

A Concise HISTORY of the HAWAIIAN ISLANDS
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About the Author

Dr. Phil Barnes has been an educator for the past thirty years. During this period, he has taught students from the intermediate grades through grad school. His background includes study in both biology and history. He received his bachelors degree from Purdue University, his masters from Indiana University, and two doctoral level degrees from the University of Miami. He is a member of the Hawaiian Historical Society, Hawaii Ecotourism Association and is listed in "Who's Who Among America's Teachers". He has been teaching Hawaiian Studies courses for the past ten years. He and his wife, Diane, make their home in Kehena Beach on the Island of Hawai'i.

PREFACE

My goal in writing this book was to create a short book that travelers to Hawai'i can read in a few hours. One's travels become more meaningful when viewed within the context of a historical framework. Many archeological remains of pre-Historic times can still be observed on all of the islands. Rich collections of early artifacts are not only found in museums but hotel lobbies. The Hawaiian Renaissance is much more than a marketing strategy for attracting visitors. Real change is in the air in the islands. This should be viewed as an exciting expansion of the aloha spirit rather than a threat to the status quo. May your appreciation of the cultural and environmental kaleidoscope of these beautiful islands be expanded by spending a bit of time in digesting this book. I have included a suggested reading materials list should you wish to expand your knowledge base. I would like to thank my wife Diane for her support. I would also like to thank my Daughter Dr. Brooke Barnes for extensive editorial assistance. Bob Voris and Dr. Beth Hartley are also thanked for their reviews of early drafts. Most of all I would like to thank the Hawaiian people for their perseverance against exceptional odds to keep the feeling of aloha alive in these islands that I love.

P. Kimo Barnes

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PROLOGUE

The Hawaiian Archipelago is the most remote group of islands on the face of the planet. The Islands are over 2,400 miles from the closest continental land mass. This relative isolation has resulted in unique life forms and also accounts for the fact that the islands were one of the last spots on the globe to be populated.

The islands are all volcanic in origin with the youngest islands being on the southeast region of the chain. The islands are located on the Pacific plate. The plate moves slowly to the northwest. There is a hot spot that is stationary in the middle of the Pacific Ocean. This hot spot is actually a large vent where molten material flows to the surface. New islands are created in the southeast as the older islands slowly drift to the northwest. The island of Hawai`i, the newest island, is presently located over this hot spot. It emerged above the ocean surface less than one million years ago. It is the only island that still has active volcanoes. A new island, Lo`ihi, is forming to the southeast of the island of Hawai`i. It is still 3,000 feet under-water and will not break the surface for thousands of years.

Volcanic activity is still much in evidence on the island of Hawai`i. Of the five volcanoes that formed this island two, Kilauea and Mauna Loa, are still active. The east rift zone of Kilauea has been erupting almost continuously since 1983. Over 200 homes in this region as well as countless historical and ecologically unique areas have been covered over by this flow. You may still observe lava flowing into the ocean creating massive clouds of steam at the end of Chain of Craters road in Hawaii Volcanoes National Park.

Erosion and island sinking are constant forces at work here, as well as elsewhere on the planet. The oldest islands, such as French Frigate Shoals, are little more than coral heads a few feet above water at high tide, as the sea and other elements have been reducing their size since the moment when their volcanoes became dormant. These islands are uninhabited and are currently a refuge for nesting sea birds, sea turtles, and the Hawaiian monk seals. They are under the jurisdiction of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and all access other than scientific research is severely limited. At the other end of the chain are the mountains of the island of Hawai`i which rise almost 14,000 feet above sea level, with peaks often covered in snow. Erosive factors and sinking have not had time to make dramatic inroads in this young island. Dramatic illustrations of this erosive principal are the Na Pali coast on Kaua`i and the north shore of Moloka`i

which contains the highest sea cliffs on earth. Both of these sea cliffs or palis were created when massive chunks of the islands slid into the ocean during major earthquakes.

Of the 4,000 islands that compose the Hawaiian Archipelago there are eight major islands. These are in order from east to west: Hawai`i, Kaho`olawe, Maui, Lana`i, Moloka`i, O`ahu, Kaua`i, and Ni`ihau. These islands are all inhabited except for Kaho`olawe which was used by the U.S. Navy for years as a bombing range. It has currently been returned to the Hawaiian people and it is being restored to its natural state. The size of these islands vary from Kaho`olawe to the island of Hawai`i, which is almost twice as large as all of the other Hawaiian Islands combined.

