

# Kahua 'Olohū



## A wahi pana of Nā'ālehu, Ka'ū

By Holly K. Coleman

*We drank a most grateful draught from the principal stream, and then continued our way along its margin, through Kiolakaa, traveling towards the sea, till we reached Waiohinu... on leaving the valley, we proceeded along by the foot of the mountains, in a line parallel with the sea, and about a mile and a half from it. In our way, we passed over a tahua páhe, or páhe floor, about fifty or sixty yards long, where a number of men were playing at páhe, a favourite amusement with farmers, and common people in general... on the same tahua, or floor, they also play at another game, resembling the páhe, which they call maita or uru maita. (Ellis, 1839 )*

The above passage appears in the journal of the English missionary Reverend William Ellis, and was recorded on his tour of Hawai'i Island in 1823. Although he does not name the "tahua páhe," geographical markers mentioned in the account make it likely that the place described by Ellis is in fact Kahua 'Olohū, a famous *wahi pana* (storied, legendary place) of Ka'ū that was formerly used as a field for Hawaiian sports and *makahiki* (religious agricultural celebrations).

This Information Sheet explores some of the cultural and historical narratives surrounding Kahua 'Olohū, Nā'ālehu. Although historical texts specifically describing or referencing Kahua 'Olohū are difficult to find, ethnographic accounts of traditional recreation and robust accounts of surrounding areas like Pāhala, Honu'apo, Nīnole, Wai'ōhinu, and other places of Ka'ū strengthen the foundation of knowledge for this *wahi pana*.

Left: Aerial View of Honu'apo Pond and Mill in Ka'ū (Photo from Kau Preservation Society)



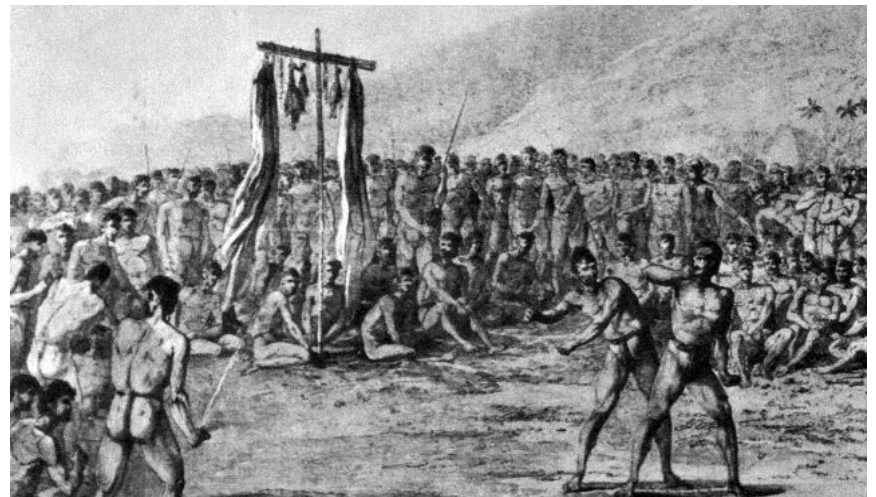
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## The Sport of Maika

Native Hawaiians engaged in a variety of sports and games, both for recreation and to build skills and strength.

The game of *maika* (which is commonly compared to modern bowling) was a traditional Native Hawaiian sport and a favorite pastime from Hawai'i to Ni'ihau (Brigham, 1902). *Maika* was played with a rounded stone, which was sometimes spherical but was usually disk-shaped; it was either thrown or rolled along a paved course known as a *ka-hua* (playing field).

The word "*maika*" can be used to signify fatigue, pain, or weariness that results from playing the game. "*Maika*" also refers to the act of engaging in rigorous or strenuous exercise (Pukui, 1986). These similar word meanings suggest that a high level of physical prowess and athletic ability was required to engage in *maika*.



Unlike many other traditional Hawaiian pastimes, surfing has remained popular; many of these sports were practiced during *Makahiki*. Top: Cheever (1851) as found in Dela Vega (2011). Bottom: Boxing at a *Makahiki* celebration (Bishop Museum Archives, n.d.).



