

NU'ALOLO KAI, NĀ PALI

EDUCATIONAL SOURCEBOOK



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In the summer of 1821, the missionary Hiram Bingham took a voyage along the Nā Pali coast in a double-hulled canoe. His party made a stop at Nu'alolo:

Appearance of the Coast

The mountains along the shore, for eight or ten miles, are very bold, some rising abruptly from the ocean, exhibiting the obvious effects of volcanic fires; some, a little back, appear like towering pyramids, around which the warring elements had swept away the more moveable and combustible matter; others, equally lofty, are partly covered with trees and shrubs. Into the nooks between them a few houses are crowded, but they are almost inaccessible, except from the sea. It would seem, however, that some hundreds of the natives live in this forbidding part of the island, subsisting, doubtless, chiefly on fish. They pass from one little neighborhood to another, in canoes. Here, about mid-way of what the natives call the Parre, we landed, where is an acre or two of sterile ground, bounded on one side by the ocean, and environed on the other by a stupendous rock, nearly perpendicular, forming at its base a semicircular curve, which meets the ocean at each end. In the middle of the curve, a stupendous rock rises to the height, I should say, of about 1500 feet. Near one end of the curve, the rock projects about 50 feet from its base, and is here about 300 feet high; so that ten houses of the little village are built under it, and defended, generally, from the rain and tempests, and always from the direct rays of the sun till some time after noon. The cool shade of this rock, when we were all present, between 10 and 11 o'clock, extended more than 100 feet from its base. Never was I so forcibly impressed, by any scene in nature, with the lively figures, by which Isaiah sets forth our savior, --"as an hiding-place from the wind; and a covert from the storm; as the shadow of a great rock in a weary land." The highest part is called "the fire Parre". Here, the natives sometimes exhibit their fire works in the night, as they did a few nights since, when the kings lodged there. Along a winding, difficult ascent, which commences by a rude ladder hanging over the sea, they climb to the very summit, and throw off firebrands, or torches, ingeniously constructed, which sail off a great distance, and fall in the ocean below.

Singular manner of catching Fish

Near this settlement, we saw about 70 men, women, and children, employed in fishg. Their method of taking the fish from the sea is remarkable. Diving down, they place a vegetable poison among the stones at the bottom, which being greedily eaten by the fish, immediately produces on them an intoxicating effect. The natives then dive or swim after them, and catch them in their hands, or, sitting in canoes, or standing near the shore, take them easily in scoop nets. It was amazing to see my Otaheitan youth, and others of our company, as we passed along, dive off from our canoe, first on one side and then on the other, to seize the bewildered fish, which strove in vain to elude their grasp.

Bingham, Hiram

1822 "Extracts from the Journal of Mr. Bingham, while at Atooi".
Missionary Herald, Vol. 18, No. 8., pp. 248-249. Honolulu,
August 1822.

**ON FOLLOWING PAGES:
PHOTOS (CIRCA 1900) OF THE LADDER LASHED TO THE CLIFF AT
ALAPI'I POINT, NU'ALOLO, ALLOWING LAND ACCESS BETWEEN
NU'ALOLO KAI AND NU'ALOLO 'ĀINA.**

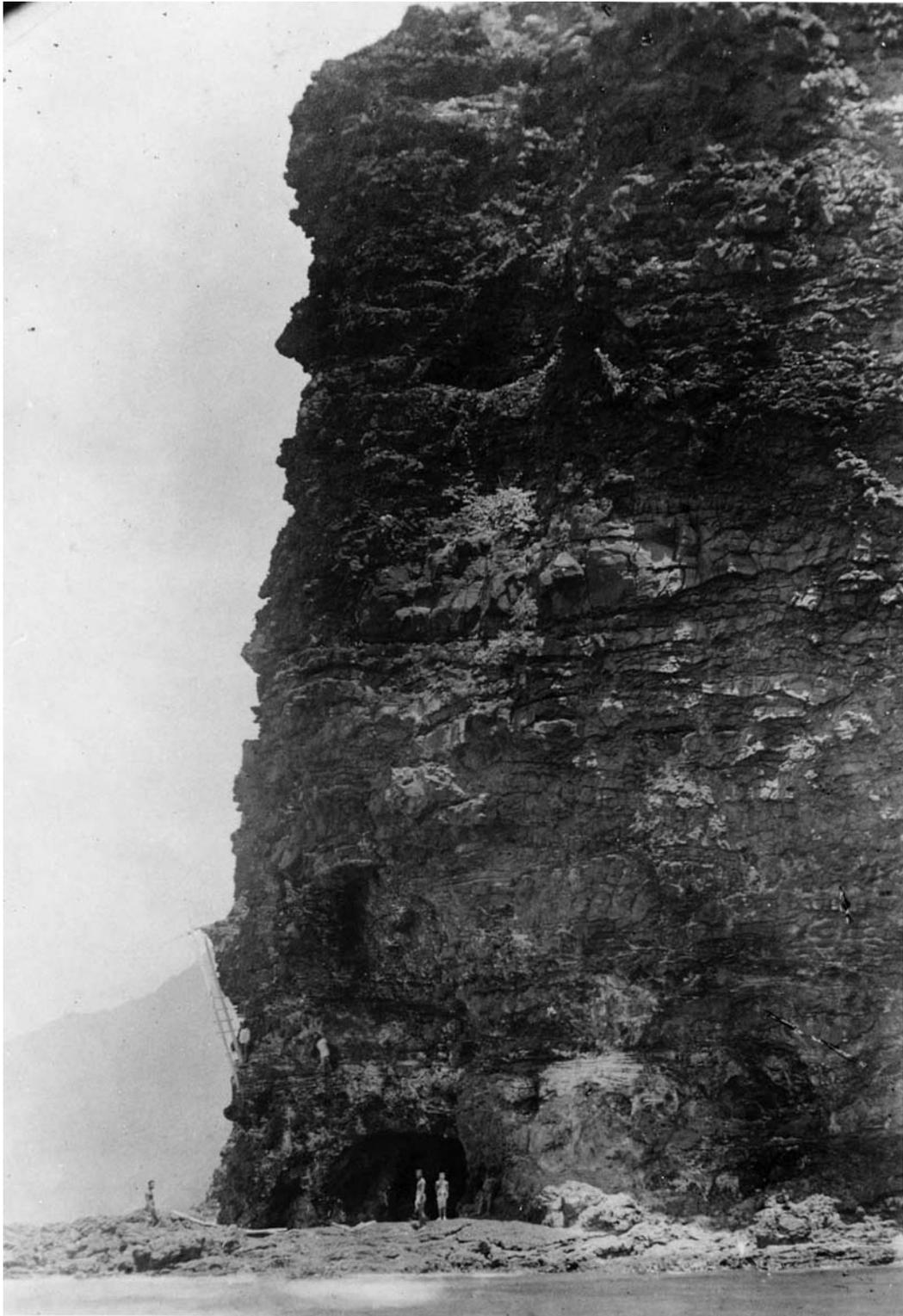
Judge Gorham Gilman traveled the coast by canoe in 1845, and made the following observation on the ladder trail to Nu'alolo 'Āina:

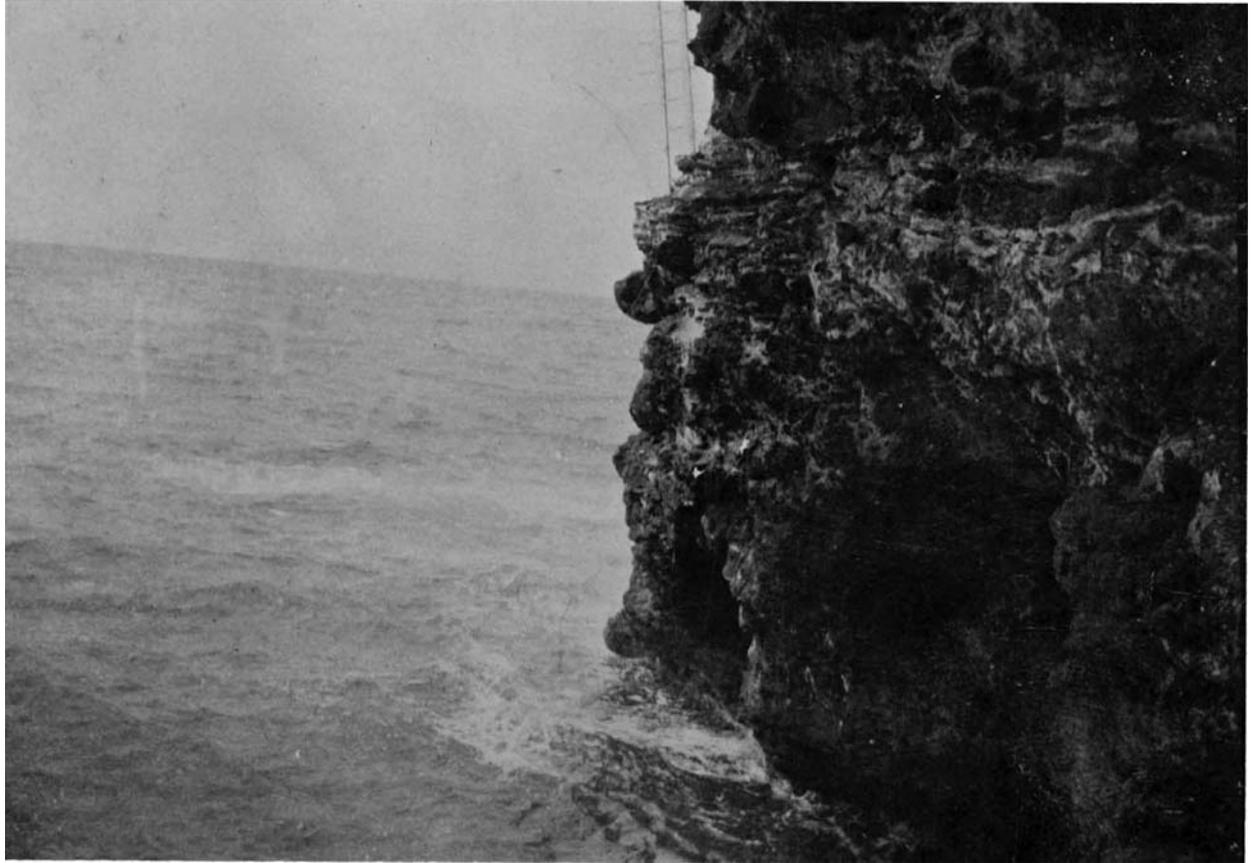
...As we came along, I had noticed a sort of ladder placed against the face of the cliff, for the purpose of reaching the heights above. A native presented himself as a guide, and I let him lead the way. Starting off, I had no doubt that I was going to ascend the ladder at once, but I had taken but a few steps before I found myself halting and reconnoitering. The way which had appeared so easy, now showed itself full of danger. The path has been excavated by the natives with their rude tools, from the face of an overhanging cliff. It is not a level, but is formed like a gouge turned edgewise, so that one's hold is very precarious. It is also too low to admit of any other than a stooping posture, and I was obliged to shuffle along with the utmost caution. My guide seemed quite at home, and he stood upright outside of me, with his body projecting beyond the surface of the cliff, and encouraged me on. I had taken off my shoes, and by degrees had worked myself two-thirds past, when I rested for a survey. There I was, my chief support a little projecting stone, not sufficient to afford a hold for my whole foot, and my hands clinging with a death grasp to the rock, and in the situation overhanging a gulf, that was foaming and boiling, as the surf broke over the rocks some sixty or seventy feet below me, and which would have proved my death place, if I had made the least mistake or slip. I had strong curiosity to go forward, but discretion prevailed, and I returned. I was then told that few white men had gone as far as I had, and that none had ever passed up the ladder. Taking a less dangerous standpoint, I took occasion to examine the ladder. It is made of the trunks of two cocoanut trees*, one of which stands against the cliff, and the other out from it, like planting the side of a ladder against a house. The outer stick is well secured with ropes, and is the only means of communication between above and below. The natives pass up by it, even with a load, as unconcerned as if passing by the best bridge. It is surprising to see even the children pass it free and unconcerned, as if on level ground. I can only wonder there is not an accident every day.