Since the islands are so isolated, life forms were slow to develop and have evolved into a unique biota. All life forms arrived on the islands by means of one of the three w's. Wave action carried many life forms, particularly flowering plants, to the islands. Anyone who has seen a coconut sprouting on the shore can appreciate this form of plant dispersal. Wings is the second means of introduction. Obviously birds arrived in the region, both the pelagic sea birds who travel the earth's oceans and land based birds who made it to the islands in powerful storm winds. Birds deposited many seeds in their faces as well as insects and other life forms that were lodged in their feathers. Wind is the third natural pathway for the introduction of new species, particularly the high altitude jet stream that carries a heavy load of spores and other microscopic life forms.

Obviously these methods of dispersal would severely limit the gene pool in Hawai`i. With relatively few representatives from any given species and few total species, life forms evolved from a limited base to fill the many diverse ecological niches in the islands. Single species evolved into a great number of different but related species. The Hawaiian Honey creeper, a small bird, is a good example of this phenomenon. Thirty separate species evolved from a single original species. Two-thirds of all species found on the islands when the first inhabitants arrived were endemic only to Hawai`i. The introduction rate of new species has increased dramatically since that time.

An unusual characteristic of the endemic fauna of Hawai`i is the fact that only two mammals were found on the islands before the first Polynesians arrived. These were the monk seal and a species of bat. This created an ecosystem with a

distinct lack of predators. This is one of the reasons that introduced species have had such a devastating effect on the native species of plants and animals. A good example of this is the introduction of the mongoose in the 1930's. The goal was to find a predator to keep the rat population in check. As it turns out rats are nocturnal and mongooses are diurnal so they seldom come in contact. To make matters worse mongooses eat even more of the native bird eggs than the rats they were brought in to control. Since that time the state has created an elaborate system to prevent the introduction of further new species.

There were also no native species of reptiles and amphibians. The large and varied insect population has given rise to an expanding number of predators in the form of lizards. There are still no snakes on the islands much to the delight of many visitors. This situation is presently being tested by the brown tree snakes from Guam. This poisonous snake has a propensity to stow away on airplanes flying in to Hawai'i. Planes are inspected on landing to try to keep this new intruder from gaining a foothold in Hawai'i.

Chapter 1

First settlement

Before looking at the arrival of the first humans on Hawai`i, an examination of the voyaging traditions of the Polynesians is in order. Although there is still a scholarly debate on the origins and migration of the Polynesian peoples, the dominant theory is that they migrated from Asia to the Southeast Asian Peninsula and then continued across the sea into Indonesia. From here they followed an easterly route across Melanesia and Micronesia to the vicinity of Fiji. From this juncture one strand headed south to New Zealand and another headed north through the Society Islands to the Marquesas and then on to Hawai`i. This should not be interpreted as a mass migration. It was more a series of fairly short voyages over perhaps a thousand years. As with the history of all groups before the advent of writing, it is possible to establish a chronological sequence from the oral histories but exact dates can not be given. As a side note, Polynesia is described as the region included in a triangle with the western corner being New Zealand, the eastern corner Easter Island, and the northern point Hawai`i.

What drove these nomads of the seas? How and why did they shove off into uncharted oceans? The easy answer is that like all peoples of the hunter-gatherer tradition they were constantly searching for food, but it is not this simple. In the first place they had a history of agriculture and food harvesting technologies that allowed them to harvest the surplus of food that is essential for a people to create the rich civilization that characterizes this region. It is undoubtedly true that even with this abundance of food an area would eventually no longer be able to support the expanding population and a group would be formed to head out to sea in search of new lands. Tribal conflict could also be resolved by the less powerful group going their own way rather than engaging in warfare.

These expeditions were well planned so that the group would have all of the necessities that they required when they reached their new home. They would carry livestock in the form of chickens, dogs, and pigs. They would also take select crops such as bananas, taro, and breadfruit to cultivate for future harvest. Medicinal plants would also be taken to ensure necessary remedies for healing rituals. Food for them and their animals would be required as well as water both for themselves and to water their plants. Basic tools, cordage, gourds, etc. would need to be included.

Perhaps more important than the physical materials that were taken would be the makeup of the crew themselves. There was commonly a crew of at least 15 people on each boat. Often three or four boats would travel together. This would provide an added element of safety at sea as well as a larger group of colonists to form their society on the new island when they landed. There would need to be a cross section of males and females as well as members of diverse families to avoid the problems associated with inbreeding. Individuals would also need to possess the skills to establish their new habitation, as well as those skills needed to pilot a craft in unknown waters for an extended voyage. And not all voyagers successfully completed their journey. No one knows how many of these pioneers perished at sea before being able to make a landfall.

