

PUNALU'U -Kau District, Island of Hawaii

Punalu'u is the name of a bay with a beach which, viewed from the sea, would perhaps have appealed more than any other along this coast to Polynesian migrants from the south as a place for a landing and first settlement. It is deep and sheltered enough to be shielded somewhat from the prevailing winds, and it has a beach on which fishing canoes can comfortably land in normal weather. Chester Lyman, in 1846 found it "romantically situated on the beach, shut in in part by a rough lava stream." This bay is also the best in Ka'u for sheltering beached canoes. Now it is mounded quite high, and thrust back; formerly it was more extensive. But still it has survived the tidal waves which have swept other beaches away completely.

Punalu'u means "Diving spring," and takes its name from the fact that for their drinking water the natives had to dive (*lu'u*) down in the bay to an underwater spring (*puna*) some ways out from the shore. A man would take gourds out to the place and dive under. When he came to the fresh cold water near the bottom of the bay, he would unstop his containers, fill them, then surface and bring them to shore. In ancient times the Punalu'u people went to the springs at Ninole for their drinking water until the ogress Kai-kapu settled there. Then they learned to dive for water in the bay. Some 50 yards in from the beach is a pond that now is stagnant, but formerly it was large and had ample fresh water from a deep spring named Ka-wai-hu-o-kauila. In the old days the spring was *kapu* and used only for drinking purposes.

A legend relates that there was a time when stormy weather prevented the men from diving for water. There were two supernatural turtles who had come out of the ocean to Punalu'u: Honu-po'o-kea (Turtle-with-white-head), the mother; and Honu-'ea (Turtle-with-reddish-brown-shell), the father. The mother gave birth to an object resembling a piece of *kauila* wood, which she buried in the sand to be hatched out by the sun. Then they dug into the earth and made a spring, then returned to the sea. When it was time for her "egg" to hatch, Honu-po'o-kea returned. When the thing she had laid did hatch it was a turtle the color of polished *kauila* wood. Mother and daughter lived in the spring until the baby turtle grew up. The young turtle was named Kauila. The spring came to be named "The-rising-water-of-Kauila." The turtle girl was able to assume human form and play with the young folk, but would become a turtle again when she went back into the spring. When bubbles came up in the spring, people knew the turtle girl was asleep in her home. Children used to catch fish and shrimps in the spring, and Kauila watched lest the little ones fall in. The people loved Kauila for this and because her spring gave them drinking water. They never used her water for any other purposes.

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"HE LA HONU - TURTLE DAY 1995" IN CELEBRATION OF HAWAIIAN SEA TURTLES

Several hundred people from all walks of life with a fondness for sea turtles came together on 25 November 1995 at Punalu'u Beach Park on the island of Hawaii for the first *He La Honu* celebration (translated as "Day of the Turtle"). The hallmark of festivities was the dedication of a bronze and lava stone monument in honor of the legend of Kauila and the green turtles that commonly feed in abundance in beautiful and historic Punalu'u bay.

The event was organized and hosted by high school students, teachers, and other members of the local community surrounding Punalu'u. Food was served in abundance and Hawaiian music groups played to everyone's delight. Various dignitaries gave congratulatory speeches on the accomplishment of the monument, with its educational message on the cultural and biological significance of sea turtles in this region. In addition, the newly published Hawaiian-English version of the "Sea Turtles - No Na Honu Kai" coloring book was distributed for the first time (courtesy of NOAA National Marine Sanctuary Program and the Center for Marine Conservation).

The planning and construction of the monument resulted exclusively from private donations, including the creation of a unique bronze-relief disk by sculptor Dale Zarrella. Sponsors included the Honu Project, the University of Hawaii at Hilo's Marine Option Program, Ka'u Agribusiness, the Gummow family, and the Bakken family. The bronze plate on the monument reads:

The mystical turtle, Kauila, makes her home in the Ka'u district at Punalu'u Bay. According to Hawaiian mythology, Kauila was empowered with the ability to turn herself from a turtle into human form and would play with the children along the shoreline and keep watch over them. The people of Ka'u loved Kauila as the guardian of their children and also for her spring that gave them pure drinking water.

The presence of Kauila can still be felt today by the sea turtles that inhabit this special place. The Hawaiian honu (green turtle) can be regularly seen in the bay feeding on limu growing in the shallows. In addition, the honu'ea (hawksbill) sometimes enters the bay at night to crawl ashore and deposit eggs in the black sand. Both species of sea turtles are fully protected under the U. S. Endangered Species Act and wildlife laws of the State of Hawaii. Enjoy watching these marvelous creatures but please do not touch or disturb them in any way.

Celebrations on behalf of sea turtles are not a common occurrence, since most often there is little to celebrate among endangered and declining populations worldwide. Fortunately, while all is not rosy, there is indeed some "Good News" to herald in Hawaii. After nearly two decades of protection under the U. S. Endangered Species Act, Hawaiian green turtles (*Chelonia mydas*) are clearly showing encouraging signs of population recovery. The annual average number of nesting turtles has more than doubled since the early 1970's, from 200 to presently around 500 per year. As a result, sea turtle watching in Hawaiian waters has grown to be an exceedingly popular attraction and ecotourism industry for visitors and residents alike.

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