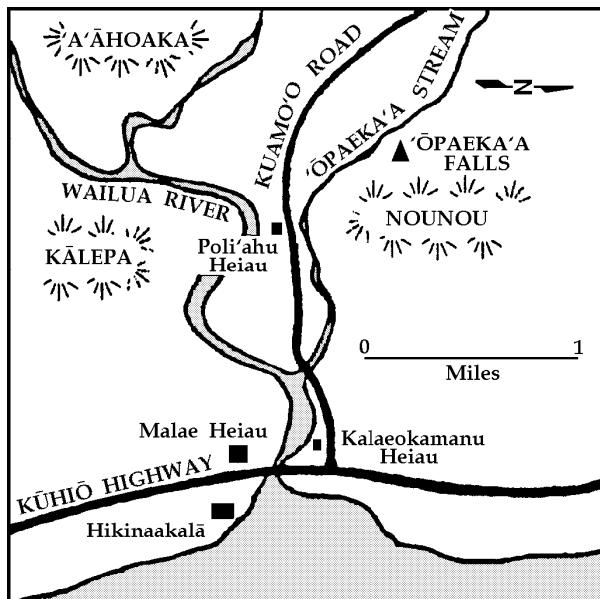


## WAILUA AHUPUA'A

The Wailua *ahupua'a* (traditional land division) ran from Mt. Waialeale to Wailua Bay. The Wailua River runs the length of the *ahupua'a* for a distance of 11.8 miles. The ridges of Nounou and Kālepa divide the *ahupua'a* into the *makai* (seaward) portion called Wailua Kai and the *mauka* (upland) portion called Wailua Uka.

Wailuanuiahoano, translated as the great, sacred Wailua, refers to the lower portion of the Wailua River basin and is named for an *ali'i* who lived in the 14th Century.



Wailua and Waimea were the two royal centers on Kaua'i prior to Western contact. These royal centers were the political, religious, and social centers for Kaua'i's paramount chiefs (*ali'i nui*) who resided at these sites for much of the year. Certain areas, such as the *heiau*, were set aside exclusively for the *ali'i* and priests. The *maka'āinana* (commoners) supported this royal compound by farming the agricultural fields along the river, harvesting the inland fishpond, and fishing the ocean waters of Wailua Bay.

The traditional Hawaiian religion was abolished in 1819 and missionaries arrived in 1820. Debora Kapule, former wife of Kaua'i's king Kaumuali'i, was an early convert to Christianity. When she lived in Wailua in 1830s, she is said to have used some *heiau* as animal pens.

Today, these *heiau* are important reminders of Hawai'i's past and a valuable link for the Hawaiian community to their cultural heritage.

## WAILUA COMPLEX OF HEIAU

The Wailua Complex of Heiau was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1962. Consisting of Poli'ahu Heiau, Hikinaakalā Heiau, Kalaeokamanu Heiau, and Malae Heiau, these *heiau* denote the religious and social significance of the Wailua *ahupua'a* to the history and culture of both Kaua'i and Hawai'i. Other sites within this historic complex are the royal birthsite at Holoholokū, the petroglyphs at the rivermouth, and the bellstone.

Wailua River State Park was initially established in 1954 in recognition of the outstanding scenic and wilderness character of the Wailua River along with the significant historical, archaeological, geological and other scientific values. The *heiau* sites were included in the park in 1962 to promote preservation and public awareness of these important cultural resources.



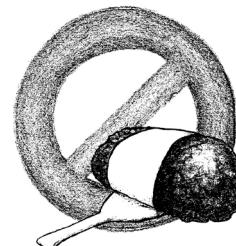
STATE OF HAWAII  
Department of Land &  
Natural Resources  
Division of State Parks



Special recognition is given to Nā Kahu Hikina A Ka Lā, a community volunteer group, for their hard work and dedication as the curators of Poli'ahu Heiau.

