

Hawai'i: A History of the Big Island (Making of America)

Pages: 160

Publisher: Arcadia Publishing (November 1, 2003)

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

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Map of the Big Island, c. 1915. The population figures in the lower left corner are from the 1910 United States Census. Courtesy Laupahoehoe Train Museum. **Hawaii** A History of the Big Island Robert F. Oaks Copyright © 2003 by Robert F. Oaks 9781439614037 Published by Arcadia Publishing, Charleston SC, Chicago IL, Portsmouth NH, San Francisco CA Printed in the United States Library of Congress control number: 2003103789 For all general information contact Arcadia Publishing at: Telephone 843-853-2070 Fax 843-853-0044 E-Mail sales@arcadiapublishing.com For customer service and orders: Toll-Free 1-888-313-2665 Visit us on the Internet at www.arcadiapublishing.com **Table of Contents**

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Writing a brief history of the Big Island is an undertaking as big as the island itself. The subject is huge, often complex, covers many centuries, and transcends various scholarly disciplines. If I have succeeded at all in distilling the story into a readable narrative, it is largely because of the help and support of many people and institutions. I could not have written this book without access to the unparalleled manuscript and book collections of the Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley. The staff was always friendly, helpful, and generous with their knowledge. On the Big Island itself, I especially wish to thank Sheree Chase and Terre Kriege of the Kona Historical Society, Lynne Wolforth of the Lyman Museum, Jill Sommer of the Pacific Tsunami Museum, and Lisa Barton of the Laupahoehoe Train Museum. The State Archives in Honolulu provided most of the pictures in this book, and I very much appreciate the help of Luella Kurkjian and her very friendly staff. The staffs of the Mauna Kea Beach Hotel on the Kohala coast and the Crockett Museum in Crockett, California also provided welcome support and photos. I also received some good suggestions from Joseph Castelli, who, despite his disclaimers and modesty, really is a Kona historian. Finally, Rob Kangas, my editor at Arcadia Publishing, guided and supported this project to completion and made many suggestions that undoubtedly improved style and readability. Necessarily, this book is largely derived from the scholarly works of others who have written in much greater detail about the topics included here. I thank all of them and hope I have not greatly distorted or misinterpreted their endeavors. Readers who want more information on particular subjects are directed to the bibliography. **INTRODUCTION** Sometime around 25 million years ago, great cracks or rifts in the Pacific Ocean floor began to erupt, gradually rising over millions of years and eventually producing a mountain range in excess of 1,500 miles long that became the Hawaiian Archipelago. The entire group consists of 132 islands, reefs, shoals, and atolls, stretching from Midway Island in the northwest to Hawai'i in the southeast. The archipelago is among the most isolated land on earth. Despite the large number of islands in the chain, most of the soil rests on six major plots (Hawai'i, Maui, O'ahu, Kaua'i, Lana'i, and Moloka'i) and two smaller ones (Ni'ihau, and Kaho'olawe). The last

to develop, and by far the largest formation in the chain, is what we now know as the Big Island of Hawai'i. Seven separate volcanoes actually formed the Big Island. Mauna Kea, Mauna Loa, Hualalai, Kohala, and Kilauea are all well known. Two smaller volcanoes, Ninole and Kulani, were long ago buried under Mauna Loa's lava flows. Kohala is the oldest; Mauna Loa and Kilauea the youngest. Kilauea continues to erupt, increasing the size of the island. Mauna Loa erupted as recently as 1986, Hualalai in 1801, and the others several thousand years ago. Mauna Kea, with a peak at 13,784 feet above sea level, ranks as the highest mountain in the world if measured from its base deep beneath the sea. The volcanoes have greatly influenced the history of the Big Island for centuries. First, they obviously made it "big"—larger than all other Hawaiian islands combined, and the biggest in the United States. Secondly, their high summits prevent many storms that affect the eastern or windward side of the island from reaching its western or leeward side. The result is a dramatic difference in climate and weather patterns most obviously between the two halves (wet and dry) of the island, but also at various elevations. Hilo, the wettest city in the United States, receives on average 130 inches of rain a year. Farther up the mountain, some areas receive as much as 300 inches annually. At the other extreme, Kawaihae in Kohala receives less than 10 inches a year. Thirdly, the volcanoes caused major environmental disasters from time to time, destroying vegetation and villages, altering weather patterns, occasionally killing both people and animals, and thoroughly disrupting human life. This destructive power was incorporated into Hawaiian mythology and religious practices. And finally, beginning in the early nineteenth century, the volcanoes became a major attraction for explorers, scientists, and ultimately tourists. As the islands formed, trade winds and storms carried plant and animal life from one island to the next. Migrating birds carried seeds and spores to disperse native plants throughout the island chain. According to Hawaiian legend, Pele, the goddess of the volcano, visited each new island in turn until she finally took up residence on the Big Island. But while native flora and fauna developed over millions of years, isolation ensured it would be one of the last places on earth to see human settlement. Even after gaining a permanent population, all the islands in the chain remained secluded. They were and continue to be the most isolated inhabited region on earth, which inevitably helped determine the culture and history of the island chain. Human settlement on the Big Island goes back nearly 2,000 years. Though other parts of the United States provide ample evidence of habitation long before that, few if any other places can trace a coherent history back as far as Hawai'i. This history is sometimes epic, often tragic and even depressing, occasionally heroic, frequently controversial, but always fascinating. To help readers who are unfamiliar with its terms, there is a glossary of common Hawaiian words at the end of the book. To help with the pronunciation, where appropriate, Hawaiian words include the 'okina, or glottal stop, which results in something like the pause in the English expression "uh-oh."

