



Oli Kāhea
He haki nu‘anu‘a nei kai
‘O ‘awa ana i uka
Pehea e hiki aku ai
‘O ka leo
Mai pa‘a i ka leo

Indeed a rough and crashing sea
Echoing into the uplands
How is it that one lands?
It is the voice
Do not hold back the voice

*—chant requesting entrance
to Kaho‘olawe*



HEALING KAHO‘OLAWE

A bombing target no longer,
this rarely visited island has much to reveal.

BY LIANNE BIDAL THOMPSON





It's an island both shrouded in mystery and at the same time, an open book, waiting for its secrets to be discovered and shared. Kaho'olawe has enjoyed and endured many identities throughout the ages: home to thriving fishing villages, beacon for wayfinders, penal colony, goat, sheep and cattle ranch, sacred place, bombing target, place of protest and now, island reserve.

Many first hear of Kaho'olawe mentioned as one of the major Hawaiian Islands that no one visits. This is only partially true. Today, people are on the dry, shrubby island, working to restore it to a verdant, thriving place where Hawaiian practices can once again be held, a place where the island's history will be learned and shared. The Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC) is working to make that happen.

After the start of WWII, Kaho'olawe was turned over to the U.S. Navy to use as a bombing

target. On Jan. 4, 1976, the first landing of protestors on Kaho'olawe included nine people who would later form the Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana. This group eventually sued the federal government to return Kaho'olawe to the state of Hawai'i. In 1980, the U.S. Navy and Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana (PKO) signed a consent decree to allow PKO access to the island. The group used this access for religious, cultural educational and restoration activities.

Over the years, important archeological and cultural sites on the island were identified. There are now more than 3,000 identified sites, all of which are part of the National Register of Historic Places. Bombing of the island was temporarily halted in 1990 and in 1992, a healing ceremony, with the aim of further the process of returning the island to the state, was held. That same year, KIRC was created.

PA group gathers at Maa'ula Nui, Kaho'olawe's highest peak. While the work on Kaho'olawe is meant to rehabilitate the island, many KIRC volunteers insist that it's the island that changes them for the better. KAHO'OLAWA ISLAND RESERVE COMMISSION (KIRC) PHOTOS. PETROGLYPH PHOTO, STAR-ADVERTISER PHOTO





DENNIS ODA PHOTO



KIRC PHOTO



DENNIS ODA PHOTO

KIRC's projects depend a lot on volunteers, who arrive by boat. Projects include plant restoration and soil erosion mitigation through the Kipuka Strategy, ridding the island of ordnances and maintaining sites, such as Moa'ula iki and its bellstone and ahu.

The first aim of KIRC was to plan out the future of the island. The process of returning Kaho'olawe—earlier nicknamed the Target Island, now called the Sacred Island—was a long one. At first, the title for the island was given from the U.S. Navy to the state in 1994 “to be held in trust until the formation of a federally-recognized sovereign Hawaiian entity.” Later in 2003, a ceremony at 'Iolani Palace marked the transfer of access control to the island from the Navy to the state; the Navy ended its Kaho'olawe UXO Clearance Project in 2004. This meant that about 75 percent of the island is cleared of unexploded ordnances (UXO).

Today, KIRC continues its mission to plan for the island's future. And, the island's future is tightly tied to its past. In ancient times, Kaho'olawe was dedicated to Kanaloa, the Hawaiian ocean god. In fact, its historical name is Kohemalamalama o Kanaloa.

To that end KIRC's vision for Kaho'olawe is to restore the island to what it once was: a sacred place that honored a god, its ecosystem restored, “Kanaloa is a *pu'uhonua* and a *wahi pana* where Native Hawaiian cultural practices flourish.”

KIRC's mission is, in short, to achieve this vision and allow for “meaningful, safe use of Kaho'olawe.”

The group, through public input, has developed a master plan to achieve these goals by 2026, which will commemorate 50 years since that first protest landing. The plan, called I Ola Kanaloa (“Life to Kanaloa”), is a work in progress (iolakanaloa.org) and has many smaller components—involving land, sea, science, history and culture—that work to one large goal.

The group works toward this goal through public outreach with various volunteer and civic groups around the state (and the nation) that come to the island for short periods of time, usually about a week. These groups facilitate KIRC's restoration projects such as planting seeds, or helping with erosion mitigation.

“We have these mounds [built] with mulch. And, as the wind blows, it deposits soils and it builds up, and we plant in that clean soil, because we know that soil is clear,” says Mike Naho'opi'i, executive director of KIRC.

Naho'opi'i is the perfect example of why the entrance chant, and possibly more importantly, the release chant (at the end of this story) are part of the KIRC experience.



DENNIS ODA PHOTO



CORY YAP PHOTO

It's been said that those who come to the island and don't recite the release chant can't get Kaho'olawe out of their minds.

"It's like they can't re-focus on their lives back home," Naho'opi'i says. The release chant asks the island to let the guest go home. As someone who's had Kaho'olawe as a part of his life ("I learned 20 years ago that I was part of the first group to the island that included children") since his first trip as a Kamehameha High School student, Naho'opi'i certainly knows the power of the island. As KIRC Executive Director, he brings to the role a unique skill set as someone who's worked with the U.S. Navy, various contractors and as a Native Hawaiian who knew and has interacted with people from all concerns regarding this very special island.

