

# Kōke'e

My *wahi pana*, is the land division of Kōke'e, on Kaua'i. Kōke'e is special to both my family and I. Kōke'e is in the Waimea ahupua'a, part of the Kona moku. Waimea is the largest *ahupua'a* on Kaua'i, covering nearly 93,000 acres. According to *Place Names of Hawai'i*, by Esther T. Mookini, Mary Kawena Pukui, and Samuel Hoyt Elbert, Kōke'e means to "bend or to wind." Its elevation is around 3,200 to 4,200 feet above sea level. My grandma, who was taken to Kōke'e as a child, said that her earliest memory was going "on picnics and plum picking." She said that they also went to pick *maile* with her father quite often. Similar to my grandma, I have early memories of going up with my family for gatherings and picking *maile* and *mokihana*, which can only be found on Kaua'i, for special events. Kōke'e is a cherished place for my family and I.

Going up to Kōke'e can be a short adventure or an all day event. Driving up the winding road through Waimea or Kekaha, you pass an abundance of trees, like *koa*, *'ōhi'a lehua*, and eucalyptus. As you drive, you feel the hot, humid air leave, and the crisp, cold air of Kōke'e blow through your windows. On Waimea Canyon Drive, you can look over the side of the cliff, and see the drop and magnificent views of Waimea Canyon. Waimea Canyon Drive meets up with Kōke'e Road, which passes through Kekaha. Kōke'e Road continues for the rest of the journey up. At mile marker 15, is

Kōkeʻe State Park, with cabins and trails before and way after. There are many places for recreation, camping, hiking and hunting throughout Kōkeʻe.

Kōkeʻe is abundant in many native plants and animals, but also with invasive species. My grandma talked about some plants that were there while she was growing up. Going up to Kōkeʻe, she said they picked purple *lilikoʻi*, which according to her is hard to find now. There are also many invasive species that are taking over. Some of these include *kahili* ginger, or *hedychium gardnerianum* and blackberry. Introduced animals, like wild goats and boar also have a lasting effect on the wildlife. These animals dig up and eat native plants, giving them little chance to survive. Additionally, something that we have gone as a family to do is pick *maile* and *mokihana*. One change these have seen, is the rise of people picking to sell. This creates a problem, because once these plants are gone, it will be over. As a result, many lei shops supply *maile* from the Cook Islands.

The *ʻōhiʻa lehua* is a special plant in Hawaiʻi. But, these plants are facing huge problems. *Metrosideros polymorpha*, the scientific name for *ʻōhiʻa lehua*, faces the disease, “rapid *ʻōhiʻa* death.” Rapid *ʻōhiʻa* death, or ROD, is a fungus that enters the plant through an opening, killing the tree. There are two species that affect trees on Kauaʻi, *Ceratocystis huliohia* and *Ceratocystis lukuohia*. According to the Kauaʻi Invasive Species Committee, these are new to science. This fungus has affected trees

around the island of Kaua'i, so the *'ōhi'a* trees in Kōke'e have a high risk of becoming infected. The fungus can be spread naturally or by people transporting it.

Though not many have been made, there are some modern changes that have taken place, like new roads and trails. My grandma reminisced about when she was younger, there were fewer trails. She also talked about the building of a new road. She said that when she was younger, there “was only one way up to Kōke'e, and that was through Kekaha.” Now there are two roads, one from Waimea and one from Kekaha. Also, Kōke'e State Park was being proposed to become a national park. The original plan was created in 2003, which according to *The Garden Island Newspaper*, “included a 40- to 60-room hotel with restaurant, a park entry gate to collect user fees from both residents and non-residents, new overlooks above Waimea Valley and a souvenir store at Waimea Canyon Lookout.” Overtime, this proposal was changed and edited, but brought back up in 2014. Kaua'i residents did not approve of this, partly because as a national park, there would be no hunting or gathering of vegetation, which is extremely important to some Kaua'i residents. These are some of the modern changes made to Kōke'e.

In the future, I think Kōke'e will be pretty similar to the way it is now. My grandma agrees that “it's a place to preserve.” Many of the plants are protected, and people are aware of the importance of the forest. I think the future of Kōke'e can be ensured by educating people about the issues it faces and why the forest is important for everyone.

For my family, it is a special place, because it is a place where we can all gather. Starting from my grandmother and her parents time, having picnics in the park, to camping with my mother and their family. Plus, having the ability to gather plants and vegetation like maile and mokihana. My hope for Kōke'e is that it will be preserved for future generations to enjoy.