Foundation Document Overview
Puʻuhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park
Hawaiʻi

Contact Information
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Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park is located along the southern Kona coastline on the western side of the Island of Hawai'i. The 420-acre park lies on prehistoric lava flows of Mauna Loa volcano, where coastal fault subsidence forms cliffs and coral reefs supply sand to narrow beaches.

Congress authorized establishment of the park on July 26, 1955. The enabling legislation (PL 84-177, 69 Stat. 376) described lands necessary and suitable for park establishment and specified that in the future these lands would be set apart as the City of Refuge National Historical Park. The new park was formally established on July 1, 1961, after title to these lands had been vested in the United States. Initially, the park was referred to as the City of Refuge in accordance with the name given by English missionary William Ellis in the 1820s. In 1978 the park was re-designated as Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park to recognize the original Hawaiian name.

Historic sites and features preserved at the park further the understanding of traditional Hawaiian lifeways and perpetuate the cultural connections of kānaka maoli (Native Hawaiians) to this wahi pana (sacred place). Until the death of King Kamehameha I in 1819, Pu'uhonua o Hōnaunau was a sanctuary where vanquished warriors, noncombatants, and violators of the kapu (laws of conduct) could take refuge from a possible death sentence. Kapu governed all aspects of traditional Hawaiian society, and the penalties for violations were severe and swift. The Pu'uhonua (sacred place of refuge) was enclosed on two sides by the Pā Pu'uhonua (Great Wall), a massive block wall that marked the boundary between the sanctuary and the Royal Grounds.

Hōnaunau Bay's protected waters and canoe landing point, along with other favorable factors such as the availability of drinking water from freshwater springs, served as an ideal location for the ali'i (royal chiefs) to establish their residential and ceremonial sites. The location provided easy access to Kona's rich fishing grounds, and anchialine pools made suitable holding pens for fish and the royal fishponds. For several centuries, the Pu'uhonua, the Royal Grounds, and adjacent areas formed one of the primary religious and political centers within the traditional district of Kona.

Among the significant cultural sites is the Hale o Keawe, a temple that once held the bones of 23 ali'i and infused the area with their mana (spiritual power). Other significant features include heiau (sacred structures or temples), animal pens, plant cultivation areas, and three steep hōlua (stone slides) where royalty would compete by racing downhill on wooden papa hōlua (sleds). Inhabited from ancient times by Native Hawaiians and their descendants, the isolated village of Ki'ilae continued into the 1920s as one of the last surviving coastal villages. A one-mile-long segment of the historic 1871 Trail traverses the park coastline. These sites and features reveal aspects of the daily lives of ancient Hawaiians and the changes that occurred after the arrival of Europeans in the 18th century and the eventual end of the traditional kapu system.

The park practices integrated resource management that incorporates native ecosystems and the human imprint on the landscape. The park and Keone'ele Cove provide protected habitats for honu (Hawaiian green sea turtles), the endangered 'ōpe'a (Hawaiian hoary bat), the endangered 'ilioholikauaua (Hawaiian monk seal), and 30 species of manu (Hawaiian birds, six of which are native). At least 23 native plant species are found within the park, many of which are culturally significant to Hawaiians.

Visitors have a wide range of opportunities to experience the park and to immerse themselves in Hawaiian culture and history. They can take self-guided tours of the Royal Grounds and Pu'uhonua, access shoreline and coastal trails, and visit the picnic area. The park visitor center provides orientation and interpretive information. Visitors may also take a two-mile round-trip hike to Ki'ilae Village to see ancient structural remains, volcanic features, and ocean views.
Purpose

For the benefit and inspiration of all people, Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park protects the wahi pana (sacred place) and interconnected cultural and natural resources of the Hōnaunau, Kēōkea, and Ki‘ilae ahupua‘a, so traditional Hawaiian values and practices will thrive now and into the future.

Significance

Significance statements express why Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park 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.

- The park protects one of the best preserved Pu‘uhonua in the Hawaiian Islands, a sacred place of refuge that exemplifies the important role of the kapu system in governing Hawaiian society.

- Reconstructed by the National Park Service, Hale o Keawe is the only representation of a traditional hale poki (consecrated house) on the island. At Hale o Keawe, a ruling dynasty cared for the sacred bones of Keawe‘Ikekahiali‘iokamoku and other paramount chiefs, imparting a strong spiritual power to the Pu‘uhonua site that is still felt today.
Significance

• The park encompasses the Royal Grounds of Hōnaunau where many generations of high ranking chiefs governed, including Keawe, who was once the paramount chief of the Island of Hawai‘i.

