

# Kaupo, Maui

A History of the Land



Menu

## Etched in stone: Three petroglyph sites in Kaupo

Petroglyphs (images pecked or incised in stone) are present throughout Hawaiian archipelago, most notably on the Big Island, which contains tens of thousands of examples.

The ancient Hawaiian artists who created these images were thoughtful in choosing locations for petroglyphs and pictographs (painted images). As archaeologist Sidsel Millerstrom has noted, “Petroglyphs were not randomly placed but were associated with ceremonial architecture and caves, and were linked to sacred land; unusual rock formations, hills, water sources, and rockshelters—all places that were considered sacred and had significance for the Polynesians.”

Maui doesn't come close to the Big Island in terms of the number of known petroglyphs. In fact, even the tiny island of Lanai contains more. Nevertheless, there are a handful of petroglyph sites in Maui, with Olowalu in West Maui perhaps the most well known.

In Kaupo, there are three known locations with petroglyphs and pictographs: Nuu, Naholoku and Miana.

### Nuu

Nuu, in the western portion of Kaupo, is by far the largest petroglyph site in the district. This is not surprising, considering that Nuu was sizable village in pre-contact Hawaii.



Nuu petroglyphs

Thomas Maunupau and Kenneth Emory, working for the Bishop Museum, visited Kaupo in 1922. On May 4, on their way to neighboring Kahikinui district, they observed the petroglyphs at Nuū.

Below at left is what Maunupau wrote about that experience, as published in the Hawaiian-language newspaper *Ka Nupepa Kuokoa* [later that year](#) (translation on the right):

Ia makou i hiki mai ai mauka ponoī o kahaone o Nuū, aia he kipapali pohaku mauka o ke alanui. Ua hele aku makou ma keia wahi, a iloko o ko makou kahaha nui, ike aku la makou i ke kii pohaku i kalaiia iloko o ka pohaku. Ua lele hou makou ilalo, a nakii na holoholona a paa, a hele aku la i ke kipapali, no ka nana pono ana i ke kii pohaku. O keia kipapali pohaku he umi paha a oi kapuai ke kiekie. He nui ke kii maanei, o ka nui nae ua ano powehiwehi loa, aohe ano maopopo pono o ke ano, a he iwakalua paha kii moakaka loa.

Ua kimomoia keia mau ki iloko o ka pohaku, me kekahi mea paahana, a ka poe kahiko i hana ai, a ua kahiko maoli no ke ano o ke kii ke nana iho. O na kii kanaka ame ilio ua maopopo loa no ko lakou ano, a he mau kii hou ae no kekahi aohe nae maopopo o ko lakou ano. Ua kaha iho makou i ke poho maluna o keia mau kii, i ano moakaka hoi, a loa pono i ka mea paikii. Pau keia poho ana, ua paikii o Keneki Emory i kekahi mau kii, no ka hale hoikeike, a ua hoopaa pu iho no hoi maua ma ka buke hoomanao no na mea a maua e ike nei ma keia wahi, o ia hoi ke ano o ke kii, a pela wale aku.

Pau maanei, hoonee hou ke alahale imua. Aole i loihi ia hele ana mai, hiki mai makou he kipapali pohaku hou i ka pili kahakai. He haneri paha a oi i-ka mamao o keia wahi mai kahi mua a makou i haalele koke aku ai no. Ua hele aku makou ma keia wahi a lele ilalo me ka hoopaa ana i na holoholona i ka pohaku. He

mea oiaio, ua nui loa ke kii pohaku maanei. He kipapali kiekie loa keia ma kekahi mau wahi, ua umikumamalima paha kapuai ke kiekie, a he ano pohaku ala ke ano o ka pohaku. He kanalima wale no paha kapuai ka mamao o ka aekai mai keia wahi aku. He kanakolu paha kii ma keia wahi. He nui ke kii aohe ano moakaka ke ano. He mau kii nunui kekahi. He mau kii kekahi i penaia me ke pena ulaula, he alae, o ia ke pena a ka poe kahiko. He kii kanaka ka nui, kii ilio ame kekahi mau ano kii e ae i maopopo ole ke ano.

O keia mau kii, aia wale no ia ma kekahi aoao uuku o keia kipapali. Ua poho makou elike no me na kii mua a paikii ia e Keneki Emory.

As we went inland from the shore at Nuū, there was a stone cliff across the path. We went to this place and to our great surprise saw petroglyphs carved into the rock. We dismounted, tied up our animals, and walked to the cliff to get a closer look at the petroglyphs. This stone cliff was about 10 feet tall. There were many pictures here, but most were too faint to make out. There were perhaps 20 that were clearly discernible.