Gilman, Gorham

1908 *Journal of a Canoe Voyage along the Kauai Palis, made in 1845*, by Hon. Gorham D. Gilman. Presented to the Hawaiian Historical Society, August 27, 1908.

*It seems unlikely that the ladder was made of coconut. A later reference (Knudsen 1991) claims the ladder was fashioned of *olopau* - probably a misspelling of *olopua*, a small native tree (*Osmanthus sandwicensis*) in the olive family noted for its heavy, very hard wood and a much more likely candidate for this use. A.C.





Kama'aina Eric Knudsen traveled the Nā Pali coast on a couple of occasions in the late 19th century. The following account is combined from two separate trip reports:

It is a long way from Honopu to Nualolo but the cliffs that face the sea are only a few hundred feet high and there is quite a bit of land above them before the very high pinnacles begin. The bench land is cut by several small streams and in every one is the most wonderful landscaping done by the ancient dwellers. Every bit of flat land was a taro patch, terraces with stone facings ten to fifteen feet high line the little streams. Once upon a time this bench land was carrying a large population. The trail winds in and out of endless gulches that finally leads to Awaawapuhi, the valley up which the great puhi went when he came to Kauai in search of rain and finally found it in the jungles of the upper Kalalau basin.

This valley also has a nice stream which ends by pouring over a high cliff onto a sandy beach. Signs of extensive cultivation are here also with the whole valley terraced up until it looks like a narrow tunnel and there is danger from falling rocks.

On the west side the natives built a ditch to carry water around the cliff and help cultivate a small flat of about ten acres overlooking the sea. A short distance further is the famous valley of Nualolo. Nualolo is really divided into two parts, the valley proper and the landing known as Nualolo Kai. The valley ends abruptly and the stream goes dashing down a steep bank for a few hundred feet and empties into the sea amidst a mass of huge boulders that lie half submerged and over which the waves splash and roar. No boat can land there, you have to swim and take your chances of getting ashore. A dangerous spot; no enemy could land a surprise attack there, nor is there a safe road to the landing. The old trail was quite exciting. It starts from the shore and after a climb of some fifteen feet one must crawl along a narrow ledge right above the sea and as you look down the waves boiling against the cliff of rock below you with the big black crabs scurrying about, your heart skips a beat.

At the end of the ledge the old Hawaiians had a ladder made of two long olopau sticks lashed to the cliff with olona ropes. This carried the climber up to another ledge and by the aid of hand holds cut in the rocks you could climb up another eight or ten feet which came upon a narrow trail cut in the rock and leading up and around the base of a huge mountain, Kamaile, and at last you were in the main valley. If the raiders came from the sea all they had to do was pull up the ladder and they were blocked.

Like Kalalau they had a trail from the table land above over the top of Kamaile and zigzagging down through the cliffs some 3000 feet to the valley below but even this trail was difficult. At one place you have to jump a crevice only three feet wide but it goes down straight like a chimney and if you slipped you would only fall 800 feet to the rocks below. They call it the Puhi. On the lower side of the puhi a piece of cliff jutted out. Behind this rock a couple of men could stand out of sight of anyone descending but with perfect view of the puhi. They were armed with long sling shots and as soon as an enemy appeared at the puhi they stunned him with a sling stone and down he went to the bottom. He was just swallowed up, hence the name puhi. Day and night the old chiefs of Nualolo kept a guard at this spot. No raiding party from the high mountains could get past.

As the trail to the top of Kamaile leaves the main valley, it passes a small cliff and in the cliff is a cave and in the cave lie the bones of a man, long since departed. The cave was walled up but some prying scientist evidently opened it looking for treasure. Is it the grave of the last guard of the valley? Who can tell?

Perhaps his spirit still watches at the puhi and when campers sleep on the site of the ancient royal house he can still be heard calling "Ta hu a--all is quiet on the western front, sleep in peace you travelers far below in the valley; no danger comes from above."