• The religious and cultural significance of this wahi pana connects visitors, communities, and cultural practitioners to its resources and inspires collaborative stewardship of these lands.

• Due to its great size and high degree of preservation, the coastal village of Ki’ilae is an outstanding archeological landscape with great potential to reveal new insights about daily Hawaiian life from the precontact times to the late 1920s.

• From the Royal Grounds where high chiefs governed, to an agricultural village where commoners lived and farmed, the park protects a great variety of cultural resources that represent a tremendous degree of social stratification and illustrate the richness and complexity of Hawaiian culture.

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.

• Pu’uhonua and Royal Grounds. Between approximately AD 1400 and 1600 the Royal Grounds and Pu’uhonua developed as one of the primary religious and political centers within the traditional District of Kona. The district’s ali‘i resided in Hōnaunau (Royal Grounds). The grounds were included in the ahupua’a of Hōnaunau, a land division that extended from the ocean to the upper slopes of Mauna Loa. Thatched buildings built on stone platforms in the Royal Grounds were used for residential and ceremonial purposes. Hōnaunau Bay’s protected waters provided an ideal location for a canoe landing point at Keoneʻele Cove that was strictly reserved for the chief and his attendants. The residents had access to fresh drinking water, and the royal fishponds held fish for consumption by the ali‘i. The Royal Grounds were separated from the adjoining Pu’uhonua by the Great Wall. The Pu’uhonua served as a safe haven for violators of the kapu, defeated warriors, and noncombatants during times of conflict. Because of its configuration next to the Royal Grounds and orientation to the ocean, those seeking protection at the Pu’uhonua were challenged to escape their pursuers and seek refuge.
**Great Wall.** The Pā Puʻuhonua (Great Wall), the largest single structure in the park, is a massive dry-set rock masonry wall that divides the Royal Grounds from the Puʻuhonua. The wall is about 10 feet high, 978 feet long, and 17 feet wide. First restored in 1902 when the area was under private ownership, the Great Wall was subsequently repaired and stabilized by the National Park Service in the 1960s and more recently in 1991 and 2004.

**Hale o Keawe.** Hale o Keawe is a reconstructed temple that once held the deified bones of 23 aliʻi (royal chiefs). According to genealogical information and traditional accounts, Hale o Keawe was likely built around AD 1650 by or for chief KeaweʻIkekahialiʻiokamoku, the great-grandfather of Kamehameha I. The powerful mana (divine power) associated with his remains and those of the other aliʻi served to sanctify the Puʻuhonua. Although many of the island’s religious structures were destroyed after the death of Kamehameha I in 1819 and the end of the kapu system, the abandoned temple was spared demolition but deteriorated over the years. Reverence for the site continued and because of its significance it was reconstructed by the National Park Service in 1967-1968.

**Kiʻilae.** Kiʻilae is a farming and fishing village that was inhabited by Native Hawaiians and their descendants from ancient times until about 1926. It consists of about one dozen stone-wall-enclosed lots that contain house and heiau platforms, burial crypts, and other stone structures. As one of the last surviving coastal villages, Kiʻilae offers a glimpse into the post-contact history of Kona into the early 20th century.

**1871 Trail.** The 1871 Trail refers to the section of coastal trail that originally extended from Nāpoʻopoʻo south to Hoʻokena. It is a segment of the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail, a 175-mile-long corridor and trail network of cultural and historical significance that is itself a distinct unit of the national park system. Within the park, a one-mile-long section of the trail extends from behind the visitor center to Kiʻilae Village. Named the “1871 Trail” in recognition of the improvements completed in 1871, the trail was widened (currently 6–10-feet wide in the park) to accommodate the passage of horses, and curbstones were added to better delineate the trail for pack animal use.

**Cultural Landscape.** The entire park may be viewed as an ethnographic landscape—a type of cultural landscape with a variety of natural and cultural resources that associated people define as heritage resources. In addition to the major sites represented by other fundamental resources, the park’s cultural landscape also encompasses hundreds of other important archeological sites and features. These interrelated resources illustrate the close relationship that Native Hawaiians have with their physical environment.