Hula and games were part of *Makahiki* celebrations. Top: "Dance of Men in Sandwich Islands" in Choris' Voyage, 1822; as found in Andersen, 1932.

## Celebrations During the Makahiki

*Makahiki* lasted approximately four months, from October or November with the rising of *Makali'i* (the constellation Pleiades) through February or March. The season was an important time of peace; it marked the end of harvest and the beginning of the season of the god Lono, which was a time set aside for agriculture. Engaging in war and other activities associated with the god Kū, such as deep sea fishing, were considered *kapu* (restricted). During this time, Native Hawaiians engaged in games and sports, including *maika*. In fact, the day of *Koloa-kulua* (twenty-fifth) during the *makahiki* was dedicated to *maika* and other sports (Malo, 1951). These activities were also continued on the next day, which was known as *Kaloa-pau*.

## Playing Maika

On Hawai'i and Kaua'i the stone used in the game of *maika* was known as an “*ulu*,” from which the more common name known for the game, *ulu maika*, is derived. However, the term “*olohū*” was used on Maui and O'ahu. “*Olohū*” was also used in Ka'u (Pukui, 1986).

Although there was some variation between the island communities, historical sources record *maika* being played three ways. In the first, players would compete with one another by seeing how far they could throw their *olohū* or *ulu*. A more familiar form of *maika* required players to roll their *olohū* or *ulu* between two upright sticks placed a few inches apart thirty or forty yards down the *kahua* (Ellis, 1839). In the third iteration of *maika*, the disks of two players were rolled against each other; the disk that turned or broke marked the losing player (Brigham, 1902).



'*Olohū* or '*ulu* (bowling stones or quoites) collected by Nathaniel B. Emerson in the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History Ethnography Collection in Washington D.C. Photo by Holly Coleman.

## Kahua

A smooth alley or *kahua* was required for the playing of *maika*; the *kahua* was made by paving and flattening strips of land into a level track that was usually about three feet wide and at least half a mile in length. Other games like *pahe'e* and *moa* (dart throwing and dart sliding), were played on the same *kahua* as *maika* (Malo, 1951).

Although most *kahua* were said to have been straight, Emerson (in Malo, 1951) noted that some *kahua* were curved, and that '*ulu* were sometimes shaped only on one side so that they would roll along a contour. Emerson also noted that there was one track in Kaunakakai, Moloka'i which was curved and that he had heard of two other similar tracks.

## Stones

'*Olohū* were made of stone, usually a close grained basalt or compact coral (Ellis, 1839). According to the nineteenth century Hawaiian historian David Malo, the stones used for *maika* were the *mākā* (*maka'a*), *Hiu-pa*, *ikimakua*, *kumu-one makiki*, *kumumaomao*, *kalamā'ula*, and *pa'akea* (Malo 1898). Stone hammers, grooved sinkers (for fishing), stone bait mortars, and stone mirrors could be made using old disks (Buck, 1957).

'*Olohū* or '*ulu* could also be made using wood, limestone, and sandstone. Games very much like *maika* were played elsewhere in Polynesia; Maori anthropologist Te Rangī Hiroa (1957) notes that in the Cook Islands and Samoa disks were cut from stone, wood, or breadfruit.

Today, stone '*olohū* or '*ulu* are some of the most common archaeological items found in Hawai'i and are commonly referred to as “quoites” in older museum collections.

## Kahua 'Ōlohu

Kahua 'Ōlohū was a game field which is located just below present location of the town of Nā'ālehu, *makai* (seaward) of the road. It was large and level, in a region where land was typically hilly and contoured: it was likely cleared and graded. As traditional Native Hawaiian games ceased to be played, the site was converted to 'uala (sweet potato) land; Hawaiian historian Mary Kawena Pukui noted that her relative Opupele had his 'uala patches here (Handy & Pukui, 1972).

By the mid twentieth century, it is said that *kahua maika* remained only on Moloka'i and Lāna'i.



Ka'ū coast, looking over Honu'apo. Photo Courtesy of Ben Gaddis.

