

SB Aug. 29, '77



**AUTHENTIC ARTIFACTS?**—Mark Blackburn shows some of the rocks removed from a Big Island beach. —Star-Bulletin Photo by Ron Edmonds.

# Big Isle Stones Still a Mystery

By Pat Guy  
Star-Bulletin Writer

The artifact dealer who removed 26 items from a beach site on the Big Island says he's convinced the rocks are part of a heiau "bigger than the City of Refuge."

And a Big Island minister, the Rev. Leon Sterling, is upset that the dealer, Mark Blackburn, is free without prosecution for removing the ancient Hawaiian items.

The authenticity of the "artifacts" has not yet been determined by archaeologists, however, and cannot be until they are returned to the site.

Jane Silverman, historic preservation officer for the Department of Land and Natural Resources, said yesterday that "because they are all natural stones, none of them has been worked or carved, and since they have been removed from the site, there is no way of knowing whether they are in fact artifacts or just natural stones."

A STATE archaeologist has looked at the stones, she said, but "because they are no longer where they were found there is no way of really evaluating until we see exactly where the stones came from on the site."

She said archaeologists have surveyed the undisclosed area where the stones were found and what Blackburn found "does not coincide with archaeologists' knowledge of the area."

She said the items may be returned to the site as early as next week for further evaluation and examination.

Blackburn has said he is willing to accompany the investigators and show where and in what position he found the items.

Silverman also said archaeologists never set monetary values on artifacts because they are "priceless."

BLACKBURN, AT A news conference last Friday with State Atty. Gen. Ronald Amemiya, said he thought the largest of the items, a four-foot tall god, was worth up to half a million dollars. He tried to sell several of the items for \$25,000 to a local dealer.

### Big Island.

The law makes it a criminal offense to take, excavate or destroy any historic property on either State or private land.

He said many influential people in Hawaii, including doctors and lawyers, "spend their weekends looking for things in burial caves." He said he knows one dealer who obtains most of his Hawaiian items by searching in burial caves.

Many dealers feel their collecting is being infringed upon by this law, Blackburn said.

He also said he is "positive" of the identity of the person who sent anonymous letters to the media and the Bishop Museum last week saying that someone was trying to sell some stolen artifacts.

BLACKBURN SAID the writer, whose identity he would not reveal, is a "jealous collector" who was upset that Blackburn did not offer to sell the artifacts to him.

"People have been taking stones and articles (from Hawaii) since the time of (Captain James) Cook," Blackburn said. Missionaries took them for souvenirs as well, according to the dealer.

There's a "worldwide market" for Hawaiian artifacts, the 24-year-old Blackburn said. "Rare Hawaiian items can be sold anywhere."

He said he knows of a Brazilian dealer who recently bought a wooden Hawaiian god for \$120,000.

He also says he hopes the public "will be made more aware and that the State preserves these things (artifacts). The public should be able to see these things and view them."

The coin, stamp and artifact dealer said earlier this week in an interview that he was "not too happy" with the way the removal of the so-called artifacts from his home was handled.

The items were not picked up until Tuesday and then it was by some men from the State Parks Department who were told to "pick up some rocks," Blackburn said.

He said the men began piling them up without wrapping them and had obviously not been briefed about the nature of the items. The men eventually got some packing material and returned to pick up the rocks, which now are being stored by the State.

BLACKBURN SAID he has told Amemiya that people have to be made aware of the 1976 law regarding historic items. He said he was not aware that he was breaking any law when he took the items from the

# State blasted for 'freeing' man who took artifacts



Leon Sterling

By HUGH CLARK  
Advertiser Big Island Bureau

KEAUHOU, Kona — A Big Island minister has criticized the State attorney general for deciding not to prosecute a Honolulu man who admitted last week he removed 2,970 pounds of ancient Hawaiian artifacts from North Kona.

The Rev. Leon Sterling said he wonders about the fairness of Hawaii's justice system when two men are jailed for six months for trespassing on Kahoolawe while a man who illegally disturbs a Hawaiian burial ground is freed without prosecution.

Sterling said that on the same day Atty. Gen. Ronald Amemiya made his decision on the artifact case, Walter Ritte Jr. and Richard Sawyer were

sentenced to six months in Federal prison for being on Kahoolawe.

He pointed out that Ritte and Sawyer violated "a Navy order that was issued without even a public hearing . . ."

This alleged imbalance of justice has disturbed leaders of Kona's Hawaiian community, he said. Sterling believes the two events suggest a general lack of understanding for the need to protect Hawaii's past.