**Traditional Cultural Practices.** The park has cultural and spiritual significance to Native Hawaiians, who have used these lands since ancient times and continue to visit sites and features within the park for traditional practices. This park is integral in supporting the revitalization and continuation of cultural identity through cultural practices, spiritual ceremonies, and transfer of traditional practices and knowledge. Many of the park’s cultural sites, objects, landscapes, and natural resources remain important touchstones that contribute to Native Hawaiian identity and heritage.
Fundamental Resources and Values

• **The Concept of Pu‘uhonua: Opportunities for Refuge and Renewal.** The ancient concept of Pu‘uhonua (refuge) is deeply rooted in Hawaiian and Polynesian culture. In ancient Hawai‘i, a system of laws known as kānāwai enforced the social order, and laws of conduct, or kapu, governed every aspect of society. In addition to royalty, certain places, things, and times were sacred, and their disturbance was strictly forbidden. Kapu further dictated the appropriate conduct of fishing, the planting and harvesting of crops, and other practices. Any breaking of kapu disturbed the stability of society, and the punishment was often death. Traditionally, a ruling chief would declare certain lands or heiau as Pu‘uhonua, and no harm would come to those who eluded their pursuers and safely reached the place of refuge. The Pu‘uhonua protected fugitive kapu breakers and defeated warriors, as well as the families of combatants during times of battle. Today, people come to the park to experience refuge and renewal in a personally meaningful way.

• **Opportunities to Experience a Natural Setting.** The power and beauty of the natural landscape is immediately evident in the park. Sky, water, geologic, vegetation, and wildlife resources combine to establish a unique sense of place and offer the opportunity to experience a range of natural settings and ecosystems. More than 180 species of plants may be found in the park, including some that are native to Hawai‘i and others that Polynesians brought to the Hawaiian Islands for use as food, medicine, or clothing. A variety of animals may be spotted, from majestic nā koholā (humpback whales) to little ‘ōpae ‘ula (Hawaiian red shrimp). Visitors also experience natural sounds, including crashing surf, calling birds, and the wind as it blows through hala and coconut trees.

Other Important Resources and Values

Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park 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.

• **Visitor Center.** Pu‘uhonua o Hōnaunau National Historical Park’s visitor center was completed in 1968, constructed as part of the National Park Service’s systemwide program of planning, design, and construction known as “Mission 66.” The mid-20th-century program modernized outdated facilities and addressed the growing pressures of the motoring public for improved visitor services. The Polynesian-inspired, open-air complex consists of three main pavilion-like buildings (comfort station, office / information desk, and theater). The one-story buildings are linked by a covered lanai and an interpretive wall. In addition to the buildings, other features contributing to the visitor center’s cultural landscape include the parking lot, walkways, planters, vegetation, benches, and lava-rock retaining walls. Architects adapted modern and regional Hawaiian architectural designs, incorporating local materials to harmoniously blend the visitor center with the park’s tropical setting. The visitor center complex was determined eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the national level of significance. It retains integrity conveying its distinctive architectural design, and its historical association with the Mission 66 program.
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.

- The complexity of the rich resources of the sea and land at Puʻuhonua o Hōnaunau required reverent management based on *kapu* (sacred law) that all people understood and applied in every aspect of their lives: *Ua ola no o kai ia kai, ua ola no o uka ia uka* (Life comes from the sea, life comes from the land).

- An integral foundational philosophy embedded in the concepts of Puʻuhonua is *aloha ʻāina*, the compassion or love for that which sustains life—the land, sea, water and all the elements and animals within. The land connects the people to the heartbeat of the gods in a physical way through *wahi pana* (sacred or pulsating places).

- The Puʻuhonua was a place where the gods supported transformation—the only process of redemption allowed by the ancient *kapu* system—and provided protection of life, especially during the rehabilitation of one’s mind, body, and soul. Today, Puʻuhonua o Hōnaunau continues to pulse as a “safe place” for all, including those who consult the ancient wisdoms.

- KeaweʻĪkekahialiʻiokamoku, ruler of the Island of Hawaiʻi in the late 17th century, embodied wisdom and diplomacy. His focus on unity and peaceful relationships with other island chiefdoms continues today as foundational philosophies for the function of the Puʻuhonua o Hōnaunau.

- The continuing traditions and practices of the *hale pokī* (consecrated house) ensure that each individual chief’s *ʻtwi* (bones) contribute to those of his predecessors, that the *moʻo* (succession) of philosophies and principles lived by significant chiefs interred within takes place, and that their *mana* (spiritual life force) secures and ensures continued balance, harmony, and unity among people.

- *Kiʻi* are carved wooden images that embody human and spiritual qualities and serve as reminders to guide people at the Puʻuhonua on their personal spiritual journeys to a balanced life.

- For generations, residents of Kiʻilae village performed essential roles that supported the functions of the Puʻuhonua and Royal Grounds. These individuals and their lifestyles attest to the *kupunā ʻike* (ancient knowledge) that has been carried forth into Hawaiian society today.