



Foundation Document Overview

Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site

Hawai'i



Contact Information

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Purpose



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The purpose of Pu'UKOHOLĀ HEIAU NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE is to conserve and protect three heiau: Pu'ukoholā, Mailekini, and Hale o Kapuni; the John Young Homestead; and the surrounding cultural landscape. The park interprets these resources and their role in Hawaiian culture, including the unification of the Hawaiian kingdom under Kamehameha I.



Significance

Significance statements express why Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site resources and values are important enough to merit national park unit designation. Statements of significance describe why an area is important within a global, national, regional, and systemwide context. These statements are linked to the purpose of the park unit, and are supported by data, research, and consensus. Significance statements describe the distinctive nature of the park and inform management decisions, focusing efforts on preserving and protecting the most important resources and values of the park unit.

- Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site commemorates the unification of the Hawaiian islands and people under Kamehameha I, who established his supremacy after high chief Keōua Kūahu'ula was offered here on a temple altar built to fulfill one of three prophecies predicting the destiny of Kamehameha I.
- Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site is the only site known to encompass a concentration of three types of heiau that illustrate traditional Hawaiian religious practices. Pu'ukoholā Heiau was a ceremonial luakini, or state temple; Mailekini Heiau was either a luakini and/or an agricultural heiau; and the submerged Hale o Kapuni Heiau was dedicated to sharks, believed to be ancestral 'aumakua (family guardians).
- Pu'ukoholā Heiau is the last great temple that was constructed by Kamehameha I as high chief and guardian of Kū, and dedicated to the war god Kūkā'ilimoku under adherence to the strictest ancient Hawaiian religious protocols.
- Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site preserves the homestead and legacy of John Young, the only foreigner bestowed the titles of high chief and governor of Hawai'i Island by Kamehameha I, and whose homestead contains the first known examples of western-style structures built in the islands.
- Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site protects Hale o Kapuni, a temple where the chiefs of the ocean (sharks) and the chiefs of the land (ali'i) came together, illustrating a spiritual connection between the land and the ocean.
- Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site protects Pelekane, or the Royal Compound, which served as a temporary residence for ancient chiefs and historic ali'i (royalty) including Kamehameha I, Queen Emma, Liholiho (Kamehameha II), and other important figures in 19th century Hawai'i.
- The mana (spiritual power) of Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site nurtures and contributes to the relevance of spiritual aspects of Hawaiian culture by inspiring continued cultural practices and ceremonies.

Fundamental Resources and Values

Fundamental resources and values are those features, systems, processes, experiences, stories, scenes, sounds, smells, or other attributes determined to merit primary consideration during planning and management processes because they are essential to achieving the purpose of the park and maintaining its significance.

- **The Three Heiau**
- **Pelekane**
- **John Young Homestead**
- **Cultural Landscapes and Associated Features**
- **Legacies and Stories of Key Figures in Hawaiian History**
- **Soundscapes and Dark Night Skies**
- **The Legacy of Ho‘oku‘ikahi (Unification)**
- **Cultural Kīpuka**
- **Immersive Cultural Experiences**



Pu‘ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site contains other resources and values that may not be fundamental to the purpose and significance of the park, but are important to consider in management and planning decisions. These are referred to as other important resources and values.

- **Marine Communities**
- **Terrestrial and Freshwater Ecosystems**

Interpretive Themes

Interpretive themes are often described as the key stories or concepts that visitors should understand after visiting a park—they define the most important ideas or concepts communicated to visitors about a park unit. Themes are derived from—and should reflect—park purpose, significance, resources, and values. The set of interpretive themes is complete when it provides the structure necessary for park staff to develop opportunities for visitors to explore and relate to all of the park significances and fundamental resources and values.

- By constructing and dedicating Pu‘ukoholā Heiau to the war god Kūkā‘ilimoku, Kamehameha I gained the mana (spiritual power) that enabled him to unify the Hawaiian Islands and people.
- John Young’s role as the king’s advisor on military, commercial, and political matters, as well as his governorship of Hawai‘i Island was very important to the ascendancy of Kamehameha I to power. Because of John Young’s influence, western goods and ideas were spread throughout the islands.
- The location, alignment, and design of Pu‘ukoholā Heiau was selected because of the mana (spiritual power) existing in the temples already on the hill and because its strategic views afforded sighting of invading enemies.
- Pu‘ukoholā Heiau continues to represent a sacred, spiritual gathering place. The Hawaiian culture and traditions representative of the era of Kamehameha I continue to be practiced today.
- Three prophecies: the birth of Kamehameha I, the lifting of the Naha stone, and the building of Pu‘ukoholā Heiau, were fulfilled when Kamehameha I conquered Hawai‘i Island in 1791 and when he became the first king of the Hawaiian Islands in 1810.
- Respect and appreciation for Native Hawaiian culture associated with the war god Kūkā‘ilimoku is demonstrated by the techniques, processes, and other religious protocols used in the initial construction and continued stabilization, maintenance, and preservation of Pu‘ukoholā Heiau.
- Marine waters are frequented by large gatherings of blacktip reef sharks. Many believe that Hale o Kapuni spiritually attracts sharks to the bay as in the years when the sharks were fed regularly at the submerged temple by the chief Alapa‘i Kupalupalu Manō.

Description

Pu'ukoholā Heiau National Historic Site is on the northwest coast of the Island of Hawai'i. Designated by Congress in 1972, this park encompasses just over 86 acres, approximately 25 of which are owned by the State of Hawai'i.

The park centers around the site of Pu'ukoholā Heiau, one of the last major temples built in the Hawaiian Islands. The temple was constructed by Kamehameha the Great in 1790–91 to fulfill a prophecy that came through a priest named Kāpoūkahi. This kahuna, or priest, told Kamehameha that if he were to build a heiau on the hill known as Pu'ukoholā and dedicate it to his family's war god Kūkā'īlimoku, he would be able to conquer all of the islands. It is said that thousands and thousands of men labored for nearly a year to construct this heiau, carrying rocks from the distant Pololū Valley, nearly 25 miles away. Without the use of mortar, cement, or other bonding materials, these skilled laborers placed each rock individually in exact locations to meet specific building specifications and adhere to strict religious protocols. When Pu'ukoholā Heiau was completed in 1791, the temple was consecrated with human offerings, the principal sacrifice being the high chief Keōua Kūahu'ula, Kamehameha's cousin and principal rival who ruled the eastern half of Hawai'i Island. Major battles ensued as Kamehameha led his army and peoleu (fleet of war canoes) northward, reconquering Maui in 1794 and securing O'ahu in 1795. Kaua'i peacefully conceded through negotiations in 1810. For the first time in the history of Hawai'i, the Hawaiian islands were united under one ali'i (chief), thus forming the Kingdom of Hawai'i and fulfilling the prophecy of Kāpoūkahi. Pu'ukoholā Heiau continues to serve as a beacon of unification where hundreds of Hawaiian practitioners gather regularly to honor Kamehameha and their ancestors in traditional rituals and protocols to perpetuate these sacred practices.

In addition to preserving the remains of Pu'ukoholā Heiau, the park protects other sites of historic significance, including Mailekini Heiau, a luakini and/or an agricultural heiau, which was eventually converted to a military fort; the ruins of Hale o Kapuni Heiau, a temple dedicated to sharks, which are believed to be ancestral 'aumakua (family guardians); the Royal Court, or Pelekane, site of numerous diplomatic meetings between Kamehameha and foreign visitors; and John Young Homestead, believed to contain the remains of the first Western-style house in Hawai'i.

