

Beaches of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau

John R. K. Clark

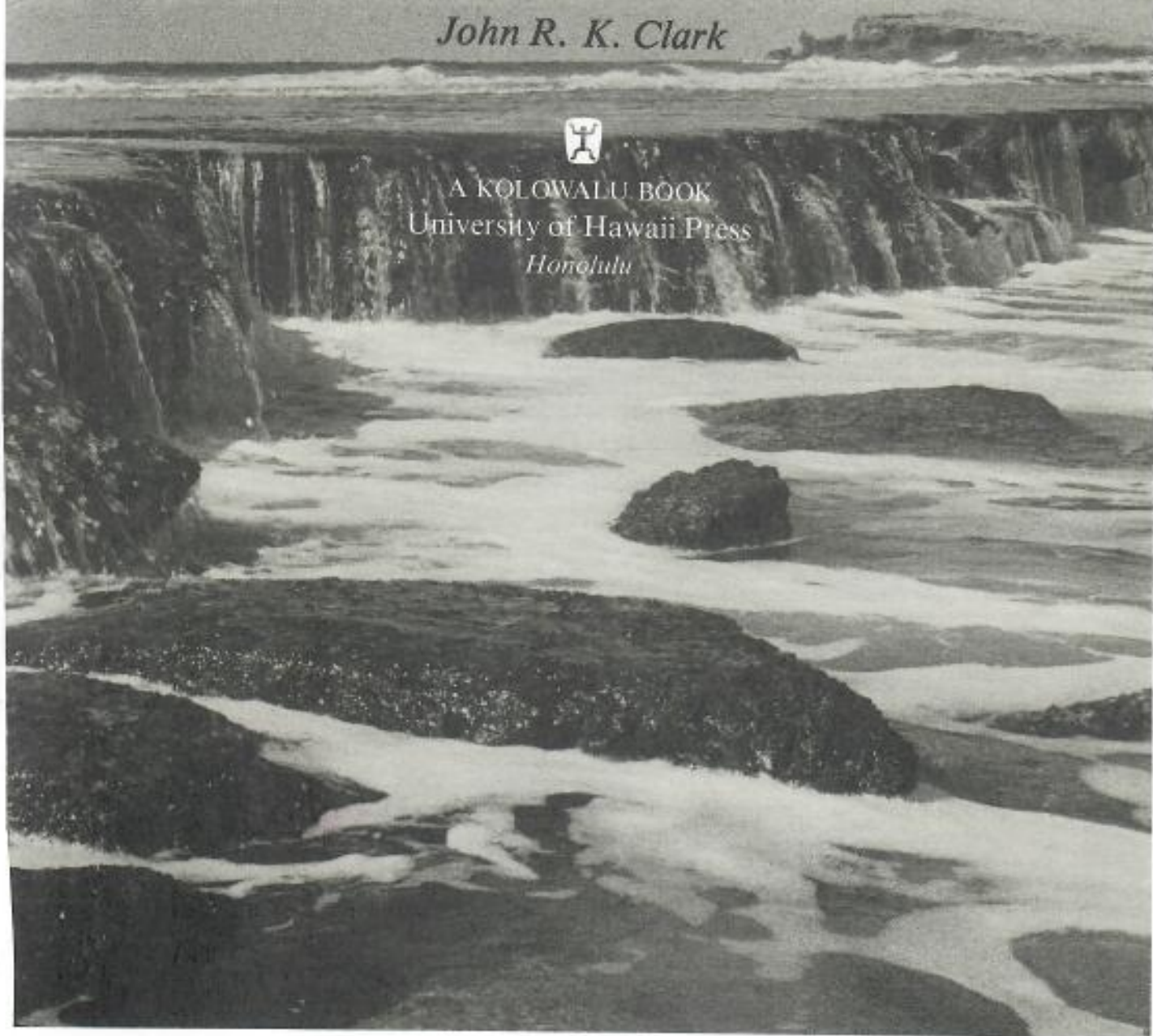


Beaches of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau

John R. K. Clark



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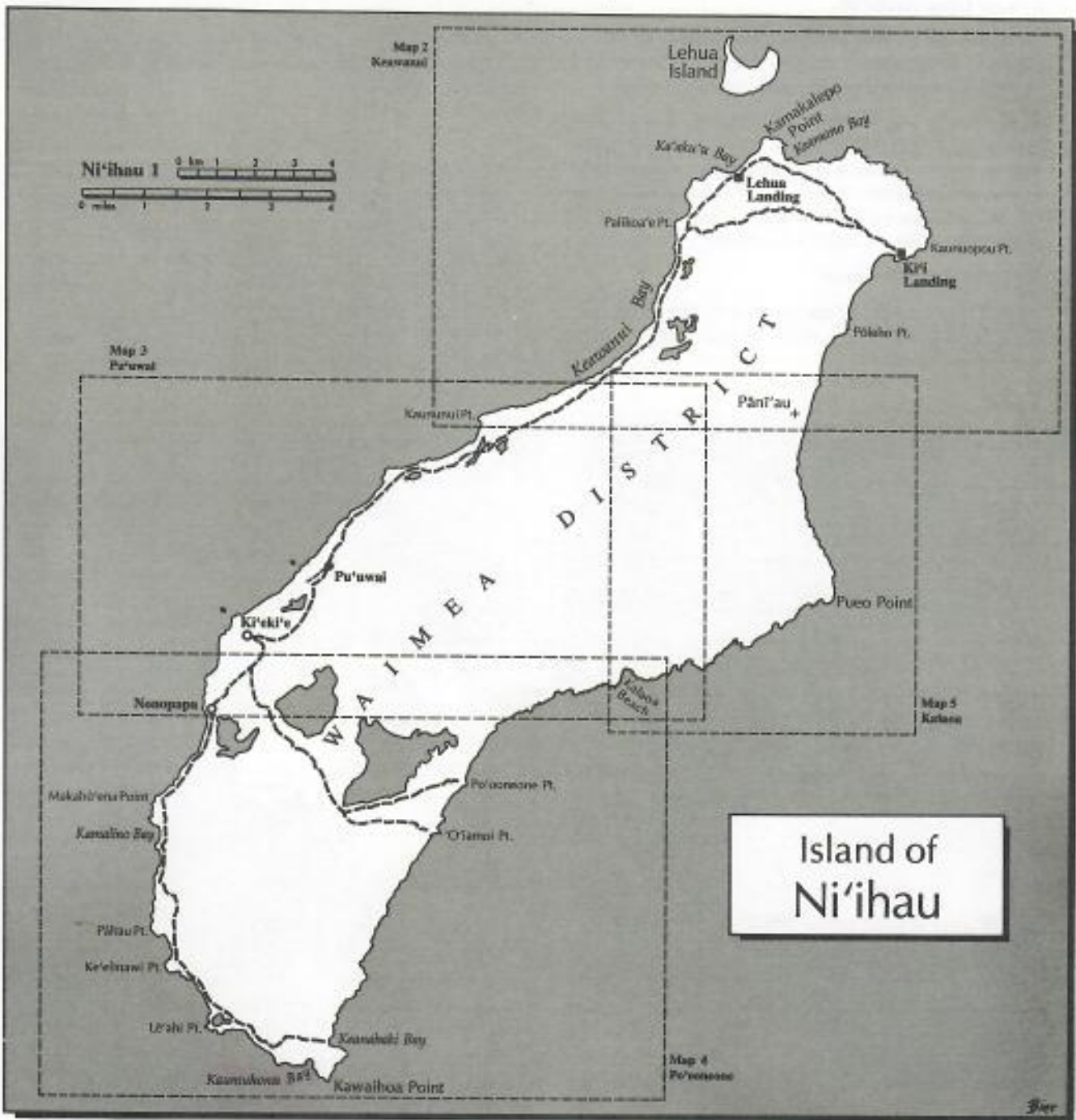
Ni'ihau: photos by John Bowen and Steve Russell

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The real value of [these] contributions to the written history and antiquities of ancient Hawaii is something that must be left for appraisal to the historian, the critic and student of Hawaiian affairs. The lapse of years will no doubt sensibly appreciate this valuation, as well as the regret, which many even at the present time feel most keenly, that more was not saved from the foundering bark of ancient Hawaii. If the student has to mourn the loss of bag and baggage, he may at least congratulate himself on the saving of a portion of the scrip and scrip-page—half a loaf is better than no bread.

Hawaiian Antiquities
David Malo, 1898



Island of
Ni'ihau



KEAMANO. Keamano Bay in the foreground is the northernmost of Ni'ihau's major beaches. It is separated from Ka'aku'u Bay (in the distance) by Kamakalepo Point, one of the landing sites of the Ni'ihau tour helicopters. The helicopters also land at the southern end of the island near Keanahaki Bay.

siderably as it curves westward. Low sand dunes on the backshore slope gently inland for several hundreds of yards to a cattle pen. The dunes are blanketed by grass and 'ilima. At the western end of the bay, the beach is completely exposed to the open ocean. The prevailing winds and currents sweep into this recessed corner and deposit masses of driftwood, fishing floats, bottles, and other debris onshore.