The big flat right above the sea was evidently the house of the chiefs. All the trails led through it. No one could pass that way without the guards of the chiefs seeing him. The fishermen brought their catch up the ladder to the chief's house and carried back poi, sweet potatoes and kukui nuts.

Nualolo was included in the district of Waimea and most likely the chiefs of Nualolo owed fealty to the king of Kauai but the Na Pali men were big and fierce and no doubt the chief was very independent which may have given rise to the story that it was an independent kingdom.

Towering over the landing beach is the great peak of Kamaile and in the ancient days it was a famous place for holding an "Oahi" or fireworks exhibition. The cliff is concave and the trade winds rush up forming a cushion on which the blazing sticks of wood come coasting down the cliff. The papala was the favorite tree but it is scarce and only used for royalty. It must have been a gala day when the king of Kauai paid his royal visit to Nualolo and the whole population turned out to celebrate.

Here in Nualolo Kai the fishermen built and kept their canoes and the beach must have been lined with them for the landing is most always safe as the channel is narrow and a big reef to the north protecting it. To find the passage in daylight is easy but at night it is not. The old Hawaiians who were night-bound watched the top of Kamaile standing high up against the sky. You can't miss that landmark and when they got the rock on top straight across the center of the canoe they turned toward shore and paddled in on that line.

It is said that there is no water in Nualolo Kai but in the far left corner of the flat lauhala trees grow and there a heiau or temple stands and hidden by lantana and other weeds are two little round wells. The last time I was there I cleaned them out and a few hours later found them full of clear and sparkling water. Did the clever old priest who built the temple trade a calabash of water for a nice fat fish? I wonder.

Next morning we took this ancient trail out along the reef and up the ladder. It was still there in good condition although the valley had been deserted for at least twenty years. Led by Augustus, we worked our way along the ledge which was wide enough but the ceiling was too low. It was cut in the shape of a V. There was room for your left leg but your right knee wanted to hit your chin, and to make matters worse at the end just before you reached the ladder a piece of black rock smooth and shining stuck out into the path like a chicken breast. It was a famous rock and had a name all its own, "Fat man's misery."

The ladder shook and rattled as we climbed up one by one but the old lashings still held and we all reached the ledge above safely. Then came a climb of about eight feet straight up to the next ledge. Holds had been cut in the rock and up we went one by one. At last all were up safely but Ned Damon, Twombly and I. Augustus called to Twombly to come and up he started. It was all new to him. Ned turned to me and said, "If he falls and goes into the sea will you jump with me?" I looked down and it was an awfully long way to the ocean and the waves were dashing against the rocks. "Sure," I said, but I watched Twombly with my heart in my throat. He went up a few feet and then his knees began to shake. I knew he was going to fall. I jumped up and caught hold of one of the hand holds with my right hand and with the left I grabbed him by the seat of his pants and pinned him against the cliff. "You are all right," I said, "you can't fall. Take it easy, go on up."

Augustus leaned down and caught one of his hands and pulled and up he went to the ledge.

From the ledge a trail cut in the softer rock led around the bluff and into the valley. As you look up the valley the top of the mountains seem to float in the clouds. They are about 3000 feet and very steep. We wandered up the valley and ran into goats. We had brought along a couple of rifles and soon had fresh meat. As soon as the firing commenced the goats fled up the cliffs with us after them. I noticed a kid falling behind. As a youngster I took delight in chasing and catching small kids so I gave chase. He was very spry and could run but so could I and as he climbed up the slope he began to weaken. I was gaining on him rapidly and in a few minutes he would be mine when I heard a strange whinnying sound that grew louder and louder and I realized a rock was falling from far above sent by the goats running on top of the cliff. I stopped for an instant and crash, a rock as big as a coconut struck the ground just grazing me and more were coming after it. I forgot all about the kid and ran as fast as I could down the mountain slope till I reached the flat. I have an aversion to falling rocks.

After exploring the valley, we returned to camp. One of the boys had found a bunch of bananas and when we reached the ladder we passed the goats, guns and bananas down from hand to hand and although it was not easy we all got down.

Early next morning we reached Milolii, a deep valley with a nice little stream. Back in the [18]70s over thirty children attended school here and their teacher named Kanuikino, a graduate of Lahaina Luna, lived with his parents in the village of Mana and walked into Milolii every morning returning home at night. But now like the rest of Na Pali it was deserted.

Knudsen, Eric A.

1991 *A Trip Around the Island and Some Personal Experiences on the Na Pali Coast*. In *The Kauai Papers*. Kauai Historical Society, Lihu'e,

Tava and Keale related the following regarding the Ni'ihau-Nā Pali connection:

There are stories on Niihau about visitors who had come to the islands long before Captain Cook's visit. These early visitors were called *Ehu* because of their red hair and fair skin. Legends suggest these foreigners settled in the Napali region of Kauai (p. 45).

...At the time of Cook's visit, the number of Hawaiians on the island was estimated to be a sizeable 10,000. Because of drought or other reasons, there were many migrations of people from Niihau to Kauai in the 1700s. Around 1800, there was another mass migration from Niihau to the island of Kauai, mainly to the Kalalau and Nuololo (Nualolo) Valleys, and to the Haena, Hanalei, Waimea and Kekaha areas.

Tava, Rerioterai and Moses K. Keale Sr.

1984 *Niihau: The Traditions of an Hawaiian Island*.

