. The Hawaiians probably used wooden rollers and levers of logs to get the stones in position. Built sometime in the mid-1500s, this wall separates the palace grounds from the *pu'uhonua* (sanctuary). Although repaired twice, for the most part, this is the original wall. Please do not climb on the wall—we would like to save the wall and save you from getting hurt.

We're Joining the Metric World

The National Park Service is introducing metric measurements in its publications to help Americans become acquainted with the metric system and to make interpretation more meaningful for park visitors from other nations.



As you make your way through the park, take time to look around. Stop by a tide pool—maybe you'll see live coral (above) or other living creatures. Or try your hand at a game of *kōnane* (left). Rules for this old Hawaiian checker game are at the visitor center. And be sure to notice the different kinds of plants and trees here, such as the *milo* (right).

For Your Safety

When you are on the shore, be alert for unexpected high waves; don't turn your back on the ocean.

We ask you not to climb on the Great Wall or on the framework of the house models—for your own protection and to preserve these structures.

If you leave the trail, watch for falling coconuts and coconut fronds. Please do not climb coconut trees—you may fall.

9 Hale o Keawe Heiau (Temple). [Reconstructed] The original Hale o Keawe heiau served as a temple mausoleum and housed the bones of 23 chiefs. It is believed that the *mana* (spiritual power) in the chiefs' bones gave additional protection to the place of refuge. The little wooden door at ground level is the only opening into this reconstruction. Food offerings were placed on the *lele* (raised platform).

10 Pu'uhonua. Now that you have entered the refuge area, what do you think it would be like to live here? To this sacred place came women and children, the aged and maimed fleeing the ravages of battle; defeated warriors and *kapu* breakers came seeking refuge. If you had broken a *kapu*, you would probably have had to swim from across the bay to get here. Once inside the *pu'uhonua* you would have been absolved by the *kabuna pule* (priest) and released—perhaps within a few hours—and free to resume a normal life outside the refuge walls.

The people in the *pu'uhonua* obtained food from the tide-pools. Look into them to see the many types of aquatic life.

11 'A-le'ale'a Heiau (Temple). At one time this temple platform probably had one or several grass houses on it. After the construction of Hale-o-Keawe heiau it may have been used as a recreation area.

12 Keoua Stone. A legend, retold by Mark Twain, says that this stone was the favorite resting place of Keoua, high chief of Kona. Note the six holes in the rock around this stone. They may have been made for posts to support a canopy for shade.

13 Ka'ahumanu Stone. As the legend goes, Queen Ka'ahumanu, favorite wife of King Kamehameha I, left him after a lovers' quarrel and swam for many kilometers to hide under this stone. Her little pet dog barked until Ka'ahumanu was found. It is said that the king and queen made up and "lived happily ever after."

14 Papamu (Same as No. 3). This is an original stone used in the game of *kōnane*, played with black and white pebbles. The object of the game is to be able to make the last move.

15 Old Heiau (Temple) Site. We believe this pile of stones marks the spot of the original *heiau*, which was abandoned after 'A-le'ale'a Heiau was constructed.

16 Petroglyph. There is a picture carved in the rock here. Can you find it? Perhaps it is the work of one who lived and served the *kabuna pule* within these walls, a *kapu* breaker, or one escaping the fury of battle.

17 Halau. A-frame structures such as these were used as work sheds and for storage.

We hope you have enjoyed your visit. Be careful of loose rock on your way back to the visitor center.

Mahalo a nui loa!

NATIVE HAWAIIAN PLANTS

Wauke. The sound of wooden mallets pounding the wauke bark on the wooden anvils echoed throughout the villages. Some say the women beating the bark into *tapa* cloth sent messages with the rhythm of the mallet. This plant is also known as the paper mulberry. Cloth beaten from its bark was

the finest in the Pacific islands.

Noni. This plant was used to treat a host of ailments. Its roots, bark, leaves and fruit were used for healing cuts, broken bones, and reducing fever, and for treating diabetes, heart trouble, and high blood pressure. Carefully smell a ripe fruit.

Milo. The wood from this tree was carved into vessels in the shape of calabashes for carrying, storing, and mixing things.



Niu. Every part of the coconut tree was used in the old days. From the husk came cord, mats, and brushes; from the leaves, thatch, baskets, and fans; and from the trunk, spears, posts, and drums. And the coconuts gave food and oil!

Hala. This unusual tree is also known as pandanus, screw-pine, or walking tree. Its thorny leaves were cleaned and softened for weaving. Skilled hands then made mats, sails for canoes, pillows, sandals, and balls. The fruit from the female tree, which is fibrous, made good brushes for decorating *tapa* cloth with natural dyes.