The bottom drops quickly to overhead depths near the shore. Strong currents occur at all times of the year. High surf generates dangerous water conditions, particularly a-pounding shorebreak, a strong backwash, and powerful rip currents. During the winter, high surf inundates Keamano Bay and all of the shoreline from the northern end of the island to Kaunuopou Point.

A large, shallow sand-bottomed pool is located among the rocks on the western point of the bay. During the summer, the semicircle of lava rock that surrounds the pool protects it from the open ocean.

Kamakalepo Point, the western point of Keamano Bay, is one of the two landing sites on the island for Ni'ihau Helicopters Inc., an air tour service, started in June 1987, that is owned and operated by Ni'ihau Ranch. The tours originate on Kaua'i, make two brief stops on Ni'ihau, and then return to Kaua'i. The second tour landing site is at Keanahaki near the southern tip of the island. The helicopter is also used to transport family members and employees between Kaua'i and Ni'ihau and to take Ni'ihau residents to Kaua'i in medical emergencies.

Ka'aku'u Beach

O Ka Lehua. Ala no keia makani makai pono o ka Moku-puni o Lehua, ua ane like no kona pa ana me ka Naulu, hoeeu iki mai nae hoi keia makani, kele lua keia makani mai Ni'ihau aku Waimea, he makani paina poi no makou ma Ni'ihau, no ka poi ole, hookahi no pai poi, lawa na hale elima o kahi hookahi.



LEHUA. Lehua Island lies three-quarters of a mile offshore the northern tip of Ni'ihau. Like Kawaihoa Point, the southern tip of Ni'ihau, Lehua Island is a tuff cone containing blocks of basalt and limestone. Steep sea cliffs comprise the island's southern face seen here, while the opposite side of the island is an open, crescent-shaped bay.

The Lehua. This wind is located directly makai of the island of Lehua. It blows like the Naulu; however, this wind stirs a bit and carries dampness from Ni'ihau to Waimea. This is our poi-eating wind on Ni'ihau. When there is no poi, a single blowing of this wind is sufficient for five homes situated in one place.

[This is a play on words, a *kaona*. *Lehua* also refers to the Lehua variety of taro which is made into poi. Taro is not grown on Ni'ihau, but the wind represents the poi which is brought to Ni'ihau in sufficient quantity to satisfy the residents there.]

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Ka'aku'u Beach is the first of four long beaches that wrap around the northwestern coast of Ni'ihau. These four—Ka'aku'u, Keawanui, Kauwaha, and Pu'uwai—span the 10 miles of shoreline from Pu'u Kole Point to Paliuli, the sea cliff at the foot of Pu'uwai Village. Ka'aku'u is probably best known as Lehua Landing, the usual landing site for the Navy LCM (landing craft mechanized) that calls weekly at Ni'ihau from Kaua'i. The landing site is marked by a *kiawe*-post corral on the

dunes behind the center of the beach. The boat is operated by Ni'ihau Ranch and hauls livestock, equipment, passengers, food (including poi), dry goods, and other necessities to the island from Makaweli Landing on Kaua'i.

Lehua Island, the landing's namesake, lies immediately off the northern end of the beach, barely three-fourths of a mile across the water. The crescent-shaped island is composed primarily of tuff, cemented volcanic ash. Other tuff cone islands in Hawai'i include Molo-kini, between Maui and Kaho'olawe, and Ka'ula, 22 miles southwest of Ni'ihau. Although Lehua Island has no beaches, landings are possible at several places where waves have cut benches into the base of the island. Seabirds are the only residents. During the winter, high surf pounds the island, climbing high up its northern and western faces. The winter months also see the arrival of many humpback whales and schools of dolphins, common not only in the waters around Lehua, but around the entire island of Ni'ihau.

Ka'aku'u Beach is 0.75 mile long and averages 50 feet in width. It winds between Pu'u Kole and Kaunuokahe points. The backshore consists of low sand dunes 15 to

20 feet high, covered with *pōhinahina*, the dominant strand vegetation on the western side of the island. It is an attractive plant, with fragrant leaves and purple flowers, and an excellent groundcover on the hot dunes.

The rocky point at the northern end of Ka'aku'u Beach is marked by a stand of scrub ironwoods. The point extends into the ocean in an arc of small rock islets separated by waters averaging only 15 to 20 feet in depth. Seaward of the rock islets the shoals continue nearly a quarter-mile into the channel between Ni'ihau and Lehua Island. The beach is narrow at its northern

end, but widens toward the south. At its southern end, it hooks out into the ocean, creating a natural trap for driftwood, fishing floats, bottles, shells, and other debris swept onshore during periods of high surf.

Almost the entire length of Ka'aku'u Beach is fronted by small patch reefs and rocky shoals. The exception is the shoreline fronting Lehua Landing, where the water offshore is deeper and a sand channel runs into the beach. Periods of high surf generate dangerous water conditions, particularly a strong shorebreak and powerful rip currents. Surf also breaks on many of the shallow offshore reefs.



KA'AKU'U. Ka'aku'u Bay, shown here above the dark, basaltic fingers of Kaunuokahe Point, is the site of Lehua Landing, the major landing on the island. The landing was named for its proximity to Lehua Island, which is just offshore. During the winter months when all landings are precluded by high surf striking this coast, the Ni'ihau Ranch boat from Pākālā, Kaua'i, stops at Ki'i Landing on the northeast coast to discharge its passengers and supplies.



KA'AKU'U. Ka'aku'u Beach is typical of Ni'ihau's north shore beaches—long, white, and swept clean by high winter surf. *Pōhinahina* or beach vitex, an endemic Hawaiian coastal plant, grows profusely in the sand dunes here and in other dune complexes along the northwest and southwest coasts of the island. *Pōhinahina* is a low-lying shrub that blooms with blue or purplish flowers. Several small ironwood trees are visible at the north end of the beach.

Keawanui Beach

O Ka Mikioi. He makani pāhele hala keia no Lehua, aole nui kona pa ana mai i ke kakahika no a mahana ae, pau no.

The Mikioi. This is a deceiving wind of Lehua Island. It does not blow very hard. It usually comes in the early morning. When it becomes warm, the wind disappears.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Keawanui appropriately means "the big bay." It is 3.5 miles long, the longest bay on Ni'ihau. Keawanui Beach lines the entire bay and, with an average width of 175 feet, it is the largest beach on the island. Although the

length of the beach remains constant, the sand is subject to seasonal erosion, and thus the width is reduced considerably during the winter months.

A continuous strip of vegetated sand dunes forms the backshore from Palikoa'e to Kaununu Point. This extensive dune system varies in width from 100 yards at the northern end of the beach to 0.5 mile at the southern end, where the dunes reach heights of 100 feet above sea level. The dunes that line the backshore at Keawanui and nearly every other beach on the island play an important role in curbing the erosion of Ni'ihau's shoreline. They serve as a flexible, but permanent, buffer between the ocean and the island.

The nearshore bottom bordering the northern half of the beach is for the most part sandy, and shallow sand

bars form in many areas. During the winter, surf breaks on the sand bars, on many of the shallow offshore reefs, and at the rocky points such as Palikoa'e. High surf generates dangerous water conditions, particularly pounding shorebreaks, strong backwashes, and powerful rip currents.

The southern half of the beach is dominated by extensive sections of beachrock. The backshore in this area is covered with broken beachrock blocks and slabs, testimony to the force of the winter surf that strikes this shoreline. During the summer the bay is normally calm.

The winter surf that strikes the Hawaiian Islands is usually highest during the period from October to

March, although it may begin as early as September and end as late as May. During the annual winter surf season, wave heights commonly reach 15 to 20 feet. As these tremendously powerful waves approach our beaches, they thoroughly scour the nearshore ocean bottom and the fringing reefs, picking up and carrying anything that is loose and unattached. When these waves finally sweep up on a beach, they deposit vast quantities of debris. In addition to all of the tiny organic and inorganic particles that constitute "sand," the debris includes seaweed, large fragments of coral, and a wide variety of shells. On Ni'ihau the shells are of particular interest to the residents of the island.



KEAWANUI. Immediately inland of Kaununu Point an extensive region of sand dunes, somewhat resembling the forward edge of a lava flow, appears to overrun the *kiawe* and other coastal vegetation. Pushed by high surf and strong winds, the sand masses are drifting north to south from Keawanui Beach toward Kauwaha Beach.

The people of Ni'ihau collect shells to string into leis. The beautiful leis they fashion are among the few examples of pre-contact native Hawaiian artwork that are still made in Hawai'i today. The leis are made of tiny shells commonly called Ni'ihau shells or *pupu Ni'ihau*. Keawanui Beach is one of the chief collecting sites. The shells are also found on the island's other northeastern beaches to the north and south of Keawanui, and on several of the windward beaches.

