**WAILUA AHUPUA‘A**

The Wailua ahupua‘a (traditional land division) ran from Mt. Waiale’ale 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.

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**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.

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**PRESERVE HAWAI‘I’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
Poliʻahu 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 aliʻi (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 Poliʻahu would have been built under the direction of an aliʻi nui (high ruling chief) in consultation with his kāhuna (priests). The gathering and stacking of the rock was done by the makaʻāinana (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 Poliʻahu 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 kiʻi (images) and pole and thatch hale (houses) to store ceremonial items.

The size and location of these luakini heiau conveyed a sense of aliʻi power and authority. They illustrate the development of complex chiefdoms in Hawaiʻi in the late pre-contact period (1600-1778) and the close relationship between the political and religious systems. It was only the paramount chiefs (aliʻi 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.