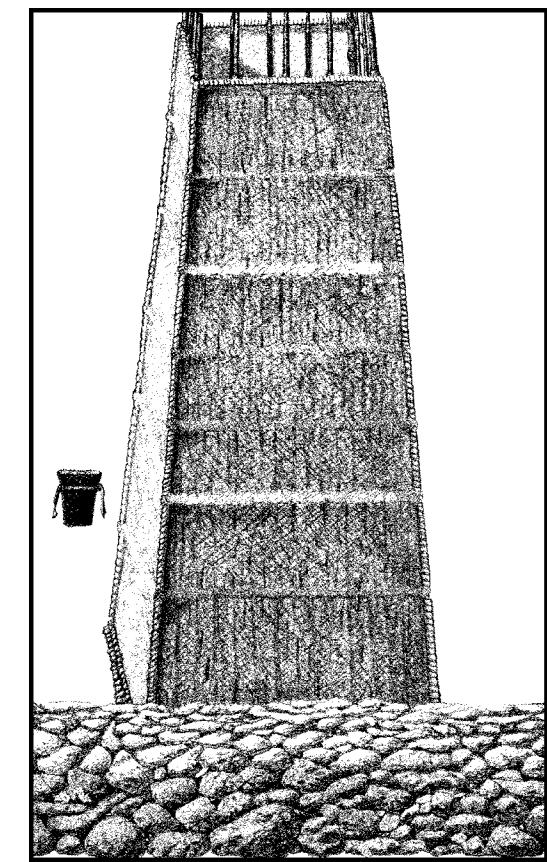
## PRESERVE HAWAII'S PAST FOR THE FUTURE

Traditionally, food items were left as offerings at a *heiau*. Please do not wrap or move rocks and do not leave items such as coins, incense, or candles as they cause long-term damage to this fragile resource.



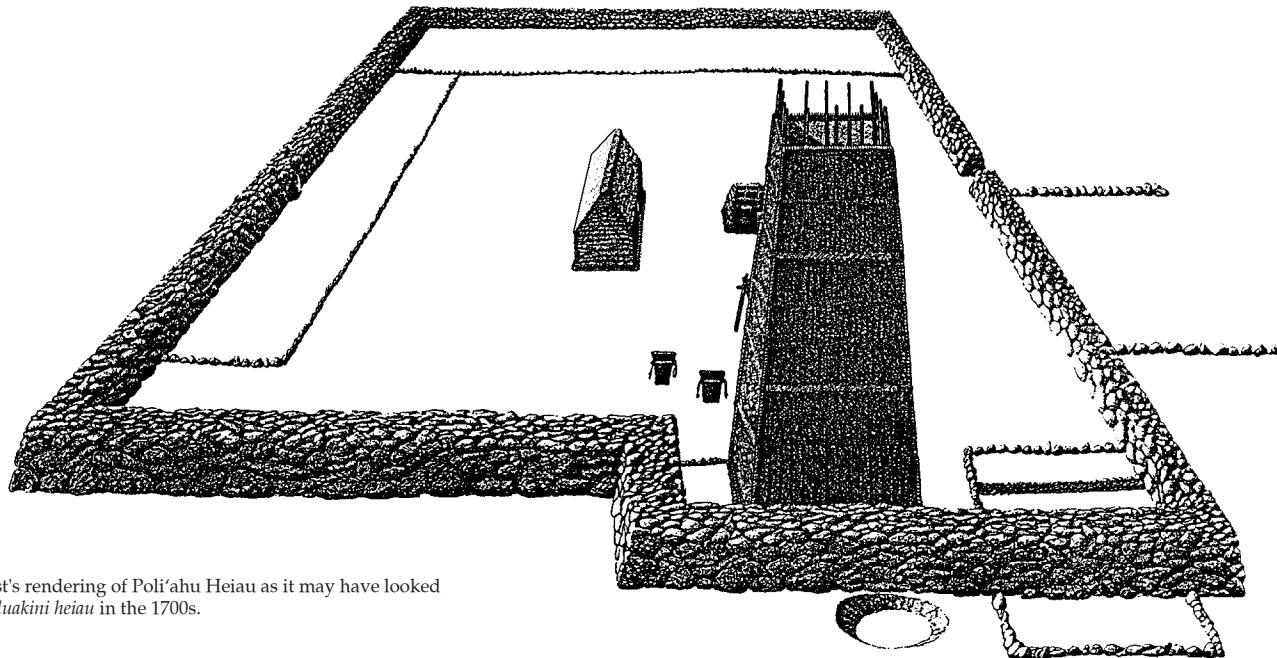
Artwork by Frank Fellhauer 10/97

# POLI'AHU HEIAU WAILUA COMPLEX



Wailua River State Park  
Kaua'i

## LUAKINI HEIAU



Artist's rendering of Poli'ahu Heiau as it may have looked as a *luakini heiau* in the 1700s.