The four species of shells most commonly referred to as Ni'ihau shells are *Euptica varians* or *momi*, *Mitrella margarita* or *laiki*, *Leptothyra verruca* or *kahelelani*, and *Turbo sandwicensis* or *kamoa*. *Momi*, "pearl," are dove shells that have an oval shape. *Laiki*, "rice," resemble grains of rice and are usually strung in simple single strands. *Kahelelani*, "the royal going," the name of an ancient chief of Ni'ihau, are small turban shells that come in a variety of colors. *Kamoa*, "the *moa* plant," are also turban shells whose spire tips resemble the yellow spores of their namesake plant. Contrary to popular belief, Ni'ihau shells are found on the other Hawaiian islands, but they occur in much greater abundance on Ni'ihau's beaches than elsewhere, and the quality of Ni'ihau's shells is usually far superior.

Shell collecting takes place throughout the winter during and immediately after periods of high surf. In her book *Ni'ihau Shell Leis*, the most authoritative work on the subject, author Linda Paik Moriarty describes the arduous task of collecting.

When a favorable site has been selected, the collectors assume a comfortable sitting or lying position on the debris line where most of the shells have accumulated. The collectors then move slowly along the debris line, repositioning themselves each time they have finished combing a particular area.

While the collectors are gathering shells, they do little or no talking to each other. They concentrate totally on the task at hand, focusing their eyes only on the shells. They move their eyes very slowly, an inch at a time. The constant focusing necessary to discern such tiny objects coupled with the harsh, intense glare of the sun reflecting on the sand and the ocean's surface puts a tremendous strain on the eyes.

The most determined collectors tolerate the long hours in the hot sun for an entire day, but most of them are not

able to endure the harsh exposure and leave after four or five hours.

On an average day of collecting, one person may fill a small baby food jar [with shells].

A single lei requires hundreds of the tiny shells, so collecting and sorting by types, colors, and sizes is a never-ending job that continues from one winter season to the next. The quantity of shells needed to make a lei far exceeds the actual number of shells in the lei. Even the most skilled lei-makers break between 30 and 50 percent of their shells while piercing them for stringing. When a lei is eventually completed, a tremendous amount of time, effort, and painstaking attention to detail has been expended to produce an exquisite piece of fine jewelry. For this reason Ni'ihau shell leis command very high prices and are an important source of income for the residents of the island.

Kauwaha Beach

O Ka Unulau. He makani ua kela no Niihau, ola ka wi nui o keia Moku-puni ke hiki mai ka ua, heaha la ia mea i ke keiki Unulau a Hina? Ke hooia mai, he ola, pa i Niihau, o na makani kaulana kela o Niihau nei a i hakuia hoi ma ke Mele a na haku Alii o kakou penel:

*Eia mai ka Unulau malalo o Halalii,
Lawe ke Koolau i ka hoa la lilo
Hao ka mikioi i ke kai o Lehua,
Pu-a wale ia no na hoa la-e!*

The Unulau. This is Niihau's rainy wind. Great famine is removed from this island when rain comes. It matters not to the Unulau child of Hina. [It is welcomed.] When it rains, life is blown to Niihau. These are the famous winds of Niihau to which mele were composed by our great alii composers thus:

The Unulau appears below Halalii.
The Koolau takes its companion [the sun] out of sight.
The Mikioi blows with great force to the sea of Lehua Island.
The companions are parted from me.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

People who have never seen Ni'ihau do not realize that most of the island is very dry and arid. With its highest

the ocean around it has always provided plenty of fish. In recent years, however, the fish populations have declined dramatically. Overfishing in the twentieth century has steadily diminished the fishing stocks around the heavily populated islands, and so commercial fishermen now frequent the waters surrounding Ni'ihau. These transient fishermen come primarily from Kaua'i, but also from O'ahu. This has caused concern among the island's owners and the Ni'ihau residents, who fear that one day their reefs may be as devoid of fish as those on O'ahu. A reduction in the residents' fish supply may diminish their capacity for self-sufficiency, an essential factor in keeping their unique native community intact.

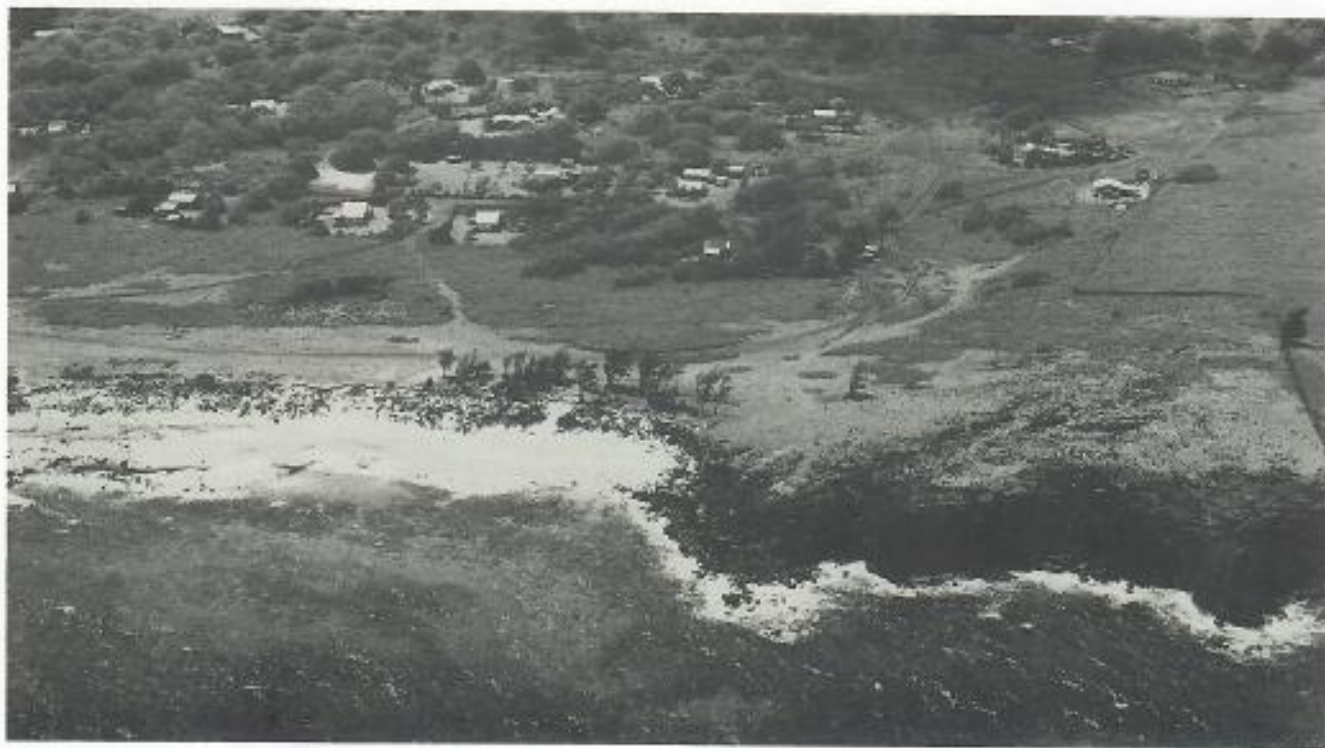
Kauwaha Beach, one of the island's excellent fishing sites, extends for 2 miles between Kaununui Point and Kalanaei. Kaununui Point, a low rocky point backed by sand dunes, is fronted by a wide reef flat with several large tide pools. In the lee of the point, on its south side,

a large sand-bottomed channel comes directly into the beach. Kauwaha beach consists of short sections of sand separated at the water's edge by beachrock and small rocky points. To the rear of the beach, vegetated sand dunes between 40 and 60 feet high extend several hundred yards inland.

During the winter, surf breaks on many of the shallow nearshore reefs and off the rocky points. Periods of high surf generate dangerous water conditions, particularly powerful rip currents. During the summer, the nearshore waters are normally calm.

Pu'uwai Beach

O Ka Papaainuwai. He makani malie keia, he hiki ke holo i Waimea, a me Hanalei, Kauai, a pela no hoi ko Kauai mai, he hiki no ke holo mai i Niuhau nei. Ehua na ano o keia makani, i kekahi wa, he Papaainuwai, a he ua



Pu'uwai. Approximately 200 people, the majority of them native Hawaiians, live in Pu'uwai, the only inhabited village site on Ni'ihau. Hawaiian is spoken as a first language in the village, one of the last places in Hawai'i where this still occurs. In addition to walking, the residents transport themselves primarily by riding horses and bicycles.

kehau ke ano, a o kekahi hoi me he makani la, nolaila i kapaia ai he Papaala, he la i ol aku mamua o Kuakaha, i Hana, Maui Hikina.

