Volcanoes National Park

The Hawaiians of old told many myths and stories about their homeland, and the myth recollected above is just one of many stories about Pele, the volcano goddess. The early story-tellers were fine poets, perceptive observers of people, and excellent students of nature. They were aware of many things about their islands that are being explained today by modern research methods. Their account of the succession of Pele’s homes, for example, agrees with the relative ages assigned to the islands by geologists—Ni’ihau and Kaua’i are the youngest. But now geologists and volcanologists can tell us facts that the original Hawaiians would have had no way of knowing. By including deeds and deeds between Ni’ihau and Oceanic Island, the Hawaiian Chain has been extended far beyond the limits known to its first inhabitants. And volcanologists have increased our understanding of the manner in which these islands were made.

The lava flows—The islands in the Hawaiian archipelago are only the top parts of immense mountains that have been built up from the bottom of the sea during the last 25 million years. They have been created by eruptions of molten rock forced up from earth’s mantle through fractures in the planet’s thin crust, which here is at the floor of the ocean.

Beneath this region, in earth’s mantle, a deep-seated source of heat melts the rocks around it. This fluid rock, called magma, then rises through the overlying crust to produce the volcanoes. Magma that flows from volcanoes over the surface of the earth is called lava.

A mountain rises—At first, the lava escaping through volcanic vents in the crust flows out upon the ocean floor. Gradually, as magmas continue to rise from the mantle, successive eruptions of lava built up a submarine mountain around some vent. As layers of lava were added, the volcano grew broader and higher, until eventually rose far above the surface of the sea. This type of volcano with gentler slopes is called a shield volcano.

As long as the conduits that feed magma into a shield volcano can receive fresh supplies of molten rock, the mountain will continue to grow. But the Hawaiian Islands rest upon a portion of earth’s crust known as the Pacific Plate, and this plate is moving slowly toward the northwest. The Hawaiian Chain has been created by the movement of the Pacific Plate, and this plate is moving slowly toward the northwest. The Hawaiian Islands were formed as the Pacific Plate moved over a hot spot in the earth’s mantle. Volcanic activity on the islands is due to the heat generated at this hot spot, which melts the mantle and produces magma. The magma then rises through fractures in the ocean floor, creating new volcanic islands.

In the case of Mauna Loa and Kilauea, the hot spot is beneath the islands, and the volcanoes are active because of the heat generated at the hot spot. The eruptions of these volcanoes are a result of the movement of the Pacific Plate over the hot spot, and the volcanoes are a result of the heat generated at the hot spot.
SEAFARERS FIND THE ISLANDS

Pele may well have been one of the deities who helped the first Hawaiians to find these islands. The gods of all seafaring peoples, the priests who accompanied them in the sea, the moon, the stars, those in the winds, clouds, ocean currents, even in the backs of sea monsters, brought those beacons atop Mauna Loa and Kilauea can be seen for many kilometers out to sea. Even if Pele happened to be sleeping they neared the island of Hawai‘i, after weeks of sailing across the uncharted sea, Pele could have been the one that lit beacons atop Mauna Loa and Kilauea can be seen for many kilometers out to sea. Even if Pele happened to be sleeping she would have known they were approaching. A group numbering as many as 50 men, women, and children may have made the voyage, the members of a great family.

For them to have discovered Hawai‘i was far enough. To have survived the difficult years after they landed on this inhospitable coast was an even greater achievement. For this would have been a most grueling landing, offering them little more than strips of cloth in the sea and freshwater to drink. It would have given them little to eat, except a few kinds of fowl and eggs. And they succeeded, for a few hundred years that passed before the food plants and animals brought from the homeland could supplement the fare they pulled from the sea.

The islands bore distinctive flora and fauna—Though lacking in many of the plants, the islands they found were not utterly barren. Despite their isolation from other Pacific islands and the continents, Hawai‘i’s volcanic mountains had acquired an amazing number and variety of plants and animals—with the exception of mammals. Only bats and seals provided man to these islands.

How had this distinctive life on the islands developed? Almost as soon as the growing shield volcanoes appeared above sea level, native plants and animals, such as tree ferns and birds, found their way to Hawai‘i. And these species, in turn, provided the basis upon which the natural history of the islands was built. How had this distinctive life on the islands developed?

CONQUERORS FROM OTHER ISLANDS

In early Hawaiian settlement remain on the land—in Pele’s realm today, little evidence of the early Hawaiians can be found. They did not intrude much upon their precursors near the summit of Kilauea, probably because they feared them. The ruins of two religious structures, or temples, have been reported near the caldera: one is the stump of a tiki-hula, “the place of dancing weaving,” where the Hawaiian Volcano Observatory now stands, and the other on Walden Ridge, the high wall above Kilauea’s summit. These temples were used for religious ceremonies, and the priests who worked with them, called kahuna, probably sacrificed to the gods. In the name of their gods, they offered to them a variety of offerings. Today, the temple ruins are an important archaeological site, and they are protected by law.

In the prehistoric period, Hawai‘i was a land of many gods and goddesses. The most important were the gods of war, Lua, and the gods of peace, Lono. These gods were associated with the sun, the moon, and the stars, those in the winds, clouds, ocean currents, and even in the backs of sea monsters. The priests who accompanied them were considered to be gods, and they were given special privileges.

These priests were responsible for the religious and ceremonial life of the Hawaiians. They were the keepers of the sacred knowledge, the repositories of the gods’ wisdom, and the mediators between the gods and the people. They were also the astronomers, the seers, and the healers. And they were the leaders of the chiefdoms, the military commanders, and the judges.

The Hawaiians believed that the gods controlled the natural world, and they tried to please them in order to ensure a bountiful harvest and a peaceful life. They built temples and performed sacrifices to the gods, and they also practiced many other religious rituals. They believed that the gods were always watching over them, and they tried to please them by offering them sacrifices and by performing many other religious ceremonies.

The Hawaiians also believed in the existence of a spiritual world, and they believed that the gods controlled it. They believed that the souls of the dead went to the spiritual world, and they believed that the gods controlled the spiritual world. They believed that the gods controlled the weather, and they believed that the gods controlled the elements. They believed that the gods controlled the world of the living, and they believed that the gods controlled the world of the dead.

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