## Other Famous Kahua Maika

In former times there were *kahua* in many of the populated areas across Hawai'i. On O'ahu, Kou was an area known for recreation and games, including *maika*. Honokaupu was another place noted for *maika*. It is described as a hard, smooth track about twelve feet wide near the area which is now the corner of Merchant and Fort Streets; Kamehameha I is recorded as using this track (Westervelt, 1915). There was a famous track known as Kalanikahua; one was built during the time of Kamehameha at Ulupa'u in Kāne'ohe. There were also *kahua maika* at Haupū'u in Waiawa, 'Ewa, on O'ahu (Sterling & Summers, 1978). Malo (1951) reported that there was one *mauka* of Maunaloa, at Kaluako'i, at the western end of Moloka'i. The famous *kahua maika*, Hinakahua, was located in Kapa'au, Hawai'i.

## Significance of Maika

Skills developed through *maika* (such as strength and precision), were prized by warriors, who often engaged in *maika* as one form of training; Hawaiians also engaged in *maika* to maintain physical health (Malo, 1951). 'Ōlohu were treasured by players and were kept well oiled in pieces of *kapa* (barkcloth). It was said that Native Hawaiians, particularly those of Ka'ū, were more fond of *maika* than *pahe'e*. Ellis (1839) wrote of the importance of the pastime to noting:

*The inhabitants of a district not infrequently challenge the people of the whole island, or the natives of one island those of all the others, to bring a man who shall try his skill with some favorite player of their own district or island. On such occasions we have seen seven or eight thousand chiefs and people, men and women, assembled to witness the sport, which, as well as the pāhe is often continued for hours together.*

*Maika* was described as one of several "ikaika pili waiwai," gambling sports; placing bets on the results of *maika* games was commonplace (Ka Lama Hawaii 1834).

The arrival of the American missionaries and the introduction of Christianity in the early 1800s would diminish the playing of traditional games in Hawai'i; the missionaries disliked games such as *maika* because they felt they encouraged bad behavior, including gambling (Ellis, 1839 p. 200). As a result, anthropologists have noted that traditional sports like *maika*, *kūkini* (foot-racing, and *hōlua* (land-sledding) had already diminished significantly by the mid nineteenth century (Finney, 1960).

Names of Heiau and Sacred Sites

Kāne'ele'ele	Puehu
Ka'ie'ie	Lanipau
ʻĪmakakōloa	Ke'ekū
Kohaikalani	Kamalai
Kalalea	Pōhakuwa'a Kauhi

Names of Pu'u (Hills or Peaks)

Pu'u Ha'ao	Pu'u Wa'awa'a
Ka'alāiki	Pu'u 'Enuhe
Pu'u Lepo	Pu'u o Kaihelenā
Pu'uiki	Makanau

Selected Inoa Wahi (Place Names)

Kapāpala	Hīlea
Punalu'u	Kī'olokū
Honu'apo	Kaunāmano
Nā'ālehu	'Au'aulele
Wai'ōhinu	Ka'alū'alū
Kahuku	Mahana
Kamilo	Hi'ona'ā
Kalae	Hōkūkano
Nīnole	Pāhala
Kōloa	Kāwala
Kahilipalinui	Kahilipali'iki
Ki'olaka'a	Pāpa'ikou
Kamā'oa	Kāwala



### The Land and Features of Ka'ū

Ka'ū is the largest of the six *moku* (districts) on the island of Hawai'i, and is divided into many *ahupua'a* (large land divisions). Ka'ū is thought to be one of the first places that was settled by Native Hawaiians and has a unique and rich history (Handy & Pukui, 1989). Therefore, it is important to understand Kahua 'Olohū within the context of the larger *wahi pana* of Ka'ū.

Ka'ū was commonly referred to in *mele* and *oli* as a windswept place. 'Ae'aekuli and Puahiohio are two winds of Ka'ū; Kuehulepo is a wind of Nā'ālehu and Ho'olapa is a wind of Kama'oa. Ha'ao is the name of a famous rain. Although rain was not that common in certain parts of Ka'ū, the upland forests provided water for many places. Famous springs throughout the district, such as the springs of Wai'ōhinu (Waiāka'īlio, Ha'ao, Waiākahoali'i, Waiākamohoali'i, Maui'oli'oli, and Kapuna), provided enough water for *lo'i kalo* (irrigated *kalo* terraces) in certain areas, and fed coastal freshwater bodies, such as Kaulia and Ka'alaiki. Brackish *loko i'a* (fish ponds) also dotted the Ka'ū coastline; the most famous fishponds were those at Kauila, Hīlea Honu'apo, Nīnole and Punalu'u (Handy & Handy, 1991).