The Papaainuwai. This wind is calm so that one is able to sail to Waimea and Hanalei, Kauai, and likewise, those of Kauai can sail here to Niihau. There are two characteristics of this wind. Sometimes it is Papaainuwainui which is misty rain and at other times it is like true rain. Therefore it is also named Papaala in which the heat surpasses that of Kuakaha at Hana, East Maui.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Pu'uwai, meaning "heart," is the name of the only inhabited village on Ni'ihau. Approximately 200 people, most of them native Hawaiians, live at Pu'uwai. The entire island is operated as Ni'ihau Ranch by the Robinson family of Makaweli, Kaua'i, and most of Pu'uwai's residents are employees of the ranch or their families. The ranch provides them with wood-frame houses, modest salaries, and medical insurance, and insures that their domestic and health needs are met. As ranch employees, the residents tend herds of cattle and sheep, make charcoal from *kiawe* wood, and collect honey. They also fish and pick 'opihi, although these resources have been severely taxed by off-island commercial fishermen.

The rural life-style at Pu'uwai is very simple. There are no telephones, no electricity, and no alcoholic beverages. Rainwater is caught and stored in cisterns for drinking. If the cisterns go dry, water is hauled from shallow wells. The primary means of transportation are walking and riding bicycles or horses. Children attend Ni'ihau School through the eighth grade and then transfer to Waimea High School on Kaua'i. Everyone attends the Congregational church, the only church in the village. A radio transmitter is used to call Kaua'i in case of emergencies. Obviously, the owners of the island and the residents have elected to embrace only a minimum of the offerings of the modern society that surrounds them.

The private ownership of Ni'ihau dates back to the 1860s. In September 1863, the barque *Bessie* arrived in Honolulu from New Zealand carrying thirteen family members named either Robinson, Gay, or Sinclair. Successful farmers in New Zealand, they had sold their

holdings and had come to Hawai'i in search of greater opportunities. The matriarch of the clan was Elizabeth McHutchison Sinclair, the Scottish widow of a sea captain. King Kamehameha IV felt that she and her extended family would be an asset to the islands. He offered to sell Ni'ihau to her if she would remain in Hawai'i. Mrs. Sinclair accepted his offer and purchased the entire island for \$10,000 cash. The king died while the sale was being transacted, and so title was conveyed to Mrs. Sinclair by Lot Kamehameha, King Kamehameha V, on January 23, 1864.

In later years, Mrs. Sinclair purchased the 21,844-acre *ahupua'a* of Makaweli and other large tracts of land on Kaua'i. Today, Makaweli is the headquarters of the family's extensive Kaua'i holdings, which include Makaweli Ranch, Olokele Sugar Mill, and the Gay and Robinson Sugar Company, as well as the island of Ni'ihau. When Mrs. Sinclair purchased the island in 1864, she asked her son Francis to manage it. This he did until 1883, when Aubrey Robinson, his nephew, the son of his sister Helen Robinson, took over. It was Aubrey who brought to an end an era of hospitality that had seen regular stops by the interisland steamships and reception of many visitors and summer guests at the family's large home at Ki'eki'e. In the wake of the acquisition of the Hawaiian Islands as a territory of the United States in 1898, Aubrey made a decision to preserve the Hawaiian language and culture on Ni'ihau by severely restricting access to the island. By 1915 the isolation had been effected, and no one was allowed to visit Ni'ihau, including relatives of the Hawaiians living there, without his personal permission.

Management of Ni'ihau Ranch was assumed by Aubrey Robinson's oldest son, Aylmer, in 1922. In 1927 Aylmer brought his youngest brother Lester on board to serve as assistant manager. Together the two of them continued their father's policies.

Aylmer died a bachelor in 1968, leaving his interests in the island to his brother Lester and Lester's sons, Bruce and Keith Robinson. When Lester died shortly afterward, in October 1969, all of the interests in Ni'ihau were vested in his wife Helen and in Bruce and Keith, the present owners.

Since about the turn of the century, Ni'ihau has acquired an aura of mystery to the rest of the world. The main reason is the Robinson family's strict closed-

door policy to all visitors, forbidding entry to anyone who is not a resident of the island, a member of the Robinson family, or an invited guest of the family. This policy extends also to virtually all inquiries about the island, the majority of which simply go unanswered.

With great determination the Robinsons protect their private property ownership rights. Trespassers on the island are commonly placed under citizen's arrest and then transported to Kaua'i at the earliest opportunity, where they are turned over to the county police. The off-limits policy is also extended to boaters who come ashore to beachcomb. They are told to return to their boats, an action that raises an interesting legal question. Are the beaches on Ni'ihau public or private? In 1973 a landmark ruling on Hawaiian beaches by the Hawai'i State Supreme Court set the shoreline boundary between public and private property at the vegetation line. In 1985 this decision was further refined by the passage of Act 104, which defines the public shoreline as extending inland "to the upper reaches of the wash of waves, usually evidenced by the edge of vegetation growth or by the upper limit of debris left by the wash of the waves." These legislative acts make it very clear that all beaches in the Hawaiian Islands are public property up to the vegetation line.

Ni'ihau's owners, however, believe that their deed gives them title to the beach as well as the land above it. In an article in the *Honolulu Advertiser* on public access, dated October 29, 1988, Bruce Robinson stated, "Our deed very clearly leads to the water. It is a separate deed quite unique in Hawaii. It stems directly from the monarchy, and with it comes the aboriginal rights of the old days." To date, the Robinsons' claims of private beach ownership have not been challenged by anyone who has been asked to leave the island. Undoubtedly, most visitors to Ni'ihau's beaches respect the Robinsons' long-standing ownership of the island and their obvious desire for privacy. People in Hawai'i are aware that Ni'ihau is a special place.

Author Ruth Tabrah has expressed Ni'ihau's uniqueness in the title of her comprehensive historical account of the island—*Ni'ihau, The Last Hawaiian Island*. Without help from any public or private sources, the Robinson family has made Ni'ihau the last truly Hawaiian island by preserving as much as possible of the

native culture. Of course, many compromises have been made with contemporary society in the matters of clothing, domestic needs, ranch equipment, and some amenities, but none in the traditions, and especially none in the language. The Robinsons have long recognized that language is the essence of culture. Ni'ihau remains the last place in Hawai'i where Hawaiian is spoken exclusively as a first language in daily life.

The Robinsons and the Ni'ihau residents continue to speak the Hawaiian dialect that Captain Cook found so similar to Tahitian. To other native Hawaiian speakers, the Ni'ihau dialect is very distinct, with many sounds that are different from standard Hawaiian. Most noticeable is the frequent use of *t* for *k*. *Kakou*, for example, the pronoun for "all of us," is *katou*; the word for spider is *tutuati'i*. Dialectic differences aside, the point of importance is that Hawaiian on Ni'ihau is a living language. It remains an unbroken link to pre-contact Hawaiian society and at the same time continues to evolve with exposure to modern society, limited as that is. *Sila*, for example, is Ni'ihau's Hawaiianized version of the word *seal*, while *kāhoe* is a brand new word for the fin of a surfboard.

In the September 1878 issue of *The Friend*, the Reverend Lorenzo Lyons wrote:

I've studied Hawaiian for 46 years but am by no means perfect. . . . It is an interminable language . . . one of the oldest living languages of earth, as some conjecture, and may well be classed among the best. . . . The thought to displace it, or to doom it to oblivion by substituting the English language, ought not for a moment to be indulged. Long live the grand old, sonorous, poetical Hawaiian language.

In her book on Ni'ihau, Ruth Tabrah notes that there has always been a great deal of conjecture that someday the island might change, especially with the passing of each Robinson generation. She writes the following about the questions that arose after the death of Lester Robinson:

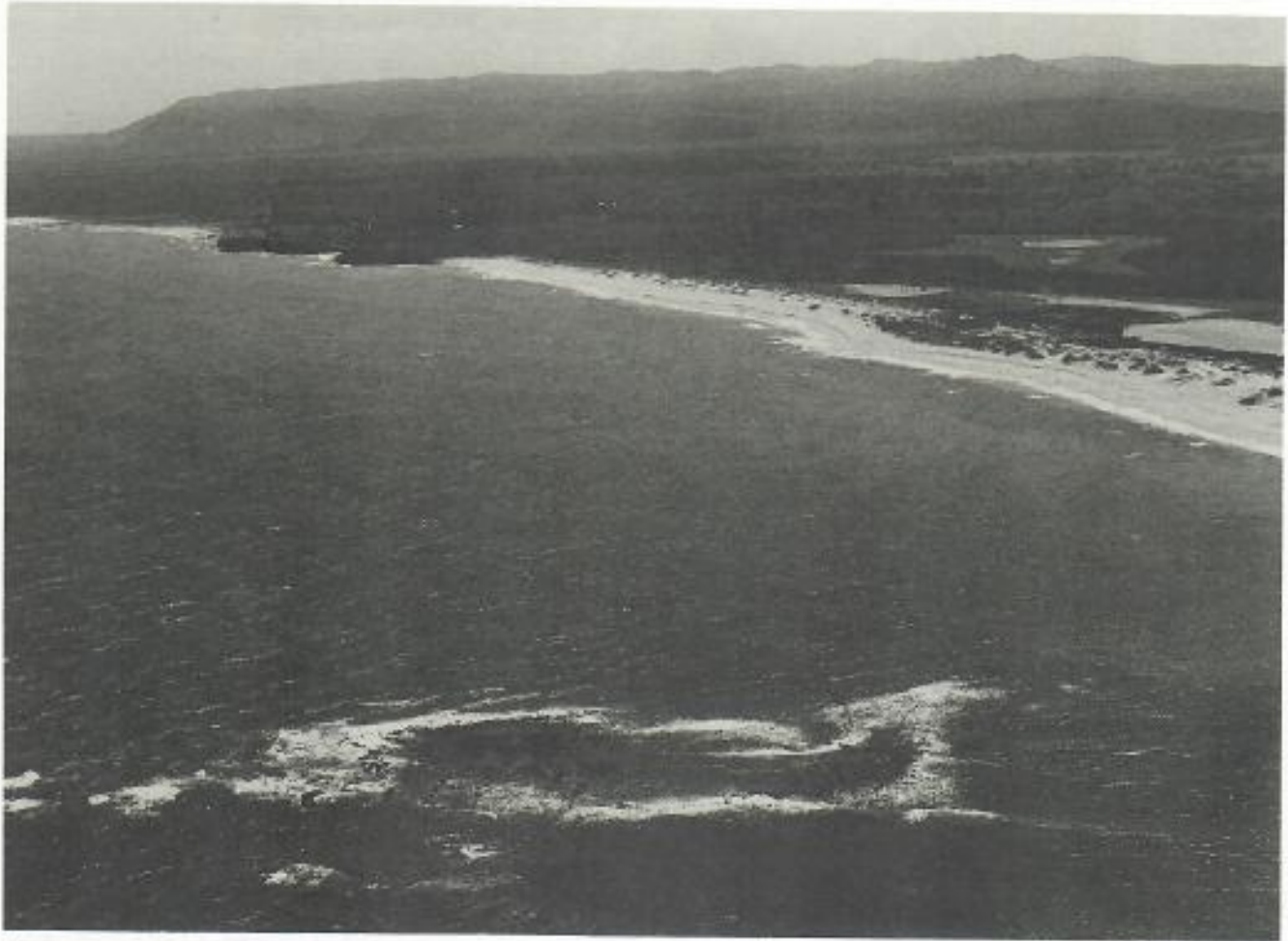
The family shunted off recurring rumors and speculation as to what might happen in the near future by stating, "too much of a mystery has been made of the Ni'ihau operation. It is simply a ranching operation and

it would be disruptive to permit visitors who would come out of curiosity." "Those interested in the past," proclaimed an editorial in the Advertiser, "will be encouraged to know that Lester Robinson passed on to his sons Bruce and Keith his feelings for the island and its status as something removed from time."

Pu'uwai Beach is a narrow, continuous sandy stretch, extending for 2 miles from Kalanaei to Paliuli. Low, vegetated dunes form the backshore. Basalt boulders

are scattered in the beach's foreshore immediately north of Paliuli. During the winter, surf breaks on many of the shallow nearshore reefs and off the rocky points such as Paliuli. High surf generates dangerous water conditions, particularly powerful rip currents. During the summer, the nearshore waters are normally calm.

Paliuli is the most dominant feature on the shoreline. It is a massive point of basalt that is bisected into twin sea cliffs by a small pocket of sand. The black lava contrasts very dramatically with the long white sand



KI'EKI'E. Kūakamoku Reef lies offshore Ki'eki'e Beach while inland of the beach are the headquarters of Ni'ihau Ranch. Rooftops of some of the homes in Pu'uwai Village are barely visible as white dots at the north end of the beach. The sand terminates at Paliuli, twin basalt sea cliffs below the village.

beaches on either side. The village of Pu'uwai is located immediately inland of Paliuli. Many large trees shelter the homes in this shoreline community.

Ki'eki'e Beach

O Ke Kiu. He makani anu loa keia, ma Kauai mai a noho i Niihau nei, ua like pu no kakou i kana hana, oia hoi, e loku ana ka lo i ke anu a ke Kiu.

The Kiu. A very cold wind [that blows] from Kauai and settles on Niihau. We have experienced its action which is to feel deep emotion. [It] blows as a gale, very cold-tempered.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

When Elizabeth Sinclair and her family purchased Ni'ihau, it was their intention not only to establish a cattle and sheep ranch there, but to make the island their home. By spring of that year, they had moved from Honolulu and were living temporarily in grass houses at Pu'uwai. For their permanent home, they selected a site on a rise at Ki'eki'e that commanded excellent views of the ocean and the rest of the island. The Ki'eki'e home was completed and the family had moved in by the end of the year. Within a few years, however, Mrs. Sinclair and most of the family members decided to live on Kaua'i and moved to the family's extensive land holdings at Makaweli. The home at Ki'eki'e continued to serve as the family's Ni'ihau headquarters and as the center of ranch operations on the island.

Ki'eki'e Beach is one of the two major beaches on the southwestern side of the island. It curves for 1.25 miles between Paliuli and Halawela. During the summer, the beach widens to 175 feet, whereas during the winter, high surf erodes the shoreline, reducing the volume of sand onshore. The sandy foreshore slopes steeply into the ocean and is occasionally interrupted by sections of beachrock. The bottom drops quickly to overhead depths near the shore. Dangerous water conditions occur during periods of high surf, particularly a pounding shorebreak, strong backwashes, and powerful rip currents. During the summer, the ocean is normally calm. In the backshore, low dunes extend several hundred yards inland.

A series of small rock islets and sea stacks project

offshore of the southern end of the beach. The largest islet is 1.1-acre Kuakamoku. The sea stacks are submerged, but even during periods of calm seas a line of whitewater is normally visible to mark their location.

Nonopapa Beach

O Ka Aoa. He makani ikaika no keia, he makani kaulana keia mai Hanapepe, Kauai mai, he makani waiwai no makou o Niihau nei, mai kou hiki malihini ana mai a hiki i kela wa, he makani waapa nui no na keiki o Kapahee, he makani haehae lole no Nonopapa a me Kamalino, kala no hoi, a uhi wale lole no hoi.

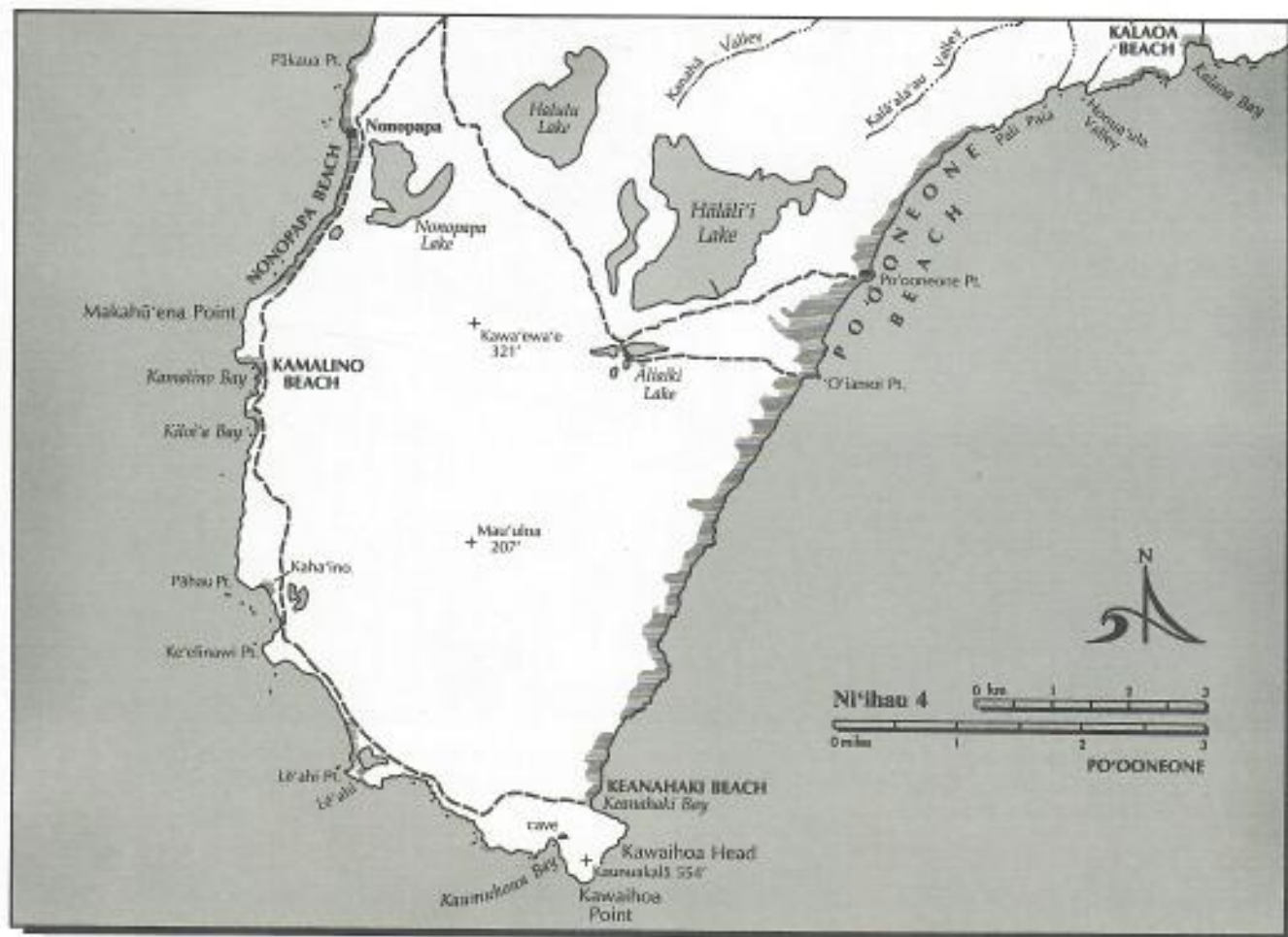
The Aoa. It is a strong wind. It is a famous wind that blows from Hanapepe, Kauai. It is an important wind for us here at Niihau. Since my arrival here as a stranger, to this day this wind has been [good] for [sailing] children's large boats at Kapahee. However, it tears clothing [off the line] at Nonopapa and Kamalino, tears up money, just overwhelming clothes.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

