

Did Hawaiians Know Of Necker Island? Science Hopes To Find An Answer

Evidences of Polynesian Culture Discovered on Necker
and Nihoa Islands Give Clues to Former Inhabitants

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Did Hawaiians know of Necker Island?

This question is being asked by scientists in Hawaii and on the mainland of the United States, and the answer does not seem far off, for definite evidences of Polynesian culture were discovered on Necker and Nihoa islands in June, 1923, by investigators sent there by the Bernice Pauahi Bishop Museum of Honolulu.

While the verdict is being impatiently awaited by the scientific world, let us see what Hawaiian tradition has to say on the subject.

Pele Comes to Hawaii

Pele, the dreaded fire goddess of the Hawaiians, was a foreigner who lived on a mythical floating island in a region known as Kahiki. She had sisters and brothers, all demi-gods. Due to the jealousy of an elder sister, Pele and some of her close relations decided to leave their home in Kahiki and seek a new home, so they embarked in the famous mythical canoe Honua-i-akea, piloted by Ka-moho-ali'i, an elder brother, a demi-god of great power and authority and the highest of shark gods.

The course followed took them to some land northwest of Hawaii nei. At an island named Moku-papapa one of the brothers, Kane-milo-hai, was left to build the small islet up and make it fit for human habitation.

Pele carried a divining rod, named Paoa, which would point out to her a new home—stopping next at Nihoa the rod pointed to Lehua, and thus she passed from island to island through Hawaii nei until at

of the island and a survey of its possible water supply showed that it could support only a few people for a very short time.

Its former inhabitants were probably temporary visitors; its present inhabitants are thousands of birds and insects.

Necker Island

Necker Island is the remnant of a volcanic cone located in $22^{\circ} 35' 13''$ north latitude, and $164^{\circ} 39'$ west longitude. It was discovered by the celebrated French scientist J. F. G. De La Perouse on November 4, 1786, who says:

"On the 4th of November, 1786, in the evening we made an island which bore west of us four or five leagues; it appeared to be rather inconsiderable... at 5 o'clock in the morning of the 5th of November we were only three leagues from the island...."

"This very small island is little else than a rock of about 500 toises in length, and in height 60, at the most...."

"There is not a single tree to be seen on it; but on the top of it is a great deal of grass; the naked rock is covered with the dung of various birds, and appears white, which makes a contrast to the different red spots upon which the grass has not grown. I came to within a third of a league of it; the extremities of it were perpendicular, like a wall, and the sea broke all around with the utmost violence, which rendered it impossible to think of landing... I named it Isle Necker."

(A voyage round the world... J. F. G. De La Perouse—London, 1789—3 Vols.—II—p. 252.)

We found the island much as described by La Perouse without the "great deal of grass." It seems strange that he did not notice the upstanding rocks that form the backs of the many stone structures we found there, as they were the most noticeable objects that marked the sky-line of the island and could not have been overlooked by anyone able to notice grass and guano covered rocks. The systematic arrangement would at once suggest the work of human beings—yet La Perouse says the island was uninhabited.

These stone terraced platforms occupied every flat or near-flat part of the island; they were well built. Forty-three were in a fair state of preservation and possibly 20 more were badly damaged or had nearly disappeared. Certain characteristics were common to all. For instance, the floor plans were rectangular in shape and consisted of two well-raised terraces.

The corners of these terraces were square; the walls perpendicular and the sides generally very straight. Along the outer walls at the back of the terraces there were generally a row of upstanding lava rocks. At different places on the terraces up-

power and authority and the highest of shark gods.

The course followed took them to some land northwest of Hawaii nei. At an island named Moku-papapa one of the brothers, Kane-milo-hai, was left to build the small islet up and make it fit for human habitation.

Pele carried a diving rod, named Paou, which would point out to her a new home—stopping next at Nihoa the rod pointed to Lehua, and thus she passed from island to island through Hawaii nei until at last Kilauea on Hawaii was designated as her permanent home.

The Pele traditions are the most ancient of Hawaiian traditions. They clearly state that Pele came to Hawaii from the northwest and touched at islands before reaching Kauai, but not a great distance from it. Moku-papapa and Nihoa are mentioned by name in some Pele traditions.

How could the ancient Hawaiians have the idea that there were small islands northwest of Kauai unless they had been there?

Nihoa

Nihoa is the remnant of a volcanic cone situated in the latitude $23^{\circ} 05' 50''$ N. and longitude $161^{\circ} 56' 30''$ W., about 130 miles from Kauai. It was discovered in modern times by Capt. Wm. Douglass, an Englishman, in command of the trading vessel Iphigenia. The entry in his log is:

March 19, 1789...at three in the morning land was seen ahead... This island or rock bears the form of a saddle, high each end and low in the middle... was named Bird Island... (Voyages... John Mearns... London, 1790—Appendix p. 5.)

Douglass did not land on Nihoa or mention any inhabitants there. Our expedition found many stone structures and utensils, unmistakable evidence of human habitation. We found typical Hawaiian plants and insects closely related to Hawaiian species. Many small areas resembling gardens were seen and a cave near a large collection of stone terraces had a small supply of fresh water dripping into a small basin in it. The general appearance of the island and a survey of its possible water supply showed that it could support only a few people for a very short time.

Its former inhabitants were probably temporary visitors; its present inhabitants are thousands of birds and insects.

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land of Great Britain by J. L. Garvin, in the "Observer," and Herbert Sidebotham, distinguished political economist, in the "Times."

Under the caption "Will Labor Rule?" Garvin indicates that Socialism will capture the government, unless, instead of indulging in irrelevant denunciation of the workers, the ruling classes follow the strong policy outlined by Lord Milner.

This policy would provide for the adoption of a strong program of social reform and would grapple with and solve the problems responsible for the labor party's growth.

Garvin indicates that the supporters of the present social system must devote themselves to the enactment of needed reforms or they will be unable to stem the rising tide which is sweeping labor toward control of the government.

standing lava rocks were sometimes placed.

We could see these upright stones which lined the crests of the hills for a considerable distance at sea. They immediately caught our attention.

Stone adzes and squid-fishing stones were found in a cave beside stone bowls, an idol and other stone implements. These should solve the mystery of Necker, as they are characteristic of some culture.

Birds, insects and vegetation similar to those of Hawaii were found. There were no evidences of cultivation. A very few drops of water seeped from the cliffs, not fit to drink and in a very small quantity.

French Frigate Shoals

The series of reefs and sand islands a hundred miles or so northwest of Necker are generally referred to as the "French Frigate Shoals." They are in the latitude of $23^{\circ} 46' 30''$ north, and longitude $166^{\circ} 15'$ west and were discovered by La Perouse a day or so after he discovered Necker Island.

"Nov. 5, 1786.

... The moon, which was almost at the full, gave so great a light that I thought we might venture to stand on... Towards half an hour past 1 o'clock in the morning we perceived breakers at two cables length ahead of the ship... The Astrolabe and the Boussole... at the same instant hauled to port, with our heads to the south-southeast... I do not think that our distance from the breakers can be estimated at more than a cable's length.

"In the morning, November 7, 1786... we soon perceived an islet or split rock... I named this dangerous rock "Basse des Frigates Francaise," because it was near providing the termination of our voyage."

(A voyage round the world... J. F. G. De La Perouse—London, 1798—3 Vols.—II, p. 252.) No evidences of ancient habitation were seen at the French Frigate Shoals, as the sand islands seem to be continually changing and

WEST WONDER ISLANDS



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