Valdemar Knudsen wrote of the fireworks displays exhibited over Nu'alolo:

An *oahi* required months of preparation. Two kinds of wood were used, the *hau* and the *papala*. The *hau* was easy to get and was cut into ten or twenty foot lengths, the bark peeled off, and then dried until it was as light as a feather. The *papala* grew in the high mountains and was hard to get, so it became the king's special fireworks. It had a hollow core when dry, and the flame ran through it as it fell, giving the effect of a shooting star.

These dried sticks were carried up the high cliffs to a ledge a thousand feet or more above the sea. On a dark night the men climbed up to the ledge, built a fire, and lighting the ends of the sticks, hurled them like javelins into space.

The two most famous *oahi* places on Kaua'i were Kamaile peak, rising 2500 feet over Nuulolo [Nu'alolo] landing on the Na Pali Coast, and the high cliffs that tower over the wet caves at Haena.

The cliffs being concave, the trade winds are forced upwards forming a sort of air cushion from which the blazing *hau* sticks rise and fall. The force of the wind and gravity together fan the burning end into a blazing ball of fire as the stick works up and down in the air and away from the cliff until it reaches the outer edge of the air cushion. There it comes tobogganning down, blazing fiercer and fiercer, until like a great rocket it sails over the flats below and rushes out to sea.

Knudsen, Valdemar

1945 *Teller of Hawaiian Tales*. Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Honolulu, Ltd.



Otto Degener, a botanist, also speaks of the 'oahi:

Oahi, the fireworks of the Hawaiians, was by far the most spectacular of their amusements. This took place on the northern coast of Kauai where the cliffs drop perpendicularly almost 2,000 feet into the ocean. On these heights the performers stationed themselves with oiled, dried sticks of *hau* or some other light wood. At night each performer lit one of these inflammable sticks and cast it into the air to the delight of the spectators gathered in canoes hundreds of feet below. The blazing wood was buoyed up by the strong trade wind and able to drop only very slowly into the ocean. As fast as these sticks were lighted the performers cast them into space until, to the spectator below, the sky appeared to be ablaze with scores of comets and shooting stars rising and falling, darting seaward or receding toward the cliffs, crossing and recrossing each other in the most fantastic way. This weird spectacle, sometimes supplemented with glowing *kukui* nuts that quickly reached their goal, continued long into the night. One by one the oiled sticks were consumed and the blazing firebrands flickered and disappeared, or the winds gradually subsided and they glided slowly and gracefully into the ocean where eager hands were outstretched to receive them. With these burning sticks the agile youths branded their arms as proof of having witnessed the *oahi*.

It was customary for those ascending these heights to carry bundles of green sticks and *kukui* nuts to the top and to scatter them about to dry. In this way, the proper fuel would be available for the succeeding performers to cast over the precipice.

Degener, Otto

1945 *Plants of Hawaii National Parks*. Edwards Bros., Ann Arbor, Michigan.

**NU'ALOLO KAI
HISTORIC PHOTOGRAPHS**



Photo taken from the Pali above the western end of Nu'alolo Kai, circa 1900.



Photograph of an historic-style grass house (from the Big Island), indicated by the shaded *lanai* area - a late development. This is believed to be the type of structure formerly atop the house platform at signpost # 8 at Nu'alolo Kai.



A late 19th century photo of adjacent Miloli'i Valley, showing two grass-thatched houses. The house at right was dismantled in the early 20th century and now resides in the Bishop Museum.



1930 Photograph by Wendell Bennett (Bishop Museum) of Cliff House Sites (Site 196).

BISHOP MUSEUM EXCAVATIONS AT SITE 196

1958-1964

In the old days, archaeologists just looked for a promising spot to dig up artifacts for museum collections. By the time the Bishop Museum came to dig here, the relationships of items to each other under the ground, in particular to determine their relative ages, were being sought. With the recent invention of radiocarbon dating (circa 1950), they additionally sought to answer the question of absolute dating - assigning a calendar date to the use of a site.

Archaeological evidence collected by the Bishop Museum and subsequent investigations suggest that Nu'alolo was continuously occupied for 800 years, from the 12th through the 20th centuries.

The complete story of the Museum excavations has yet to be written. The University of Hawaii continues to work on the artifacts collected, cataloguing and describing them for continued study.