In January 1778, Captain James Cook, the British commander of a voyage of exploration in the Pacific, made the first recorded visit by a Westerner to the Hawaiian Islands. He landed first at Waimea on Kaua'i. After provisioning his two ships with food and water, he set out to explore Ni'ihau. On January 29, he and his men dropped anchor off the rocky shoreline immediately south of Kamalino, the site of a small village.

After Cook's death on February 14, 1779, at Ka'awaloa on the Big Island, James King assumed command of the expedition. In search of provisions once again, King eventually put into Ni'ihau and anchored in the same area near Kamalino. A heavy easterly swell was running, making the anchorage difficult, so King moved his ships farther north to Nonopapa. There, in addition to another small village, they found a long sandy beach, deep nearshore waters, an extensive reservoir of sand at anchoring depths, and a small rocky point at the north end of the beach that offered some protection to boats going ashore, even during periods of moderately high surf.

King's anchorage at Nonopapa was revisited in 1786 by Captains Nathaniel Portlock and George Dixon,



both of whom had been with Cook and King. In spite of Ni'ihau's dry and desolate appearance, the native Hawaiians there grew yams in abundance, and Portlock and Dixon were able to take on some water and a large quantity of yams. They christened the anchorage Yam Bay.

Late in the eighteenth century, Yam Bay was visited by a number of other sailing ships looking for provisions. The approach to Ni'ihau was apparently always the same, as the vessels navigated around Kawaihoa, the southern tip of the island, and then headed up the southwestern coast in the lee of the island until they reached Nonopapa.

During the nineteenth century, Yam Bay became

known as Nonopapa Landing. In the latter part of the century, it was used occasionally as an interisland steamer landing. Today, Nonopapa is marked by a large green corrugated iron warehouse, several *kiawe*-post corrals, and a stand of coconut trees. Kawa'ewa'e Hill, a large cinder cone 290 feet high, dominates the view immediately inland.

Nonopapa is described in "Kawaihoa," a traditional Ni'ihau song.

<i>O 'ike 'ia o ka 'aina</i>	Well known in this land
<i>A o Nonopapa</i>	Is Nonopapa
<i>Ke kal ho'omalie</i>	Where the sea is soothing
<i>Ka nani ho'ohenoheno.</i>	With a caressing beauty.



NONOPAPA. A lone warehouse adjoins several corrals at the north end of Nonopapa Beach. In former times Nonopapa was used as a landing by ships sailing around Kawaihoa, the southern tip of the island. Nonopapa, like Lehua Landing to the north, is subject to high surf during the winter and spring.

Nonopapa Beach is the second of the two major beaches on the southwestern side of the island. It curves for 2 miles between Nonopapa and Makahu'ena points. In the backshore, sand dunes 15 to 20 feet high are covered with *pōhinahina* and extend several hundred yards inland. During the summer, when the ocean is normally calm, the width of the beach varies from 50 feet at the north end to 125 feet at its southern extremity. During the winter, high surf erodes the shoreline, reducing the volume of sand onshore. The sandy foreshore slopes steeply into the ocean and is occasionally interrupted by beachrock and small clusters of boulders. The bottom drops quickly to overhead depths near shore. Periods of high surf generate dangerous water conditions, particularly a pounding shorebreak, strong backwashes, and powerful rip currents. During the winter, surf breaks offshore of the warehouse at the northern point of the

beach. When winter surf is particularly high, waves 20 feet and higher break between 1 and 1.5 miles offshore on shoaling reefs.

Kamalino Beach

O Ke Kona. He makani keia i papalua ia kona ano ma Niihau nei, he Kona, a he Konaelua, he makani ikaika keia mai ke Komohana Hema mai, ua kamaaina kakou i kona ano, hele mai ka ua me ka makani, kelekele na alanui, holomoku na wai kahe, ku ke oka wahie aia i kai, kau ke alapii o ka Oopu, aia iloko o ka mawae o na pohaku a me na kipona lepo, a pela aku.

The Kona. This is a wind that hits twice as hard here on Niihau. It is a Kona and it is also a double Kona. It is a strong wind from the southwest. We are familiar with its characteristics. The rain comes in with the wind, the road

becomes muddy, water flows and is almost fit to sail in; much debris is left on the beaches; step formations are created for the oopu fish to climb up, situated within the spaces of the rocks and soil banks, and so on.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Kamalino is a small bay on Ni'ihau's rocky southwestern shore that was once the site of a small Hawaiian fishing village. During the twentieth century several wooden houses were built in the area and used by Ni'ihau ranch hands, but these were abandoned during the 1930s. Today, Kamalino is marked only by a small pocket of sand tucked into the corner of the bay. On clear days, the small island of Ka'ula is visible on the horizon 22 miles to the west. Both Ka'ula and Kamalino are mentioned in "Kawaihoa," a traditional Ni'ihau song:

<i>He nani a o Ka'ula</i>	Beautiful is Ka'ula Island
<i>'Aina o nā manu</i>	Land of many birds
<i>Ke kai ho'ō'olu ana</i>	Refreshing is the ocean
<i>A o Kamalino.</i>	At Kamalino.

During periods of high surf, waves break at the northern point of the bay and at several other points to the south. One of these points is known to some boaters as Antennas. The "antennas" are the radio towers of the former Ni'ihau Loran station, a communication facility that was built in 1944, during World War II. The station with its control building and living quarters was decommissioned and abandoned in 1951.

The people of Ni'ihau knew the station as Waitū and composed a song in its honor called "Po'e Koa o Ni'ihau," the "Soldiers of Ni'ihau":

<i>Aloha ka po'e koa a o Ni'ihau-</i>	Aloha soldiers of Ni'ihau
<i>Noho ana i ka uluwehi</i>	Living in the beauty
<i>Ka poli a o Waitū.</i>	In the heart of Waitū.
<i>Eia mākou ke kia'i nei</i>	We are here guarding
<i>No ka polo o ke aupuni</i>	To protect the country
<i>A o Alelika.</i>	Of America.
<i>Ho'oholo mai 'oe i kahe likini</i>	You start the radio

<i>No ke kahea ana aku I Kaua'i.</i>	For the daily call To Kaua'i.
<i>Ha'ima 'ia mai ana ka puana</i>	Tell the refrain again
<i>Noho ana i ka uluwehi</i>	Living in the beauty
<i>Ka po'e a o Waitū.</i>	The soldiers at Waitū.

Low sea cliffs form the shoreline from Kamalino to Kawaihoa, the southern tip of the island. Small pockets of sand, sections of beachrock, and basalt boulders lie at the base of the cliffs. Although *kiawe* is the dominant coastal plant, this end of the island is noted for another type of strand vegetation, *pilo*. *Pilo*, which is also known as *puapilo* and *maiapilo*, is the Hawaiian caper, famed for its fragrant, delicate, many-stamened flowers. In *Ni'ihau, the Last Hawaiian Island*, author Ruth Tabrah notes that Captain Cook went ashore at this end of the island and walked some distance to the north. He probably encountered the low-branching bushes of *pilo* because he reported the following in his journal: "The ground through which I passed was in a state of nature, very strong, and the soil seemed poor. It was, however, covered with shrubs and plants, some of which perfumed the air with a more delicious fragrance than I had met with at any of the other islands visited by us in this ocean."