These images were pecked into the stone with some tool by the people of old, and some of the pictures appear truly ancient. The images of people and dogs were easy to make out, but there were other pictures that could not be discerned. We marked these pictures with chalk to make them clearly visible and so that the camera could capture them. When the chalking was complete, Kenneth Emory photographed the images for the museum, and we recorded in our journal what we had seen here, such as the types of images and so forth.

When we were done here, we continued along the trail. Not far along, we arrived at another stone bluff next to the shore. This place was about 100 yards from where we had just left. We went over to this place, dismounted, and tied the animals to the rocks. In fact, there were even more pictures here. The cliff was quite tall in some places, perhaps 25 feet high, and the stone was basalt. This place was approximately 50 feet from the water. There were about 30 pictures. Most pictures could not be made out. Some were quite large. Some images were made with red alaea clay, the paint of the people of old. There were many images of people, representations of dogs and some other pictures of an unknown nature.

These pictures were on only a small portion of this cliff. We marked these with chalk like the previous ones, and Kenneth Emory took photographs.

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Because they had to hurry on to Kahikinui, Maunupau and Emory set aside the next day, May 5, 1922, to spend more time exploring Nuū. Here is [Maunupau's account](#) of that day:

Maanei huli hou makou ihope ma keia alanui no, ahiki mai i kauhale. E hi'a upena ana ia mau kamaaina, a o ke aloha wale no ka i haawi aku, a hele loa no ma kahakai aku, ahiki i kahi o ke kakai pali pohaku. Nakii

na lio maanei, a hoomaka no ka hana.

O keia wahi, ua kokoke loa i ke kai, mai ka 50 a 75 kapuai ka mamao. Mai ka 10 a 20 kapuai ke kiekie o keia kipapali pohaku. He pohaku paakiki loa keia, ua like me ka pohaku kukulu hale o Honolulu nei, ano ala, aole he pohaku pele.

He nui loa ke kii maanei, he 100 paha a oi ka nui. He 150 kapuai paha o ka pali i paa i ke kii, a he nui aku no paha ke kii ma kekahi mau wahi aku o keia kipapali, aole nae makou i hoao e huli papa aku.

O kekahi mau kii ua kalaiia i ka pali he 6 a 7 kapuai ke kiekie mai ka honua ae, e hiki ole ai hoi i kamalii e hana pela, ina kakou e olelo ae, na lakou i hana keia mau kii.

Ma kekahi wahi, ua elieli iho makou he eono iniha iloko o ka lepo, a loa he kii malaila. Ina paha he mau kapala ka makou, a e eli a hohonu loa ilalo, o ka manao o ka meakakau, e loa no he mau kii hou aku. O keia loa ana o ke kii iloko o ka lepo, hoike ana mai ia, ua paa keia mau kii i ka lepo mailuna mai o ka pali, i ka wa paha e ua ai, a nolaila ua kahiko maoli keia mau kii.

He nui loa na kii i penaia me ka alae, a o kekahi mau kii, ua kalai wale ia iho no. He hookahi kii i kimomoia. He mau kii kahiko loa kekahi ma ke ano ke nana iho, a o kekahi mau kii, aole no i ano kahiko loa. He hookahi kii nui loa, he 15 iniha paha ke kiekie. O ke kii kanaka ka nui a penei ke ano: he kanaka e ano holo heihei a kukini ana paha, kanaka i ke kula hakaka a lua paha, kanaka me ke o i'a, he lawai'a paha, kanaka e haa ana i ka hula, he kumu hula paha, kii ilio, kii pe'a o kahakai, kii ano puhi, kii lupe hihimanu, ame kekahi mau kii o ae i maopopo ole ia makou ko lakou ana. He mau kahakaha kekahi i like me ka hua Pake a i ole Kepani. Ua poho iho makou i keia mau kii a paa i ke poho pa'i ke kii.

At this point we returned on the path back to the village [Nuu]. The residents were making fishing nets. We just gave a greeting and continued along the shore until we arrived at the stone cliffs. We tied the horses here and began to work.

This place was close to the sea, about 50 to 75 feet away. This stone cliff ranged from 10 to 20 feet tall. It was a hard stone like the stones used to construct buildings in Honolulu, being basalt and not lava rock.

There were many petroglyphs here, 100 or more. About 150 feet of the cliff was marked with images. It's possible that there were other areas of the cliff with images, but we did not try to search further.

Some images were carved 6 or 7 feet from the ground. Thus, a child could not have made these images even if it was claimed that they had.