Ka'ū is known for its deep waters and strong currents. It is possible to catch deep sea fish from the cliffs at Kalae. The famous surf breaks at Kāwā, Punalu'u and Paiāha'a were renowned. Hala'ea and Kāwili are the names of two strong currents of Kalae, which met at a point marked by the *heiau* (place of worship) Kalalea and the stone Pōhakukeau. Puehao in Kama'oa and Hale o Lono in Haleola were famous places of healing (Pukui, 1983).



Top: Kaulia Pond. Bottom: Nīnole Cove, looking toward 'Enuhe Hill (1970). Photo Courtesy of Kau Preservation.

## Literature of Ka'ū

The *mo'olelo*, *ka'ao* (tales), *mele* (songs), and *oli* (chants) document the cultural significance of this place. In particular, the work of Mary Kawena Pukui has left a rich corpus of material which help to expand our understandings of this place, its resources, and its people.

*E ala e Kau e!  
Kau nui aina makani,  
Ko ke au i Alae  
Kapaepae ka waa e holo.  
I Kailikii, I Kaulana.*

Ka'ū, the large windy land.  
Land where the current draws to Alae,  
Where the canoes sail here and there.  
To Kā'iliki'i, to Kaulana.

### 'Ōlelo No'eau

Pukui recorded many Ka'ū *'olelo no'eau* (wise sayings).

*Ka'ū 'āina kipi.*

Ka'ū, land of rebels.  
The people of Ka'ū were known to rebel against oppression, even killing their own oppressive chiefs.

*Ka'ū, 'āina kua makani*

Ka'ū, a land over whose back the wind blows.  
Ka'ū is a windy land.

*Ka'ū hiehie i ka makani*

Ka'ū, regal in the gales.  
An expression of admiration for the district of Ka'ū, Hawai'i, or for a stately or outstanding person of that district.

*Ka'ūlepo 'ula'ula*

Ka'ū of the red earth.  
Said of the natives of old Ka'ū, who were one vast family.



Top: Map showing the District of Ka'ū. Registered Map 1409, J. F. Brown (1885). Left: The above excerpt is part of a *mele* naming the six different districts of Hawai'i and the six chiefs of those districts chanted by Kuapaka'a on his journey around the Islands (Nakuina, 2005).

## Selected Mo'olelo of Ka'ū

Pukui (1972) notes that the Hawaiians of the area did name their place "Ka'ū" (the breast) because they loved Pele. Another *mo'olelo* attributes the name to a male *kupua* (demigod) who took the form of a stone and was called Ka'ūloa.

The people of Ka'ū were known for being intolerant of oppression. Several *mo'olelo* recount the slaying of oppressive chiefs: the chief Kohāikalani was crushed by a log during the building of Ka'ulakalani Heiau; The chief Halae'a was drowned after demanding too many fish; and the chief Ko'ihala was stoned after starving his people.

A boy in Kahiki named Niauelpoo wished to visit his father, Kualakai in Ka'ū. He traveled with the aid of his ancestor, Niuolahiki, who took the form of a coconut tree, and stretched from Kahiki to Ka'ū. The boy excelled in demonstrating his skill through games there, including maika, and made a friend named Uhuula. Unfortunately, Niauelpoo's father did not recognize him, and killed him and Uhuula. Niuolahiki revived both youth, and Uhuula became the red parrotfish. Niauelpoo was able to prove to Kualakai that he was his son. Niauelpoo's mother, Hina heard that he been killed by his father, and she traveled to Kau and killed Kalakai, who became the first kualakai fish (Handy & Pukui 1972).



Hawaiians in front of grass house, in Nā'ālehu. Photo Courtesy of Hawaii State Archives Digital Photo Collection.

