



What's In a Name?

Kukae'ohiki, modern-day Laniakea.

BY IAN MASTERSON

WHEN FRED AND PETER VAN DYKE, BUD BROWNE, BUZZY TRENT, GEORGE DOWNING AND WALLY FROISETH had just surfed the break now

known as Laniakea for the first time, they decided upon a name for the new break. The place name was figured based on a sign that read "Laniakea" fronting a house on the point known as *Pu'u Nenu* (Pohakuloa Way), to the north of the break, at the spot where Browne had been shooting from an old observation tower (Clark, 2004). We now know from the work of John R.K. Clark that the name for the beach fronting the surf break Laniakea was originally *Kukae'ohiki*, or "sand crab excrement" as it were. Admittedly, the small doo-doo balls left behind by the crabs incessant digging are still visible on a daily basis at dawn before the many surfers and tourists stomp on through them without a care, believing that sand is sand is sand. So does that make these pioneers wrong, or off a bit? Not at all, for the name Laniakea, in reality the name of a spring located amongst the rocks inside Jocko's to the north of the point, is a historical reminder of these great pioneers on an adventure way back in November of 1955—awesome footage that can be seen in Bud Browne's "Surfing the 50's!"

Visually, crabs in their crouched stance could be likened to a human in a squatting position. Even the best surfers grab rail when they need to set the inside edge while flying into a barrel, and the double-hand grab that I employ to set the rail on my single fin has caused me to endure much rousing from my friends for my "crab-grab" stylee. Yet, that's what keyed me into the visual metaphor of a crab as a surfer: imagine a Hawaiian streaking across the inside west

bowl at Laniakea on a 16-plus-foot long 200-plus pound *papa'olo* with no fin—it just might take a double-grab to accomplish such a feat.

There are traditional legends in which crabs are metaphors for surfers in ancient Hawai'i, but how do we know that ancient Hawaiians were surfing at Laniakea? It is written in stone under our feet and all that sand. At the beginning of the winter when the summer trade winds moved all the sand along the shoreline towards Papailoa, the shelf seen at the north end of the beach most of the year is then exposed all the way past the first few houses after the bridge. One early fall morning I was surprised to see a petroglyph of a rainbow man staring at me. I passed another carving of a man holding a paddle over his head and another of two men facing each other in a boxing position. Further, at the spot where almost every surfer jumps in to paddle out through the channel, was another rather large petroglyph of a man on what appears to be a short surfboard!

The images are consistent with the ritual athletics that are part of the annual *Makahiki* festival in ancient Hawai'i, a festival that could easily be likened to the Olympics in ancient and modern times. These games, associated with annual tribute to the *ali'i* (chief) and a time period freed from the normally strict *kapu* (taboo) system, are presided over by the god of rain in one of his many forms, *Lono-i-ka-makahiki*. The rainbow is a symbol of *Lono*, and there are rainbow man petroglyphs elsewhere in the Islands.

The rainbow man petroglyphs suggest that *Kukae'ohiki* was a site where the *Makahiki* games occurred. That brings to life an active metaphor of a Hawaiian streaking across a Laniakea peeler, grabbing both rails to hold in



that edge and 200 pounds of solid wood from plunging to the reef below in an attempt to surf the wave through the inside break and pass the *pua* (buoy) inside the shelf to win the contest—meanwhile the spectators along shore are chuckling at how the surfer looked like he was using one form or another of *lua* (bathroom), or like a crab scuttling on the reef.

So herein lies a theory presenting a deeper meaning that might hide the disdain I felt over my favorite surf spot being originally named for crab poop. But hey, what's in a name anyway? Laniakea translates to "wide sky" literally, probably also relating to the heavenly sky father, *Wakea*, who is a progenitor of the Hawaiian race. Either way, it definitely applies to the broad visual display spanning from Ka'ena to Ke Iki Points embracing a curved horizon. Really, the way to realize the *mana* (power or divine spirit) of a place name is to experience the place. All of us who have dawn patrolled there and seen the morning rainbows fronting massive cloud bands along the horizon with the sun rising behind the plains of Lauhulu have felt the *mana* of Laniakea, and we have all given thanks for that feeling. Everyone else, well, they're probably just seeing turtles!



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