Poli'ahu Heiau is situated on a bluff above the Wailua River with commanding views *makai* (seaward) to Wailua Bay and *mauka* (inland) to the ridges of Nounou and Kālepa and the peak called 'A'āhoaka. This is one of 7 *heiau* recorded along the Wailua River.

It is uncertain when this *heiau* was built but based on historical traditions, its construction is attributed to the *menehune* which suggests some antiquity. It was probably in use during the 1600s and 1700s but may be older. Oftentimes, *heiau* were modified and enlarged by new *ali'i* (chiefs) when they came to power.

The walls enclose just over an acre and are constructed by locking the stacked rocks with no use of mortar. The walls, measuring 5 feet high and 5 feet wide, still show the craftsmanship of these rock wall builders. Rock was brought up to this bluff by many hands from the rivers below. The rock was used to build these walls and pave the interior floor. An interesting feature of this *heiau* is the notched corner along the east wall which appears to be a later construction.

A large, complex *heiau* such as Poli'ahu would have been built under the direction of an *ali'i nui* (high ruling chief) in consultation with his *kāhuna* (priests). The gathering and stacking of the rock was done by the *maka'āinana* (commoners) who took time from their farming and fishing to build these sites.

## RELIGIOUS SITE

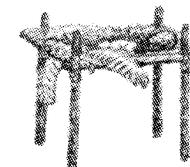
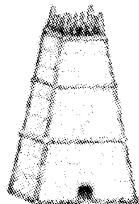
The function of *heiau* could change over time. Some *heiau* were dedicated to the god Lono and ceremonies were conducted to insure fertility of crops and fishing grounds. Other *heiau* were dedicated to the god Kū for success in war. These were called *luakini heiau* and could involve human sacrifice as well as offerings of pig and fish.

Because of the size and construction of Poli'ahu Heiau, it has been suggested that this *heiau* was a *luakini*. As a *luakini* there would have been a number of perishable structures placed within the walled enclosure, including carved wooden *ki'i* (images) and pole and thatch *hale* (houses) to store ceremonial items.

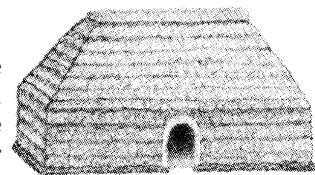
The size and location of these *luakini heiau* conveyed a sense of *ali'i* power and authority. They illustrate the development of complex chiefdoms in Hawai'i in the late pre-contact period (1600-1778) and the close relationship between the political and religious systems. It was only the paramount chiefs (*ali'i nui*) with the highest political and social status that could build these large, impressive *heiau* and command the large labor force needed for such a project.

No two *heiau* were constructed alike but there are certain features that are common to all *luakini heiau*. Within the walls of Poli'ahu Heiau would be several features built of perishable materials, such as wood and *pili* grass. These structures were destroyed when the traditional Hawaiian religion was abolished in 1819. Today, only the stacked rock walls and stone foundations remain.

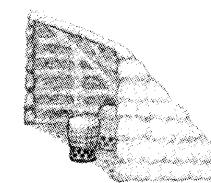
**ANU'U or LANANU'U MAMAO**  
Oracle tower where the *kāhuna* communicated with the gods. This structure often measured 20 feet or more in height and was a pole frame covered with *kapa*.



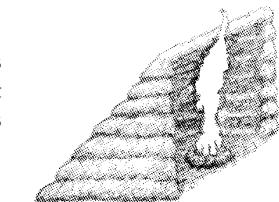
**LELE ALTAR**  
This raised wooden platform was where the offerings for the gods were placed.



**HALE MANA**  
The ceremonial items were stored in this pole and thatch house where the *kahuna* might also reside for short periods.



**HALE PAHU**  
This structure housed the sacred drum (*pahu*) that announced the rituals and sent messages.



**HALE UMU**  
This is where the temple fires were lit. These fires might be used to cook the pigs as offerings.



**KI'I**  
The wooden images (*ki'i*) were placed by the altar and at the entrance to oversee the site.