

Manawai Archaeological Project

by *Kathy Kawelu*

The Manawai Archaeological Project (Moloka'i, Hawai'i) forms the basis of Kathy Kawelu's dissertation research.

Background on Moloka'i archaeology

The island of Moloka'i has not received equal archaeological attention as other islands in the main Hawaiian group. O'ahu and the Big Island have been the focus of archaeological studies conducted in Hawai'i. The high proportion of work on these islands is in part due to the development of land, and the environmental impact assessments that development requires. Many cultural resource management (CRM) reports have been generated for Moloka'i as well, these reports far outnumber the research based investigations that have been carried out on the island. To date, three academically based archaeological studies have been undertaken using modern archaeological techniques (Bonk 1954, Kirch & Kelley 1975, Weisler & Kirch 1985). These projects stand in contrast to the work of earlier scholars (Stokes 1909, Thrum 1909, Fowke 1922), who collected their data in a non-systematic manner, relying solely on the accessibility of sites and/or the knowledge of native Hawaiian informants.

Prior to Bonk's (1954) work at Mo'omomi, anthropologists such as G. Fowke, J. F. G. Stokes, and amateur scholars like T. G. Thrum had done island wide investigations, involving the description and recording of heiau (temples). One of their goals was the accumulation of data regarding ancient Hawaiian remains, in an attempt to salvage such information before it was "lost" to development or forgotten. Another goal was the collection of evidence for cross cultural comparisons, in order to develop sequences of island colonization throughout Polynesia. That is, the route and sequence by which the Polynesian islands were settled by people. Beginning with the Mo'omomi study, the methods used and the research questions asked changed significantly. This involved systematic survey and excavation of the study areas, and research goals geared toward the cultural adaptation of the Hawaiians to their environment and the manner in which people organized themselves on the landscape.

Current research project

The projects discussed above have made important contributions to Moloka'i archaeology, and Hawaiian archaeology in general, however, there are many issues and regions which need to be investigated. Previous work was done on the northwest coast (Mo'omomi), the north coast (Halawa Valley), and the south coast (Kawela). However, the southeastern shore of Moloka'i was densely populated in prehistory and at contact (Kirch 1985), yet this area has not received archaeological attention, with the exception of the Kawela study (Kirch & Kelly 1975) and CRM initiated projects. My dissertation work entails a settlement pattern analysis within Manawai ahupua'a (traditional land division) along the southeastern coast of Moloka'i. The location of many heiau in this area have been recorded, and this data compiled by C. Summers in her 1971 volume, *Molokai: A Site Survey*. These site specific investigations, however, lack spatial and temporal context which gives us a fragmentary view of the lives of the prehistoric people of this area. By conducting a multiscale settlement pattern analysis of Manawai Valley I will be able to reconstruct a more complete interpretation of the organization of people on the landscape. Data generated from such an analysis will enable me to address general topics of social, political, economic, and religious organization; as well as more specific issues of intra-cultural contact between Moloka'i chiefdoms and those conquering chiefdoms from other islands.

My research will serve to accomplish several goals: a) to conduct research in an area that has not been intensively studied, b) to generate a settlement pattern for this densely populated area, c) to reconstruct a spatial and temporal context in which the site specific heiau studies can be placed, and d) to address issues of intra-cultural contact and native colonialism in the late prehistoric (protohistoric) period.

In the summer of 1998 a 5 member crew (Steve Eminger, Kalei Nathaniel, Craig Stahl, Tania Stellini & myself), carried out a month long survey of the lower portion of Manawai Valley. The goals for the season were: a) to get acquainted with the land, in terms of topography, vegetation, weather, density and extent of cultural sites, and ahupua'a boundaries; b) to determine logistical requirements for later seasons, such as tools needed, crew size, financial costs, and time estimates; and c) to begin surveying the valley. The survey involved a walking

inspection of the land, using closely spaced transects. Sites encountered were recorded on a survey form, which included a formalized "check-list" of site features, a drawing of the site (generated from tape and compass measurements), and a verbal description. Global Positioning Station (GPS) points were also taken for each site. The Hawai'i State Historic Preservation Division (SHPD) was generous enough to loan a GPS receiver to the project, in exchange for the sharing of information.

One issue grappled with during the survey was the demarcation of sites. What we found, much like what researchers found in Halawa Valley, was a patchwork of "sites" connected together by walls and terraces, essentially forming one continuous site. Lacking the tools to deal with recording such large areas, I was forced to arbitrarily dissect the sites into manageable pieces (sections that would fit on the survey form, for one). Some 50 sites were recorded in this way, to a distance of roughly 1 km inland from and 60 m above the coast. Much of the coastal flat has undergone modern development, such as the building of a condominium and a dairy, so the number of sites prehistorically was likely much higher than what we located. My research into the Mahele records places the majority of kuleana plots in this lower segment of the valley, so I'm fairly certain that we are not getting the full picture in this area of Manawai. In a month of work we made a small dent in the total survey area, which is approximately 5.5 km in length, and rises to a height of 1200 m. Several more field seasons will be required to complete a survey of the whole valley, as well as the initiation of subsurface testing of a sample of sites. By working out the settlement pattern for Manawai Valley, and establishing what remains are there to begin with, I'll be able to address more complicated issues in Hawaiian prehistory in the future.