Kawaihoa, the southern tip of the island is a massive, solitary hill that stands 550 feet high. Boaters commonly call it South Point. Two miles back up the southwestern coast, a smaller hill called Lē'ahi sits on a rocky point. The names of these two sites are the same as the names of two similar sites on O'ahu, Lē'ahi (Diamond Head) and Kawaihoa (Koko Head). There are a number of interesting similarities between these two pairs of places bearing identical names, including their locations on the southeastern ends of the islands, their locations on the shoreline in relation to each other, the narrow sand beaches that lie at their bases, and their offshore wind-shear lines during normal trade winds. The most striking similarities, however, are in the two Kawaihoa's. Both of these headlands are huge, rounded, brown, volcanic cones made of tuff, or volcanic ash, cemented into firm rock. Both of them contain blocks of older volcanic rocks and limestone from the coral reefs that were torn apart during the explosions that built them. Both

of them exhibit fretwork created by the constant weathering of sea spray in the soft, thin-bedded tuff on their faces. Both of them have wave-cut sea caves and wave-cut benches along their bases. The resemblances are very strong.

Tuff eruptions are younger geologically than the basalt rocks upon which they are built, and they provide Hawai'i with some of its most singular landmarks. Kawaihoa on Ni'ihau is no exception; it is one of the unique geographic features on the island. The residents of Ni'ihau have a great deal of aloha for the mountain and tell of its beauty in the song "Kawaihoa." The following is the song's first verse:

<i>Kaulana mai nei</i>	Famous throughout Hawai'i is
<i>Ka lani o Kawaihoa</i>	The majesty of Kawaihoa
<i>Ka lani a o Lē'ahi</i>	And the majesty of Lē'ahi
<i>Ka beauty a o Ni'ihau.</i>	The beautiful places of Ni'ihau.

Keanahaki Beach

O Ka Aoalaenihi. He makani ua kela, ma Nihi mai, oia ka mea i kapala ai e ka poe kahiko, he Aoalaenihi, no kona hele nihi ana mai.

The Aoalaenihi. This is a windy rain from Nihi which is why the ancients named it Aoalaenihi. It moves quietly.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Kawaihoa, the massive tuff cone that makes up the southern tip of Ni'ihau, is exposed to the open ocean on three sides. The erosive forces of trade winds, high surf, and heavy storms have eroded two deep bays on either side of it.

One bay, Kaumuhonu, is located on the western side in the lee of the point. It is used as an anchorage during normal trade wind weather, but during periods of *kona*, or southerly, storms, and summer periods of southerly



KAWAIHOA. Kawaihoa, known to boaters as South Point, rises over 500 feet above the ocean at the southern tip of Ni'ihau. This massive headland consists largely of tuff—consolidated volcanic ash—and in structure closely resembles Koko Head on O'ahu. High surf has eroded the tuff to form Kaumuhonu Bay, visible here below the western face of the cone.



PO'OOONE. Po'ooncone, a 50-foot high headland on the southeastern side of the island, is a prominent coastal landmark. Po'ooncone means "sandy head," an appropriate name for this isolated point made of lithified sand dunes (colianite) and covered with a thin veneer of sand. The row of sand mounds in the foreground marks the hole-digging efforts of 'ohiki, common Hawaiian sand crabs, that come ashore at night.

swell, it is exposed to high surf. The Kaumuhonu shoreline is primarily a tuff sea cliff with a small detrital storm beach overlying a low bench at the head of the bay.

The second bay, Keanahaki, is located to windward on the eastern side of Kawaihoa. It is used as an anchorage during *kona* storms and during periods of calm seas. It is a much shallower bay than Kaumuhonu, with nearshore water depths of 6 to 8 feet. A large pocket of sand fronted by a low rocky shelf lines the head of the

bay. A wave-cut basalt bench extends the length of the bay to a point that hooks out into the ocean. The hook makes the bay a natural trap for driftwood, fishing floats, bottles, shells, nets, and other debris commonly swept onshore by the trade winds and high surf.

Keanahaki was formerly a popular summer retreat for the Robinsons and their guests. Several grass houses and a small wooden cottage once stood on the low sea cliffs above the beach. Only the house foundations remain today. Keanahaki is also the second of two land-

ing sites on the island for Ni'ihau Helicopters Inc., an air tour service, owned and operated by Ni'ihau Ranch, that was started in June 1987. The tours originate on Kaua'i, make two stops on Ni'ihau, and then return to Kaua'i. The first stop is at Kamakalepo Point at the northern tip of the island. In addition to the tours, the helicopter is used to transport family members and employees between Kaua'i and Ni'ihau and to take Ni'ihau residents to Kaua'i during medical emergencies.

Po'oooneone Beach

O Ke Koolau. He makani lewe mai keia i ke ahi me ka pulupulu, ua like keia makani me ka Ilio hae la, ka hele a hanupanupa ka moana, i kahele huhu a keiki o na pali Koolau.

The Koolau. This is the wind that carries away the sparks of fire kindling. This wind is like a barking dog, when it comes the ocean is choppy like an angry child along the Koolau cliffs.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Po'oooneone Beach extends for 2.5 miles from 'O'iamoi Point to the sea cliffs at Pā'ia. It is the only major beach on the southeastern side of the island. Po'oooneone Point, the 50-foot-high headland for which the beach is named, bisects this long stretch of shoreline. Po'oooneone means "sandy head," an appropriate name for this isolated landmark standing at the water's edge. It is made of lithified sand dunes (eolianite) with a thin veneer of sand.



PO'OOONEONE. Po'oooneone Beach is a beachcomber's paradise. It faces into the prevailing trade winds, making it a receptacle for every piece of debris pushed shoreward by the wind, waves, and currents. Japanese fishing floats, highly prized by Hawai'i's beachcombers and popularly known as "glass balls," are often found in these large pockets of litter.

The mile-long stretch of sand from 'O'iamoi to Po'oooneone points averages 100 feet in width. It is lined by low, wide sections of beachrock. Incoming surf sweeping over and around it has eroded a series of tidal pools in the sand between the sections of beach rock. Driftwood, fishing floats, bottles, shells, and other debris litter the entire beach, but tend to concentrate near Po'oooneone Point. Low extensive sand dunes slope inland for 1.5 miles to Lake Hālali'i, a shallow, intermittent lake. *Kiawe* is the primary strand vegetation.

On the north side of Po'oooneone Point, the beach continues for 1.5 miles to Pā'ia. This section of shoreline is also fronted with wide, raised sections of beachrock and tidal pools that parallel the beachrock. An especially large, circular, sand-bottomed pool is located in the lee of the point. Elsewhere, the beachrock outcrops are bisected in several places by narrow sand channels that run into the beach. Driftwood, fishing floats, bottles, shells, and other debris litter the entire beach, but tend to concentrate in the areas near the sand channels and where the sections of beachrock are low and flat. The steep, sparsely vegetated sand dunes to the rear of the beach are 20 to 30 feet high.

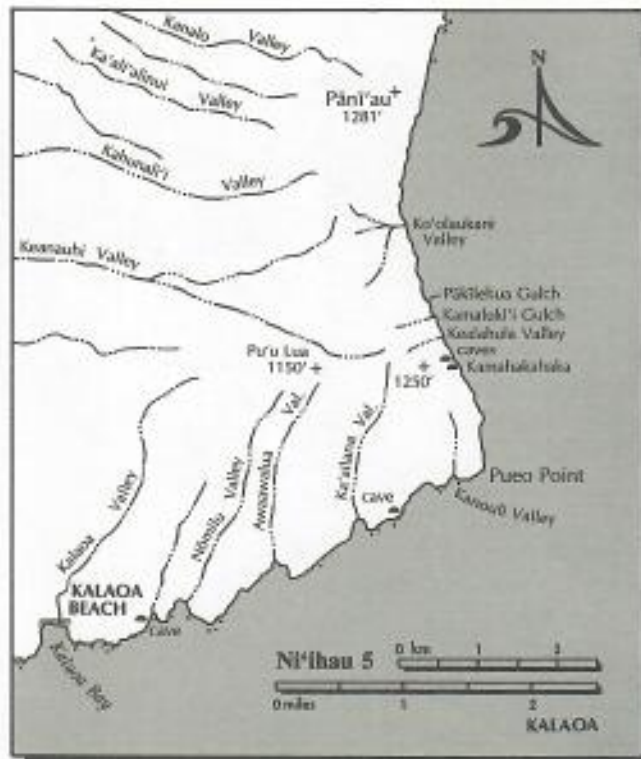
As one of the two major windward beaches on the island, Po'oooneone, like Pōleho to the north, is exposed directly to the trade winds and the constant surf that they generate. Waves break almost continually against the long sections of beachrock that line the beach. Small local rip currents are common in the surge channels among the rocks. Periods of calm seas prevail primarily during *kona* weather, when the wind is from the south or when there is no wind at all.

Kalaoa Beach

O Ke Kulepe. He makani pili aina ole mai keia, i ka moana walé iho no ia e lauwiki ai, o kana hana, o ke kulepe i na waa holo mai Niihau aku, a pela no hoi mai Kauai mai.