Chapter One ORIGINS Who first discovered and settled the Big Island? Where did they come from? When did they arrive? How did they get there? Where did they settle? How did they live? And how do we know? These are all questions archaeologists, historians, anthropologists, and others have debated for many years. There is no written account of Hawai'i until the English Captain James Cook visited (not really "discovered") the island as he attempted to sail around the world in 1778. The history of the Big Island before the time of European contact must be constructed from other kinds of evidence. There is no disagreement that the original Hawaiians were part of a larger Polynesian culture, but beyond that there has been substantial controversy over the last 100 years on many other fronts. Only in the last 20 years or so have new scientific techniques led to a growing new consensus (almost) on the questions listed above. Despite the lack of a written record, there are several sources for the study of ancient Hawaiian history. First, we have written accounts of Captain Cook and other subsequent European visitors, who recorded the life they found in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. These chronicles may provide a good picture of the Big Island at that time, but they offer few clues regarding the previous several hundred years. Hawai'i in 1800 was almost certainly very different from Hawai'i in, say, the year 1000. In addition, Europeans who wrote these accounts viewed that picture through their own cultural lenses, observing a very different society and culture from their own. A second source is the remarkable Hawaiian legends and stories orally handed down from generation to generation. These tales,

which consisted of very detailed genealogical narratives of Hawaiian rulers, were not written down until the nineteenth century. They provide a wealth of information, yet they also present problems. Sometimes different legends will give various versions of the same event, and it is very difficult to estimate the dates of these experiences. The legends, with meticulously detailed genealogies, are similar in some respects to the Old Testament. When we try to map them into our western calendar system, the common method is to apply a standard number of years to an average generation. If we know that something happened 15 generations ago, we can guess at the date by applying a standard. However, experts throughout the years have used different standards. Some scholars use 30 years as the average length of a generation, others 25 years, and some use 20 years. The latter figure is most commonly accepted today. Obviously, there will be dating problems when one scholar uses 20 and another 30 as the standard, especially if we are trying to go back 40 or 50 generations. Moreover, of course, no generation will be exactly average in length. Compounding the difficulty, one legend may relate that Chief A was the father of Chief B (two generations), while another states that the two were actually brothers (one generation). A third source for the historian is the physical remains. The Big Island, especially the western half, is one of the richest areas for archaeological study in the United States. We have the remains of heiau (temples), houses, walls, sacred stones, petroglyphs, caves, and fishponds that tell part of the story. Advances in scientific techniques available to archaeologists, such as carbon dating, have challenged some traditional beliefs about early Hawaiians. Unfortunately, many archeological sites that once existed on the eastern half of the island were destroyed in the nineteenth century in the drive to plant more and more sugar cane. The picture we get from these remains, then, is incomplete. Finally, computer modeling also helps determine early settlement patterns from estimates of climate at the time, population estimates based on food production and supply capabilities of a particular region, and navigational possibilities based on wind and current patterns. Returning then to the questions presented above, who were the first Hawaiians and where did they come from? In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most scholars would have said Tahiti was the "Kihiki" mentioned in Hawaiian legends as their homeland. By the 1960s, however, the consensus began to shift in favor of the Marquesas, north and east of Tahiti. The language of these eastern Polynesian islands is closer to Hawaiian than the dialect of Tahiti. There are also greater similarities with the archaeological remains and artifacts of the Marquesas. While there is general agreement on the "where," there is less agreement on the "when." Three primary theories compete within the range of years sometime between 0 and 300 A.D., between the 300s and the 600s, and one in the 700s. Tools such as carbon dating prove helpful, but this technique can be compromised by instances such as the presence of much older driftwood used in fires in later years. Most scholars accept the period from the 300s to 600s, though there is by no means unanimity on this subject. How they reached the island chain is also controversial. In his historical novel *Hawaii*, James Michener popularized the long-held view that the original immigrants came from the Society Islands (Tahiti), discovered Hawai'i, went home for settlers, and returned with many colonizing voyages. Scholars began to challenge this view in the 1960s and 1970s. The likelihood that these Polynesian sailors, even with their recognized sophisticated navigational skills, could travel far from home and back again several times, against the wind no less, seemed implausible to some. The current generally accepted thesis is that early settlers arrived in one or maybe a few canoes and seldom if ever returned to their homeland. We, of course, do not know how many people made the initial voyage. Computer models suggest as few as three couples (six people) would have had a 33 percent chance of producing a surviving population. Raising the number to seven couples increases the odds of the colony's survival to 80 percent. We also do not know whether these original settlers landed on the Big Island and later spread to the other islands or vice versa. However, the southern location of the Big Island is closer to their starting point and the sheer size of the island makes it easier to find. Regardless of whether they came directly from the Marquesas or indirectly from another island, the first Big Island settlers brought with them many of the crops, animals, tools, religious beliefs, and skills of farming, building, and fishing of their Polynesian homeland. The most likely place for the first settlers to set up their colony would have been on the eastern wet side of the island. Earlier speculation of a first settlement at South