Their methods of navigating are only recently being resurrected by Polynesians who wish to keep the voyaging traditions alive. This navigation was a combination of celestial observations such as marker stars at night and cloud formations during the day, as well as evaluating flotsam (objects floating in the water), bird and fish species that were sighted, current flow, etc.. As the number of floating objects increased and they sighted birds with limited flight range they would know that they were getting closer to land days before an actual sighting would be made. This was a complex system that involved no instruments and, since writing was not present, had to be learned by rote memory.

The voyaging vessels themselves could take several different forms. They consisted of hulls that were created by hollowing out large logs. These dugouts were then decked with shaped wood pieces often made of Koa, a beautiful wood indigenous to the islands. The hollowed out area could then be used to store supplies in a dry environment. This hull would either be joined to a similar hull to create a catamaran or have an outrigger attached to construct a stable and seaworthy craft. A platform was attached to the two hulls which created a living area for the voyagers. A small hut or shed roof was added for protection from the elements.

Vessels would be propelled by both sails and paddles. With the twin hull configuration ten or more people could be paddling at the same time. This was a distinct advantage over larger European style sailing ships in that you did not need to worry about becoming becalmed when the winds die for weeks on end in the tropical seas. These craft also had the advantage of drawing far less water

than the larger sailing ships. It was thus much easier to navigate the dangerous coral shoals. And the boats could be paddled directly onto the beach rather than mooring a quarter mile out to sea. This allowed them to escape the destructive force of the not uncommon tropical storms.

It is commonly speculated that the first Polynesians to reach Hawai`i came from the Marquesas Islands in what is now French Polynesia. These islands are some of the most inhospitable in all of the South Pacific. The main islands are ringed by sea cliffs and divided by valleys that are so deep that the bottom receives little direct sunlight. Thus access to both the bounty of the ocean and arable land for farming was extremely limited. The people had a reputation of being very warlike, which is common in areas with limited resources. All in all, it is not hard to imagine why a group would want to strike out for a more accommodating environment. The Marquesas are over 1,000 miles from Hawai`i. That would make this one of the longest voyages over open ocean in all of Polynesia.

Wherever their origin, the first landfall was made at Ka Lae on the southern coast of the island of Hawai`i. Again there is a debate as to the time of this arrival. Most estimates put this landing between 400 and 500 AD. It is a common speculation that the voyagers were probably running low on supplies when they reached Hawai`i. If they had missed Hawai`i the next group of islands is the Aleutian Chain of Alaska far to the north. If they were lucky Mauna Loa may have been erupting at the time. At a height of 13,600 feet this beacon could be observed far out to sea, particularly at night. Even if the volcano was not erupting the great mass of the island's mountain creates its own weather system with clouds stacking up high into the sky. This would be a sign that the skillful navigators would not be likely to miss if they were even within 100 miles of the island.

Once a landfall was made they would quickly have gone to work to recreate the agricultural and domestic attributes of their homeland. They would of course be mindful of specific differences in their new surroundings and would modify their practices to adapt to the new environmental conditions. These original settlers had the islands to themselves for several centuries. During this time period they occupied all of the major islands in the Hawaiian chain. All of this was thrown into disarray around the year 1000 when a large contingent arrived from

the islands of Tahiti. These new arrivals were physically larger and quickly established their dominance over the original inhabitants. In a relatively short period of time a new hierarchy was created with the Tahitians as the ali`i or nobles and the former occupants reduced to the role of commoners or slaves.

Little is known of these smaller original inhabitants and some say they are the basis of the menehune mythology. These are the “little people” that come out only at night and are known for their engineering prowess. Many rock walls and other structures in the islands are attributed to their labor.

It is speculated that in the early years following the arrival of the Tahitians there was widespread voyaging between Hawai`i and Tahiti with a wholesale migration of large numbers of Tahitians and extensive trade between the two regions. For unknown reasons all contact with the rest of Polynesia suddenly ceased and the Hawaiian Island remained isolated until the arrival of the Europeans almost 800 years later. It was during this time period that the rich culture of Hawai`i developed in a manner that allowed half a million inhabitants to exist in the islands with all of their physical needs being met with a minimum of difficulty. Their remaining free time could be devoted to all of those aspects of music, dance, and the arts that make Hawai`i such an interesting destination today.