The Kulepe. This wind does not touch land. It twists and turns only over the ocean, that is all it does, overturning canoes leaving Niihau or arriving from Kauai.

Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865



Much of the island of Ni'ihau is the remnant of a shield volcano. The northeastern edge of the remnant lies between Pueo Point, the eastern point of the island, and Pōleho Beach. High sea cliffs line this coastline and contain the highest point on the island, Pānī'au, at 1,281 feet. The southeastern edge of the remnant lies between Pueo Point and Po'oooneone Beach. The sea cliffs here are lower and are notched by a series of small, stream-cut valleys. Pockets of sand are found at the heads of several valleys, including Honua'ula, Kalaoa, and Nōmilu. The remainder, including 'Awa'awalua, Ka'ailana, and Kanouli, have small cobble and boulder beaches.

The most prominent valley of the series is Kalaoa. It is fronted by a wide pocket of sand, a barrier beach between Kalaoa Bay and intermittent Kalaoa Stream. When the stream flows after heavy rains, it carries large quantities of soil to the coastal waters, and it is common to see a wide plume of murky water flowing past the



KALAOA. The southeastern sea cliffs from Paia to Pueo Point are cut by a series of narrow coastal valleys, some of which contain small pocket beaches. Kalaoa Beach, the largest of the pocket beaches, is often fronted by a mud plume after heavy rains. Muddy water flowing down the valley overruns the beach, inundating the shorebreak and the small bay offshore.

south point of the bay. The sand in the backshore is heavily veneered with mud. A *muliwai*, a pond of brackish water, forms occasionally in the backshore. *Kiawe* is the dominant vegetation at the shoreline and in the narrow valley immediately inland.

The nearshore waters at Kalaoa Beach are dominated by a shallow sand bar paralleling the length of the beach. Tradewind-generated surf creates a typical windward beach break on the sand bar. Driftwood, fishing floats, and other wind-blown debris are found onshore, but in much smaller quantities than on the beaches at Pōleho, Po'oneone, and Keanahaki.

Pōleho Beach

O Ke Kiulehua. He makani anuanu nui loa keia, no ka awili pu o ka Lehua me ke Kiu, oia ka mea i mui ai ke anu, aia keia makani ma ka Akau Hikina, hookahi no waiwai a kela makani, he anu, pupuu na hua i ke anu a ke Kiulehua.

Oia na Inoa o na makani o ka Mokupuni holookoa o Niihau nei. Ua pau, a ke hoi nei ko Niihau keiki, ua kau iho la ka olu i ka ulu hala o Halawela. Me ke aloha no.

The Kiulehua. This is a very cold wind which is a combination of the Lehua and the Kiu winds which is the rea-

son that it produces extreme coldness. This wind is located to the northeast. One important mention of this wind—because of its extreme coldness, it produces chill bumps upon the fruits [an exaggeration, of course, but an example of an individual's creativeness when describing something to make it sound more interesting].

These, then, are the winds of the entire island of Ni'ihau. The descriptions are finished and Ni'ihau's son is returning home [in other words, it is time to say goodbye]. Peace and quiet have settled upon the hala grove of Halawela. Affectionately,

P. P. Holi
Halawela, Ni'ihau
Ke Au Okoa
July 24, 1865

Pōleho Beach is a 2.5-mile stretch of shoreline that extends from Ka'ali Cliff to Ki'i Landing. The only sand

beach on the northeast shore of Ni'ihau, it averages 150 feet in width and is backed by low vegetated dunes. *Kiawe* predominates in the shoreline vegetation. Although the beach is interrupted by a series of small, low, rocky points, there are several wide, rock-free expanses between the points. These sites are exposed directly to the assault of the open ocean, and the dunes extend much farther inland than at the other areas along the shoreline. The largest rock-free section is at Pōleho, where the dunes are between 50 and 100 feet high and extend hundreds of feet inland into the base of Ka'ali Cliff. On a clear day, this broad expanse of unvegetated dunes is visible even from the road to Waimea Canyon on Kaua'i.

Pōleho Beach faces directly into the path of the trade winds. The beach is littered with masses of windblown debris, including driftwood, fishing floats, nets, and bottles. Cowrie shells are also common. The wind also generates a continual shorebreak on a shallow, sloping



PŌLEHO. The prevailing tradewinds have created an extensive series of sand dunes at Pōleho Beach, the only beach on Ni'ihau's northeast shore. This wide swath of unvegetated sand is even visible from Kaua'i on the road to Waimea Canyon, an elevated vantage point. The northern half of Lehua Island can be seen over the sand dunes and the adjoining *kiawe* forest.



POLEHO. Poleho Beach is a typical Hawaiian windward beach. The constant blowing of the trade winds creates choppy, wind-blown surf that breaks on the shallow sandbars in its nearshore waters. The island of Kaua'i, visible across the Kaulakahi Channel, is 17 miles away.

sand bar near shore. Local rip currents are common during periods of high surf.

Ki'i Landing, located at the northern end of the beach, is marked by a shack and a corral. It is an alternate landing site for the Navy LCM (landing craft mechanized) operated by Ni'ihau Ranch. The boat calls weekly at the island to bring supplies for the residents. Ki'i Landing is used when high surf precludes the use of Lehua Landing at Ka'aku'u Beach. Even during periods of extremely high winter surf, Ki'i almost always offers a safe anchorage in the lee of Kaunuopou Point. Hawaiian monk seals seem to favor these calmer waters during the winter and are commonly sighted in the area. Seals are also seen around the northern end of the island at Pu'u Kole and Lehua Island, and at the southern end at Nonopapa, Kamalino, and Keanahaki.

In 1923 William Hyde Rice offered this explanation for the naming of Ki'i in his book *Hawaiian Legends*:

The people of the islands of Kauai and Niihau were accustomed to going to one end of Niihau to fish. But it

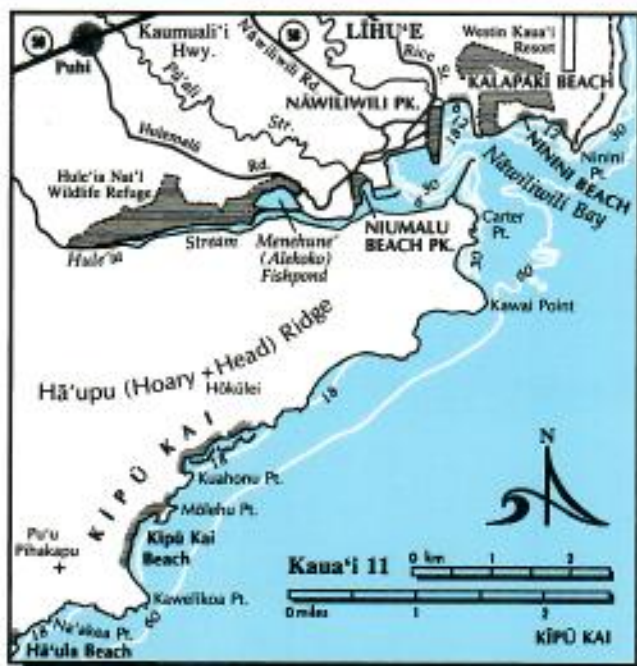
often happened that while they were sleeping on the sand after a hard day's fishing, the akuas would come and devour many of the men.

At last one brave man declared that he would destroy the akuas and rid the island of this danger. So he built a longhouse, similar to a canoe house, leaving only one entrance. Then he made many kiis, or wooden images of people, placing in the heads mottled gray and black eyes of 'opihii, or mussel, shell. These images he put in the house, concealing himself outside.

At night the akuas began to come for their usual meal. Looking into the house they saw the kiis with their shining eyes. At first this surprised them, but as the images lay very still, the akuas decided that the Kauai men slept with their eyes open, and so they entered and tried to eat the images, with dire results. Their teeth were caught in the wood, and while they were struggling to free them, the crafty Kauai man quickly shut the door and set fire to the house, and all the cruel akuas were burned to death.

Thereafter Niihau became safe for fishermen, and this part of the island still bears the name Kii.

Beaches of Kaua'i and Ni'ihau



Kaua'i has more sand beaches per mile of shoreline than any other island in Hawai'i. Its spectacular shoreline ranges from cliffs of bird sanctuaries to a fishpond in a volcanic crater to the traditional swimming, snorkeling, surfing, and beachcombing beaches. Although the owners of Ni'ihau discourage visitors, author John Clark includes fascinating sketches of the island to complete his inventory of Hawai'i's beaches. Clark provides history and legends associated with each site; maps and photographs enhance his narrative.

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John R. Kukeakalani Clark is the author of *Hawai'i's Best Beaches*, *The Beaches of O'ahu*, *The Beaches of Maui County*, and *Beaches of the Big Island*. A former lifeguard, he is deputy fire chief in the Honolulu Fire Department and a private consultant on ocean recreation and water safety.

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