Point still appears in some guidebooks, but archaeologists now discount this location due to the harsh environmental conditions settlers would have encountered. Current thinking centers around locations such as Hilo Bay, or perhaps in the Waimanu or Waipi'o Valleys, as a logical first outpost. Wherever the location, these men and women would have cleared trees to plant crops, such as taro, sweet potato, breadfruit, yams, and bananas. They undoubtedly survived on fishing and catching native birds until the crops came in. Wood from cleared trees would be used to build tools and houses, as well as for firewood. As their numbers increased, the first settlement spread to other areas along the eastern side of the island and finally to the more hospitable areas of the dryer western side. Gradually, after 500 years or so, both sides of the Big Island probably supported many small kin-group settlements of perhaps 250 to 500 people; essentially independent nations governed by one chief. Communities in some of the more favorable locations may have been larger and begun to dominate the smaller nearby settlements. This pattern is speculative, but supported by the pattern found in the Marquesas and elsewhere at European contact. At some point, around the year 900 or 1000, settlers gradually began to move into dry areas on the west side of the island. Archaeological evidence from this period exists in west Kohala, from 'Upolu Point to Kawaihae and in the area around Waimea. The ruins of the village of Lapakahi State Historical Park in North Kohala provide some clues of how people lived several hundred years ago. Similarly, there were settlements created between the 900s and 1200s in central Kona at Koloko, just north of Kailua, and other areas such as Ka'u. Perhaps the migration was driven by crowded conditions on the windward side of the island or maybe by limited opportunities to become a chief. Because of the lower rainfalls, these pioneers must have developed new agricultural techniques, perhaps planting crops at higher elevations 2 or 3 miles inland to take advantage of more rain. Where the rainfall was insufficient to support taro cultivation, sweet potatoes, which could grow in dryer climates, became the dominant crop. Their houses, on the other hand, remained along the shore to take advantage of available fishing. Though these leeward settlements grew, the windward side of the island continued to be by far more populous and thus more powerful than the settlements on the dry side. Over time, these societies became more complex politically and socially, evolving from a two-tier (chief and commoners) culture to a three or more tiered political organization with hierarchies of chiefs. Around 1200, there were significant changes in political and religious ideas, beginning in Kohala. Nineteenth-century anthropologists theorized that this was the result of a second wave of migration to Hawai'i from Tahiti or other Polynesian islands. These supposedly superior immigrants overwhelmed and replaced existing rulers to establish new governments and religions. Again, recent scholarship questions this view as both simplistic and inaccurate. There may indeed have been new arrivals, though perhaps not so many as to constitute a wave. There definitely was a new priest by the name of Pa'ao, who imposed a new religion and anointed his own chief, Pili. This ruler made significant changes in Kohala, but it is unclear as to whether these two were foreign invaders or native Hawaiians. We do know that around 1200, political organizations became much larger geographically, perhaps even including the entire island from time to time. Society became much more complex and religion more important. It is from this period that we begin to see increasingly large temples, the implementation of both secular and religious kapus (taboos), and a widening social gulf between the ali'i (chiefs) and the common people. The kapu structure established a rigid caste system and imposed a strict social organization. The people lived in self-contained communities, each comprising a large section of land called an ahupua'a. Each ahupua'a included a village, usually near its fairly small coastline with reefs and fishing grounds, and then extended inland and upward to elevations suitable for farming, then progressing higher into forest land. Elaborate fishponds, which allowed small fish to swim in from the ocean, but prevented larger specimens from escaping, provided a ready supply of food. The Mauna Lani Resort on the Kohala coast has a reconstructed functioning fishpond that covers over 5 acres. Hulihe'e Palace has a much smaller example, but it still shows how fish were caught and kept alive until they were needed. Depending on the terrain, the ahupua'a might be triangular or rectangular as its territory pushed back from the shore. The idea was for each one to contain all terrain, climates, and natural resources necessary to support its inhabitants. When