## The Māhele

Six *konoiki* (lesser chiefs) were awarded twenty *ahupua'a* and two *'ili 'āina* (small land divisions). The missionaries were given the land under their mission station in Ka'ū. Some of the *ahupua'a* which had been given to the Hawaiian government to pay for commutation fees. Other *ahupua'a* were designated government lands by the King, such as Hōkūkano, Ka'alāiki, Ho'ona'ā and Wailau (Ueyoka et al., 2012). Sugar and ranching interests would eventually acquire large tracts of land in Ka'ū.

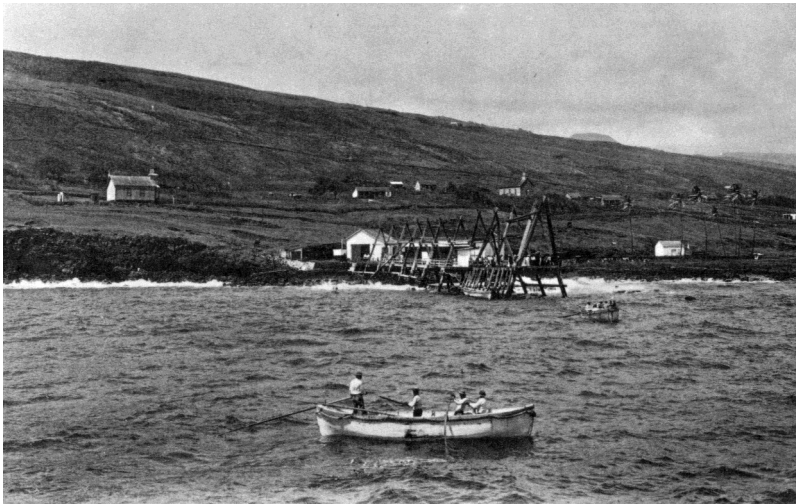
## Changing Life in Ka'ū

Social, economic, and political changes occurring during the late 1800s and 1900s would cause systemic shifts throughout Hawai'i; these changes were also visible in Ka'ū.

Rapidly industrializing and urbanizing centers, such as Honolulu, began to draw segments of the population away from Ka'ū. As in other parts of Hawai'i, the sugar industry began to import foreign labor to work on the plantations in the region; the same was true of the growing ranches. These changes would also affect the resources and environments of Ka'ū. The introduction of Euro-American commerce would decrease traditional farming, fishing, and subsistence living among Native Hawaiians in Ka'ū. In particular, the *pulu* (fern fiber) trade led to famine in the area; the trade also encouraged debt among Native Hawaiians that ultimately led to the loss of land (Ueyoka et al., 2012). By the mid-1800s, introduced disease and drought had also resulted in severe levels of depopulation. The introduction of Euro-American education by the missionaries would fragment traditional methods of intergenerational learning and disrupt the passage of cultural and historical knowledge, affecting the Native Hawaiian family structure, as well as traditional



Top: Punalu'u, 1891, Courtesy of Kau Preservation.  
Middle: People in a Canoe, n.d. Courtesy of Kau Preservation.  
Bottom: Punalu'u Landing (1880) Hawaii State Archives Digital Collection.



Top: Hutchinson Sugar Mill at Honu'apo. Bottom Honu'apo Landing, 1890; Photo in R. J. Baker Collection. Both photos courtesy of Ka'ū Preservation.

## Sugar

The sugar industry was responsible for many of the social, economic and environmental changes in Ka'ū in the 1800s.

Sugar was first planted commercially in Ka'ū in the late 1860s, during a period of time where sugar was a major export crop in other areas of Hawai'i. The sugar industry became a major driver of the economy and labor in Ka'ū by the 1880s; hundreds of foreign immigrants would come to Ka'ū to work for the sugar companies. Industry expansion led to the construction of mills at Pāhala Nā'ālehu, Hīlea, and Honu'apo. Shipping was moved from the town of Ka'alu'alu in Wai'ōhinu to Honu'apo; the bay was deepened in 1870s and a wharf was built in 1883. A railroad for transporting sugar was built between Honu'apo and Nā'ālehu by 1890.