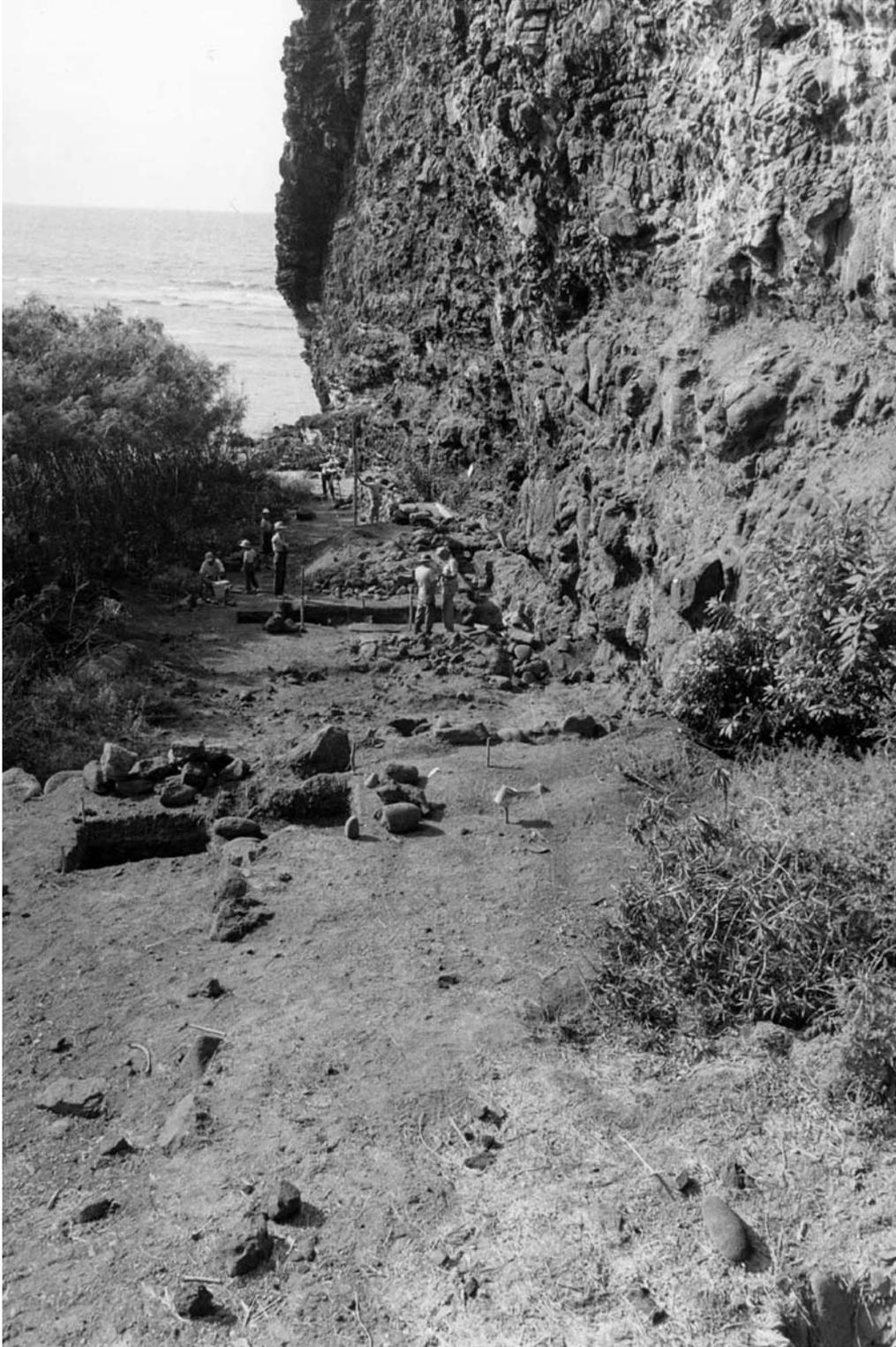
The results of small scale excavations conducted recently by State Parks are in the process of being analyzed and published, and we expect that report to be available in the very near future.



1958 Bishop Museum Excavations within K-2, Site 196.



1959 Bishop Museum Excavations within K-3, Site 196.



1959 Bishop Museum Excavations within K-3 & K-4, Site 196.

The State Parks Nu'alolo Kai Archaeological Resource Management Project

Nu'alolo Kai, A small valley and reef flat along the Nā Pali coast of Kaua'i, contains some of the most spectacular and resource-rich archaeological sites found anywhere in Hawai'i. In the summer of 1996, a pilot resource management program was initiated at Nu'alolo. The goal of the program was to conduct site enhancements along the interpretive trail, specifically to clear the archaeological sites which were formerly visible but which had become obscured by vegetation following Hurricane Iniki in 1992. A secondary goal was to begin to record the cleared archaeological features in detail, in order to monitor the effects of high tourist visitation to this area. The effort was originally coordinated by Alan Carpenter and Jordan Jokiel of State Parks with the support of volunteers, and since 1998 has been coordinated by Carpenter and Maurice Major of the State Parks archaeology program. Transportation to and from Nu'alolo is provided by private boat companies. Professional archaeologists with appropriate mapping skills were invited to participate in the effort and given first priority as volunteer participants.

More recently, the non-profit group Nā Pali 'Ohana has taken an active role in providing and recruiting volunteers, as well as involving local *kūpuna* with ancestral ties to West Kaua'i.

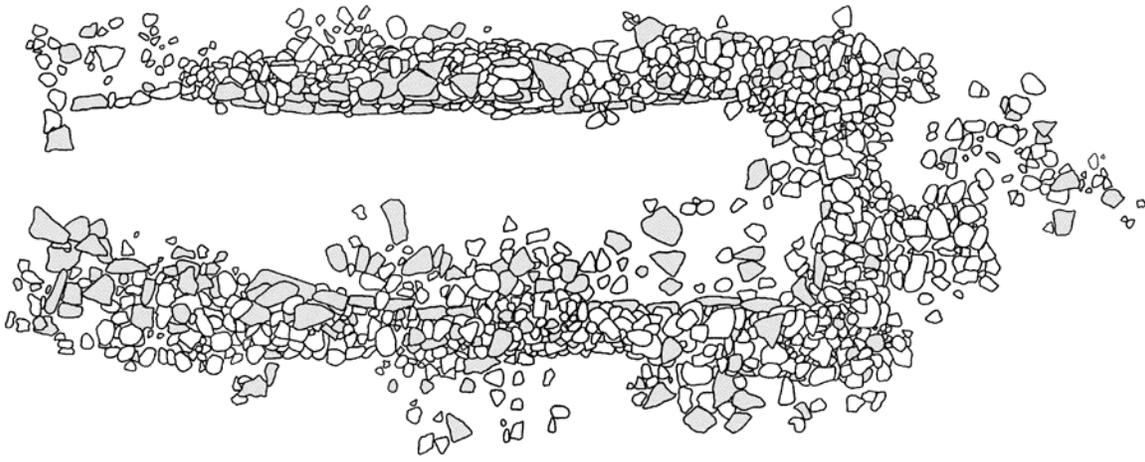
In addition to the clearing work, signposts identifying locations along the interpretive trail were installed. Site protection signs were installed at two particularly sensitive complexes, Site 50-30-01-7150, a burial complex, and Site 50-30-01-196, a *heiau* complex.