Sterling, chairman of Hawaii County's Bicentennial Committee, said he finds it difficult to accept Amemiya's explanation that Mark Blackburn gathered the artifacts without knowing he was violating the law.

Amemiya's "casual dismissal shows he is missing the tempo of the people," said Sterling.

The minister also expressed con-

cern about possible looting of other Hawaiian burial sites.

He said his committee hopes to establish a system for Hawaiian families to assume guardianship over important sites to protect them from disturbance.

Sterling predicted the Hawaiian community will not accept Amemiya's decision in the Blackburn case. "We will be going to our senators and our representatives to find out just what this is all about," he said. "Too many of us feel the State is missing the boat."

Sterling said he is also upset because the return of the artifacts to the Big Island depends on State funds to pay for the transfer. He believes Blackburn ought to be responsible for returning them.

# Rocks Will Be Returned to Big Isle

By Helen Altonn  
Star-Bulletin Writer

The controversial rocks brought to Honolulu from Kona by an artifact dealer to sell as Hawaiian images will be returned to the Big Island, State archaeologist Robert Hommon said today.

He said he and Jane Silverman, State historic preservation officer, will take the 3,000-pound collection of stones back to the beach site from where they were taken by artifact dealer Mark Blackburn.

He said it is hoped the delivery of the stones to their original site "will put the issue to rest." He said the trip is planned "in the near future."

HOMMON SAID HE agrees with Kenneth Emory, senior anthropologist at the Bishop Museum, that the rocks are natural and have no value as ancient Hawaiian artifacts.

"Several resemble sculptures of things, but they are not sculptured. They're all natural," he said.

However, he said, "there are a lot of reasons why it is a good idea to take them back."

He said it would be senseless for the State to store the stones, and it would please the Kona community to have them back.

"Rocks are not supposed to be removed and taken from one Island to another," he said.

He also pointed out that the area where Blackburn gathered the rocks is State property, and said at least part of it is in the conservation district.

"It is illegal to take anything from the conservation district without permission, whether antiquities or not," Hommon emphasized.

"IN THE FUTURE, this sort of thing probably will not be let go as easily," he added in a warning to other artifact collectors.

Blackburn, a collector of coins, stamps and artifacts, maintains that he has discovered a rich mine of artifacts. He believes one item is worth up to half a million dollars.

He also said the rocks are part of a heiau "bigger than the City of Refuge."

However, the archaeologists have pointed out that removal of the rocks from their site makes it difficult to evaluate whether they were part of a structure.

The State has the rocks in its possession, at an undisclosed location.

State Atty. Gen. Ronald Amemiya said after the rocks were turned over to him that he wouldn't prosecute Blackburn because the collector seemed unaware he had violated a State law by taking them.

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# Big Isle Questions Amemiya 'Artifact' Removal Decision

By David Shapiro  
Big Island Bureau Chief

**HILO**—The County Council yesterday asked for a full report from State Atty. Gen. Ronald Amemiya on why he chose not to prosecute an artifact dealer who recently removed 3,000 pounds of stones from what he believed to be a Kona heiau site.

The Council also referred the mat-

ter to County Prosecutor Paul De Silva for review.

Councilman James Dahlberg, who initiated the move, said he is not asking for prosecution by De Silva at this point but said he believes the prosecutor is empowered to step in if necessary.

**AMEMIYA DECIDED** not to prosecute Mark Blackburn for removing the articles after Black-

burn voluntarily returned the stones.

The value of the stones recently has been questioned by some authorities, but Hawaiian groups remain up in arms about the way the matter was handled by the attorney general.

Dahlberg said removal of the stones was "clearly illegal" and was "very alarming from the standpoint of their disrespect for our laws and properties and the potential immeasurable losses had these activities not been discovered in time."

Dahlberg said Blackburn's contention that he was ignorant of the law forbidding removal of artifacts "is absurd."

"I am displeased with the disposition of this serious offense as I believe it will accord other exploiters an incentive, protected by Mr. Amemiya's precedent-setting decision, to further desecrate and destroy our historic sites," Dahlberg said.

**THE COUNCIL VOTED** 8 to 1 to ask for a report and send the matter to De Silva, with Councilman Stephen Yamashiro dissenting.

Yamashiro said the Council should ask Amemiya for a report but should refrain from criticizing the attorney general until the facts are in.

Dahlberg denied that he was criticizing Amemiya. He said he is merely seeking the rationale for the decision.

In Honolulu, State archaeologist Robert Hommon said the stones will be returned to Kona.

Hommon said he agrees with Bishop Museum anthropologist Kenneth Emory that the rocks have no historic value.

"Several of them resemble sculptures but they are not," he said. "They are natural rocks."