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Waimea water spirit's legend grows

Offerings left at sloped rock, subsequent rains perpetuate cultural beliefs, traditions

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WAIMEA, Hawai'i — In times of drought, the elders in Waimea remember the mo'o wahine, or female water spirit, and the comfortably sloped rock where the old stories say she comes to sun herself.

The rock is known as Manaua, and after the long drought this spring, Hawaiian cultural practitioners began leaving lychee, maile lei and other offerings there in a tradition that is supposed to bring rain.

According to local legend, the mo'o wahine lives at a pond some distance from the rock, and when she sees the offerings at Manaua, she realizes the people remember her.

BIG ISLAND



Believe what you like, but it began raining in Waimea town hours after representatives of Halau Hulu Ke'alaonamupua left the first offerings in

mid-June.

More offerings appeared later — it isn't known who left them — and Waimea teacher Pua Case was deeply moved. She said Waimea doesn't have many visible symbols left that are connected to tradition and story.

"It's so much more than leis being put on a rain rock," she said. "It's about the active practice of culture, and respect for those things that were done generations ago, that we not forget, especially as we develop so quickly here."

"Whether it rains or not is not as important as participating in the practice, and helping our people to remember that these stories really mean something," she said.

There are several stories associated with the rock, some modern and some that are old.

The history volume called "Parker Ranch of Hawai'i" relates how Richard Smart, descendent of ranch founder John Palmer Parker, once had a low fence built around the rock to protect the site.

A severe drought followed, and the rains didn't return until Smart ordered the fence removed, according to the account.

Hawaiian storyteller Ku'ulei Keakealani recently stood on the crispy brown grass surrounding Manaua and told an older account, a story of how a group of boys



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Big Island teacher Pua Case, with her daughter, Kapulei Flores, 7, tells the story about Manaua rock in Waimea, where cultural practitioners recently brought offerings for the female water spirit, mo'o wahine, after an extremely dry spring. It rained a week later.

went out to catch birds at nearby Pu'u Hōkū'ula, and went for a swim afterward at the mo'o wahine's pond to cool off.

One of the boys disappeared, and the elders believed it was because the mo'o wahine took a liking to the lad, and decided to keep him for herself.

Case's father, William Case, was the water foreman at Parker Ranch for many years, and he introduced Pua Case to the legend.

During a drought in the early 1980s, William Case asked his daughter's hula halau to make lei offerings at the rock, which had been nearly covered with overgrown vegetation.

After the first offerings were placed at the rock that year, more offerings of lei and food suddenly appeared, Pua Case said.

"It wasn't really forgotten after all," she recalled. "We knew that this was

something that our community was still connected to, and it rained, it poured, it was wonderful."

After the long drought this year, William Case once again suggested it was time to make offerings at Manaua.

By that point, Deputy Water Manager Quirino Antonio with the Big Island Department of Water Supply was ready to accept any help he could get.

Drought has been a particular problem in Waimea this year because two 50 million-gallon storage reservoirs there were damaged in the Oct. 15 earthquakes, and have not been repaired.

That reduced the reserves the county has available to serve the area, and as the dry weather lingered, the county imposed mandatory 25 percent water use restrictions on Waimea and surrounding areas.

Special pipes and generators were im-

ported and readied in case the drought got worse.

Then the rains resumed in some mauka areas, and after the offerings were made, the water reserves climbed to more than 70 million gallons. "Maybe it helped us out, because it's been gaining," Antonio said.

To Pua Case, the whole incident is something she can use to re-enforce the connection with the past for her students at Waimea Middle Public Conversion Charter School. They will learn the latest story of the Manaua.

"It's what we do to not forget. I took my 7-year-old there in the afternoon so she would know this is something she must continue," Case said. "It's about practicing your stories."

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