Two work trips each summer have been conducted since 1997, following the initial trip of 1996. Activities of each first trip centered around vegetation clearing of the interpretive trail and the associated archaeological features interpreted along the trail in response to growth fostered by winter rains. The second trips consisted of follow-up vegetation clearing at previously cleared sites and gradual expansion of clearing into adjacent areas. Detailed feature mapping has been ongoing since the second trip of 1997.

Through these trips, an estimated 75% of the archaeological features in the public use/trail area of Nu'alolo Kai flat have been mapped in detail. These include a very extensive *heiau* and *lo'i* (or bathing pool) complex, multiple burial features, cliff house sites, and a variety of other habitation, trail and possible religious features. A redesign of the trail route is presently underway.

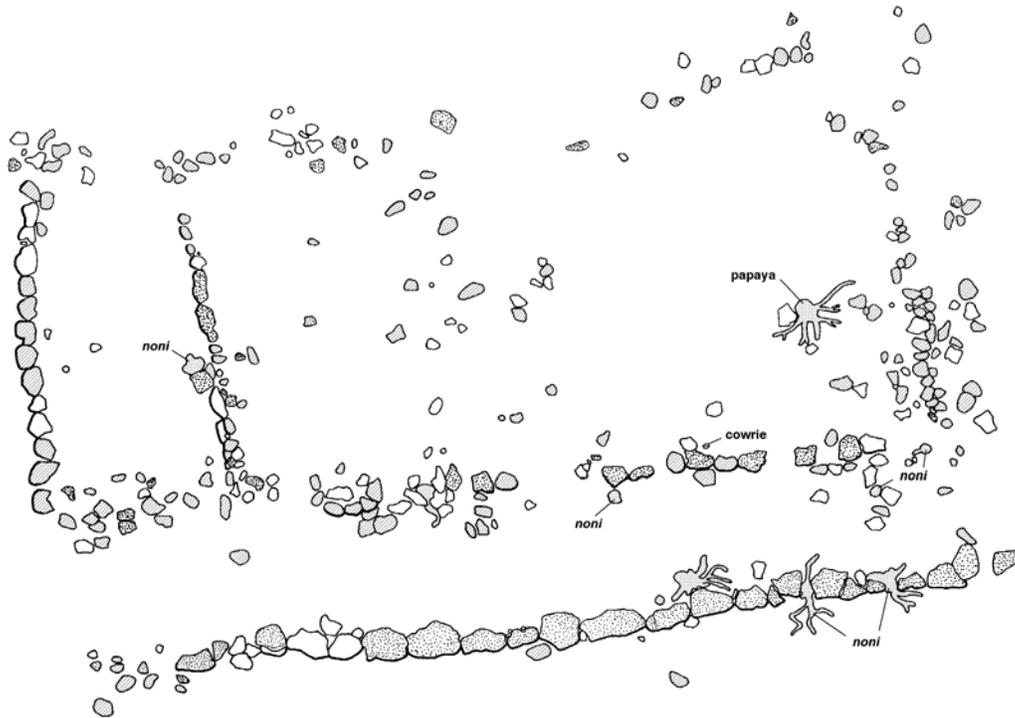
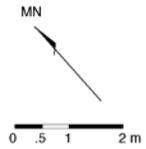
To date, nearly 100 volunteers have participated in this project, donating an estimated 2500 hours of time toward this effort. The project is unique in that it requires very minimal state expenditures to coordinate the effort, and involves individuals from the state, a non profit community group, commercial boat companies, and the general public working toward a common goal - the protection and documentation of a wonderfully preserved piece of Hawaii's past.

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL MAPS FROM THE
CURRENT PROJECT**



NU'ALOLO KAI
NĀ PALI COAST STATE PARK
 Site 50-30-01-197
 Feature B
 July 1997
 M. Major

-  = STACKED WALL
-  = SANDSTONE



NU'ALOLO KAI
NĀ PALI COAST STATE PARK
 Site 50-30-01-197
 Feature C
 July 1997
 A. Carpenter

- LEGEND:**
-  = ALIGNED STONE
 -  = SANDSTONE
 -  = WATERWORN STONE
 -  = TREE



NU'ALOLO KAI
NĀ PALI COAST STATE PARK
Site 50-30-01-197
Feature F
July 1997
F. Eble

LEGEND:

-  = BASALT STONE
-  = SANDSTONE
-  = UPRIGHT SANDSTONE SLAB



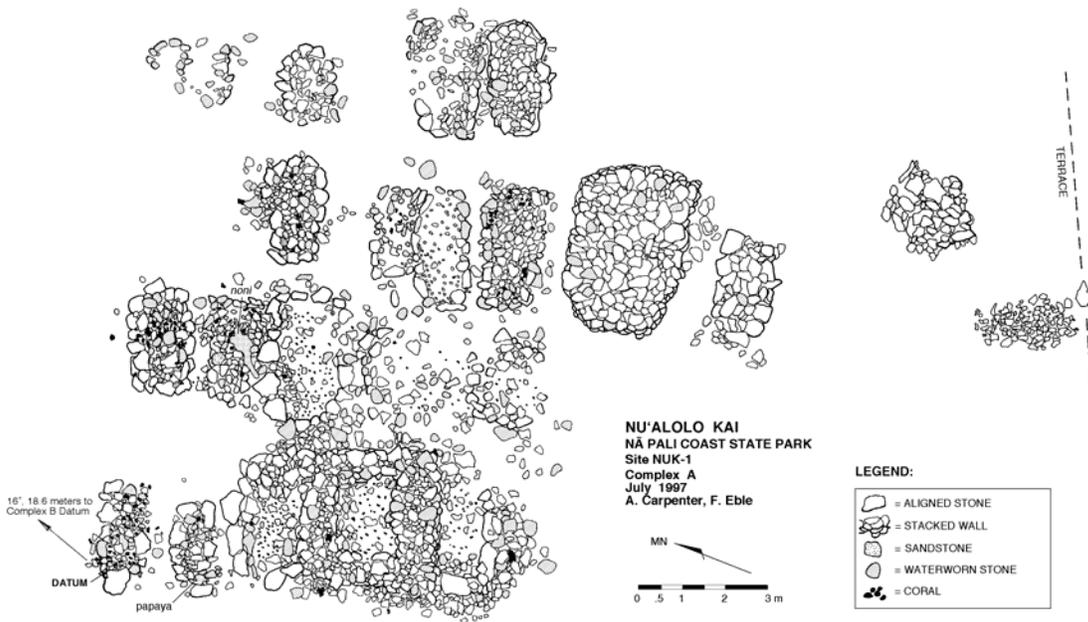
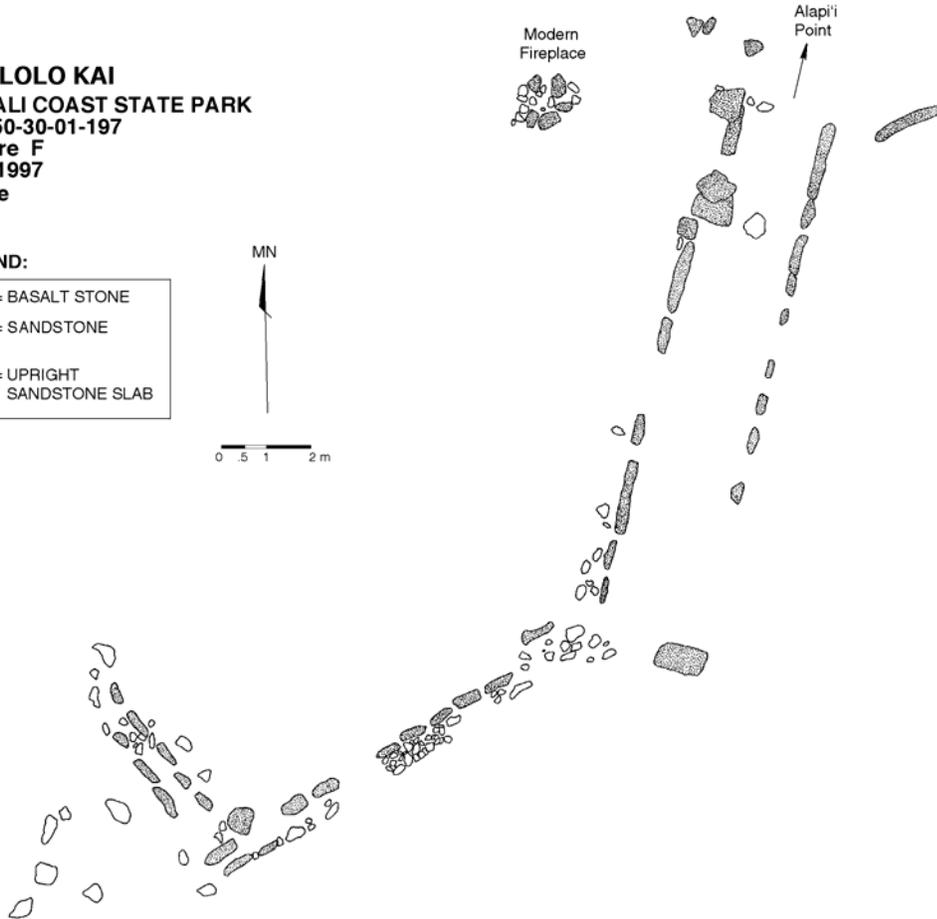
Modern
Fireplace



Modern
Fireplace



Alapi'i
Point



NU'ALOLO KAI
NĀ PALI COAST STATE PARK
Site NUK-1
Complex A
July 1997
A. Carpenter, F. Eble

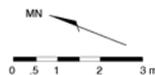
LEGEND:

-  = ALIGNED STONE
-  = STACKED WALL
-  = SANDSTONE
-  = WATERWORN STONE
-  = CORAL

16'. 18.6 meters to
Complex B Datum

DATUM

papaya



TERRACE