Europeans first reached Hawai'i, there were approximately 600 ahupua'a on the Big Island. Pa'ao established a new religion and a distinctive priesthood. He in turn placed Pili in power in Kohala, and Pili's descendants eventually unified the entire Big Island. This religion over time evolved into the theology Europeans discovered when they landed. There were many gods, though only four major ones—Ku, Lono, Kane, and Kanaloa. Each of them had several forms and manifestations, such as thunder, clouds, and images. One of Ku's appearances was as Kuka'ilimoku, a war god special to Hawaiian kings who, as we shall see, played a large role during the reign of Kamehameha. Other lesser deities controlled sorcery or violent events. The most famous of these lesser deities was Pele, who conducted volcanic activity at Mauna Loa and Kilauea. Appeals to these gods for success in war, death to enemies, agricultural fertility, and other favors were made at major heiau (temples), called luakini, which were built and consecrated by rulers. The luakini were temples of human sacrifice, built at their royal centers, and became the focal point of each kingdom's religious observances. The luakini consisted of huge stone platforms with either wooden or stone-walled enclosures. Inside was an altar with images of Ku or other gods. Priests (kahuna), overseen by a high priest (kahuna nui) lived close by, cared for the heiau, performed ceremonies, and attempted to persuade the king to follow proper religious behavior. For eight months of the year, the luakini was dedicated to the god Ku. There were strict ceremonies four times each month, and anyone who failed to observe proper practices as stipulated in the kapu could have his property seized or he might even be sentenced to death. Anti-social acts were causes for immediate death, as was defeat in war. This attitude prevailed in most Polynesian societies, but there was also a concept of refuge where one could escape these severe penalties. Each district had sites designated as sites of asylum. Anyone who violated a kapu or who had been defeated in battle could have his life spared if he could reach one of these sanctuaries. These places were called pu'uhonua. The most famous today is the example at Honaunau in South Kona, but there were at least ten throughout the island. Sometimes a pu'uhonua was not a place, but a high ranking ali'i. If you could reach this chief's presence, you could obtain sanctuary. For four months in the fall and early winter, the god Lono replaced Ku as the religious focus in the luakini. During this period, known as the Makahiki season, people of high rank gave up eating pig, and war and sacrifices were both suspended. Ku could bring success in war; Lono could bring rain and abundant crops. During the second month of Makahiki, each ahupua'a sent a tribute to the king, who in turn distributed it to the gods, priests, and retainers. The image or symbol of Lono—Lonomakua—was a pole with a carved head and a crosspiece consisting of a feather lei, a fern, and white kapa (native cloth made from tree bark). A group of priests and athletes then carried this image clockwise around the entire Big Island, collecting additional tributes. In addition to this new religion, the priest Pa'ao and king Pili established a royal lineage that ultimately led to Kamehameha. We do not know much from oral histories about Pili's immediate successors, but by the late 1500s, two of them are well chronicled. Liloa, who ruled from approximately 1580 to 1600, and his son 'Umi, from approximately 1600 to 1620, both consolidated their authority and ruled the entire island. By Liloa's time, the six major districts of the island that we now know were already established. Liloa appointed high chiefs in Hilo, Puna, Ka'u, Kona; he apparently directly ruled the other two: Kohala and Hamakua. Frequently moving around his kingdom to maintain control, Liloa used the religious system to attract support by rededicating many heiau. His primary one was Paka'alana in Waipi'o, the location of his court.

Although its soils are the youngest in the Hawaiian chain, the Big Island's chronicles are at times epic, tragic, and heroic, but always fascinating. Modern Hawai'i is filled with tradition and mythology, accommodating influences as diverse as its inviting landscape. Kamehameha stood tall to mold this nascent region into a unified kingdom and others fought to sustain it, while outside forces molded and shaped this island in astonishing ways.

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