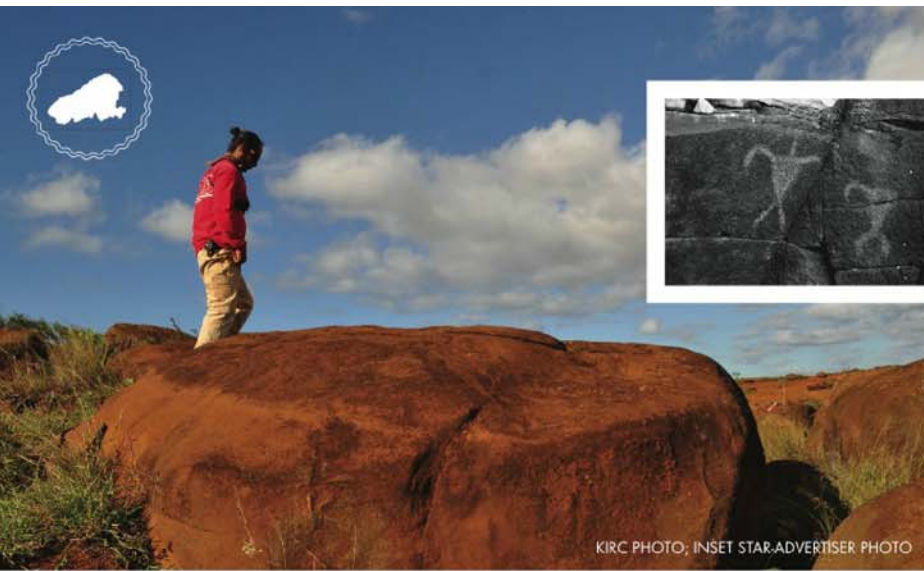
When asked why Kaho'olawe is considered a sacred island, Naho'opi'i points to its historical meaning, but also the tangible links to the past that are found on the island.

"I think today what makes it sacred ... is the idea that when you go on the island you can feel the direct connection between you today and the past," he explains.

"One reason is because it's still untouched. There was no development on the island, there was no agriculture. So,

if you look at Wahiawa, or those areas [developed areas on other islands], the big bulldozers pushed all the villages, all the cultural artifacts and everything into mounds so they could clear the fields for sugar cane and what not. On Kaho'olawe, you can still walk to a place and go to a place ... and you can see the stone tools he worked with. Not only that, you can see the rock he probably sat on..." Naho'opi'i's eye gleam as he goes on to describe that one can discern the work that man from ages ago did, how he worked.

"You can tell he sat on this rock, there's flakes here [indicated on the ground below the worker], he was probably



KIRC PHOTO; INSET STAR-ADVERTISER PHOTO



KIRC PHOTO

Top: Plans are in place to try to save Pökaneloa, a stone that features petroglyphs relating to astronomy that sits along a cliff's edge.
Bottom: KIRC's base camp on Kaho'olawe.
KIRC PHOTOS

right-handed because his tools—his hammer was here ... So, you can feel the connection, that's part of the sacredness because you can feel the connection with the past. Very directly. There's not a lot of things blocking your way—history, lights, technology. You don't have to go searching for it."

Kaho'olawe was and is also important to the voyaging community, acting as a beacon of sorts. Considered the *piko* of the Hawaiian chain, Naho'opi'i explains that there's a point on Kaho'olawe that wayfinders had determined allowed them to sail directly to Tahiti. Indeed, the point is named Lae'o Kealaikahiki—Point of the Path to Tahiti.

Conversely, those sailing towards Hawai'i first encounter Kaho'olawe. One can hear the echo of the waves as they bounce off the back of the valleys at night. Today, it is "visible" at night because it appears as a huge shadow of darkness blocking the lights of neighboring islands and the stars in the sky.

While the Polynesian Voyaging Society trains in the state, Kaho'olawe is always included in the wayfinders' curriculum.

Naho'opi'i relates the story of *Pökaneloa*, a boulder (3-by-4 meters) that's covered with petroglyphs. It's been determined that, due to its location and the markings on its surface *Pökaneloa* may have some as-

tronomical significance. This very important cultural resource also happens to be sitting at the edge of a very high cliff. KIRC is developing a plan to somehow save *Pökaneloa*. This is not unlike the precarious position KIRC finds itself in. The master plan goes through 2026, but the trust that funds KIRC and its work will last only through the middle of this year. Getting people involved in KIRC's work and raising awareness for this special island is something that is going to be consuming the minds of KIRC's members and those who love the island for the foreseeable future. ^

Learn more about KIRC: kahoolawe.hawaii.gov

*Oli Ho'oku'u/Ke Noi 'A'ama
 'O 'awekuhi 'o kai uli
 kuhikau, kuhikau
 E hö mai i 'a'ama
 I 'a'ama aha
 I 'a'ama 'ia au*

Pointing tentacle
 of the deep sea
 Direct, direct
 Grand also an 'a'ama
 An 'a'ama for what?
 Releasing me from my
 obligations as your guest

*—chant requesting release
 from Kaho'olawe*

