LEARNING ABOUT HAWAI’I’S PAST

An Introduction to Hawaiian Archaeology

What is archaeology?
Archaeology is a study of past cultures based on physical evidence and supported by research of written records and oral history. Through archaeological research we seek answers to questions about the past.

Why do archaeology?
In Hawai’i today, many of the archaeological studies are done when land development is proposed to determine if archaeological sites are known or likely to be found on the land. Other archaeology is done as research projects. Each archaeological project contributes something to our knowledge of the past.

What is an archaeology site?
Sites are places where people lived, worked, and worshipped. Sites are marked by what people left behind, including abandoned heiau and house sites, agricultural terraces, fishponds, rock walls, discarded tools and rubbish piles. Archaeologists study these sites to learn more about how people lived, where and when they lived, and how they adapted to the natural environment.

Heiau are religious sites and are the largest and most impressive Hawaiian sites. Defined by massive stone platforms or extensive rock walls, heiau illustrate the importance of religion in Hawaiian culture. For these reasons, many heiau have been preserved.

Ki’i pōhaku (petroglyphs) are the forms carved or pecked on stone surfaces. Many of these are human forms. The papamā (checkerboard) was used for the game konane.

Cultural deposits indicate where people lived and are marked by charcoal staining, stone pavings, artifacts, and midden.

Fishponds were built along shorelines and streams to raise fish for ready harvest.

Adzes were the major stone tool made and used by the Hawaiians. These tools were hafted and lashed onto a handle for woodworking.

Drilled dog teeth were a common ornament. These teeth were lashed together to make bracelets and anklets.

Auger shells were drilled for the attachment of a string and used as a gourd stopper.

Preserve the Past for the Future

You are welcome to visit many of the Hawaiian archaeological sites found in parks and botanical gardens. However, you are asked to remember that these sites are fragile and subject to damage and collapse. Please visit with respect and preserve these cultural places for future generations.

• View the site from the exterior. Please do not climb on or over the rock walls. The stacked rock is unstable and may collapse.
• It is unlawful to take, excavate, destroy, or alter any historic site on state land. Any person who violates this law is subject to a fine of $10,000 (HRS Chapter 6E-11).
• Wrapping a rock in a ti leaf is not a traditional offering. This damages the integrity of the site.

For more information, contact the State Department of Land and Natural Resources, Historic Preservation and State Parks Divisions on Hawai’i, Kaua’i, Maui, and O’ahu.

E mālama no kēia mua aku
Preserving the Past for the Future

STATE OF HAWAI’I
Department of Land & Natural Resources

SOCIETY FOR HAWAIIAN ARCHAEOLOGY
**What do archaeologists do?**

Archaeological research is conducted to learn more about people of the past by studying what they left behind. Before going into the field, archaeologists conduct research in libraries and archives where they study written histories, *mo'olelo* (traditional histories), maps, photographs, and previous archaeological reports for the area. This research provides clues to what kinds of archaeological sites might be expected in the area.

**What are the tools of the archaeologist?**

During excavations, information is both gathered and destroyed. Therefore, it is important that archaeologists work slowly and carefully to obtain all the information and record it accurately. This means using hand-tools, such as a trowel, dustpan, and brush. Screens are used to gather what may be missed when excavating.

**Finding Sites:**

Walking surveys are conducted to locate sites, including surface structures and buried cultural deposits. Archaeologists record the sites they find with maps, photographs, and written descriptions. These sites may include rock walls, living floors, firepits, and refuse pits.

**Digging the Past:**

*Excavation*

By carefully digging through layers of soil and cultural remains, archaeologists gather information on how an area was used and how people lived. They excavate in square units and measure distances and depth in metrics.

**Preservation & Interpretation:**

Significant archaeological sites are preserved as an important part of Hawaiʻi's unique cultural history. Our understanding of the site from the archaeological research can be shared in tours, signs, and brochures. Preserved sites can be found in parks, gardens, resorts, golf courses, and other attractions.

**What can you do?**

You can become a site steward and help protect Hawaiʻi's archaeological sites from damage and vandalism. Report disturbances, share your knowledge, and educate others.

**Making Sense:**

Writing the report

Archaeological reports document the work performed, interpret the findings, present conclusions, and identify questions for future research. These reports are maintained by the State Historic Preservation Division.