One of the largest operations was Hutchinson Sugar Plantation Company, which was started by a man named Alexander Hutchinson but was acquired by Claus Spreckles and eventually C. Brewer & Company.

Natural disasters, such as the tsunami, earthquakes and other natural disasters would at times disrupt the production and shipping of sugar and damage the infrastructure of the plantations. Following the decline of sugar as an important export crop for Hawai'i in the mid 1900s, the sugar industry diminished in Ka'ū (University of Hawaii, 1994).

## Missionaries

Although the American Protestant missionaries frequently visited Ka'ū to preach and give sermons, they did not establish a mission there until the 1840s. The mission station was built in Wai'ōhinu and run by Reverend John Paris. A stone church was built there, partially using stones from sacred sites in the area; it was later destroyed by the earthquake of 1868.

## Ranching

The introduction of cattle to Hawai'i led to the growth of the cattle industry and *paniolo* (cowboy) culture, which would become an important part of life in Ka'ū. Ranches were established at Ka'alu'alu, Kahuku, and Kapāpala.

## Natural Disasters of 1868

Maunaloa erupted on March 27, 1868; it was reported that steam and fire were seen at four points on the mountain and that a stream of lava flowed towards Ka'ū.

Kīlauea began to tremor on the 28th. The missionary Titus Coan, who was stationed in Hilo at the time, wrote: "Shocks of the earthquake become more frequent and vigorous, and were felt all round the island... they came in such quick succession that the ground rarely ceased to quiver between the throes," (Missionary Herald, 1868). Wooden houses were knocked off their foundations in Keaīwa, Punalu'u and Nīnole, and it destroyed nearly every stone wall and house in the Ka'ū district. The large stone churches in Kahuku and Wai'ōhinu were leveled.

A major earthquake occurred on April 2; it was estimated to be 7.9 in magnitude and is the largest recorded earthquake in the Hawaiian Islands. The earthquake was so large that it was felt on Maui, Moloka'i and O'ahu, and its aftershocks continue to this day (Hawaii Volcano Observatory, 1994).

The earthquake triggered landslides that sent dirt, rocks and cliff faces tumbling; it also opened fissures in the earth. The largest landslide occurred in Kapapala, Ka'ū, and part of the coastline permanently sank.

A tsunami was also triggered by these events. The wave was said to have measured nearly 50 feet (~15 meters) tall and caused major destruction in Ka'ū at Honu'apo, Keauhou and Punalu'u, destroying much of the infrastructure used there for industry and shipping. Villages, such as those at 'Āpua, Waikapuna and Kawā were wiped out.

Although other parts of the island were affected by these natural disasters, the Ka'ū coastline suffered the most damage and the highest number of casualties.



Volcano after earthquake, 1887. Photo Courtesy of Hawaii State Archives Digital Photo Collection.

## Accounts of the Events of 1868

*Ma ka aoao hema nae o Hawaii ka ikaika loa. Kulaiia na hale ilalo, olokaaia na pohaku ma na pali, wawahiiia na luakini hale pohaku o Kau. Nakaka ae la ka honua ma Kau, a hamama he mawae nui ma ke alanui o aupuni ma Kiolakaa, ma Kau...I ka hu ana mai he Pele lepo ulaula mauka aku o Keaiwa, kahe wikiwiki loa aku ekolu paha mile iloko o na minute ekolu paha. Hookahi paha mile ka laula o keia lepo ula I luaiia mai e ka Pele. Pau kekahi mau hale a me na kanaka, na lio, na hipa, a me na kao, I ka uhiia I keia lepo ula, a kanu ola ia ana ia aku lakou. (Ke Alaula, 1868)*

On the southern end of Hawai'i it was very strong. Houses were knocked down, rocks rolled from the cliffs, and the stone houses of Ka'ū were shattered. The earth quaked in Ka'ū, and a large fissure opened in the Government Road in Kiolaka'a in Ka'ū...When the lava swelled upland of Keaīwa, it flowed perhaps three miles within perhaps three minutes. It spread out perhaps one mile, this lava expelled by the volcano. Several houses were destroyed, and people, horses, sheep, and goats were covered by this lava, and they were buried alive.