At one place, we dug 6 inches into the dirt and found an image there. If we had some shovels and could have dug deeper, the writer believes more images would have been found. Finding these

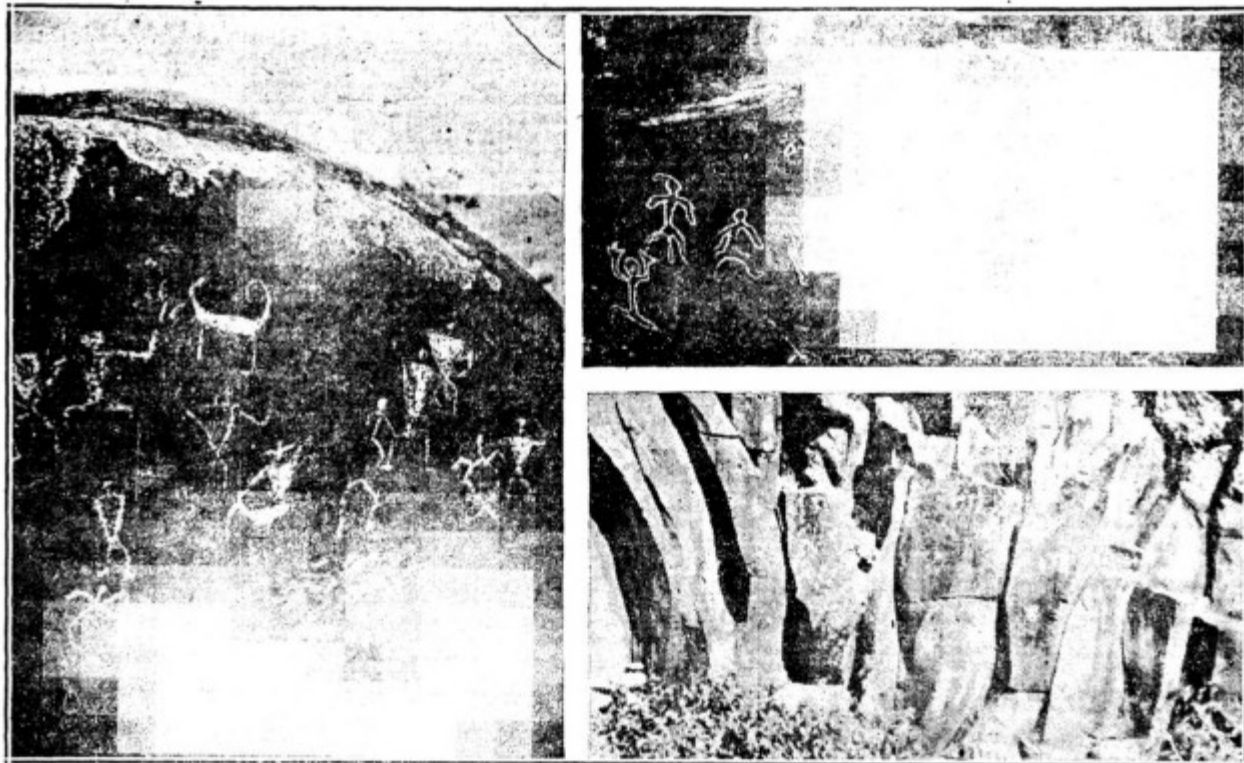
images in the dirt indicates that these images had been covered by dirt from the cliff, perhaps when the rains came, and therefore were very old.

There were many images painted with red alaea clay, but some were just carved. One image had been pecked in. Some images looked extremely old, but others did not. One was quite large, about 15 inches tall. Most were of people, and here were types: a person perhaps running a race; a person training for combat; a person spearing fish, maybe a fisherman; a person dancing hula, maybe a hula teacher; a dog; a starfish; an eel; a stingray; and some images that we could not make out. Some were marks like Chinese or Japanese script. We marked these images with chalk and photographed them.

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**Na kii keia i kalaiia, a i kimomoia aku iluna o na pobaku pahoehoe ame na pobaku paakiki ma Kahikinui, Nuu ame Kaupo**



Kenneth Emory's photos of Nuu petroglyphs published in Ka Nupepa Kuokoa, July 13, 1922.

The Chinese or Japanese script that Maunupau mentioned is certainly possible, as Chinese were living in Nuu during the 1800s; China native Soon Ah Look had store at Nuu around the turn of 20th century. However, Sidsel Millerstrom, the archaeologist cited at the beginning of this post, examined these markings and described them as "parallel or random incised lines, most superimposed over older types of petroglyphs".

Also, while Maunupau theorizes that dirt falling from the cliffs covered up some images found beneath

ground level, stormy surf could also have been the cause. In 1891, for example, [high waves washed through Nuu](#) and destroyed houses and springs.

Maunupau wrote, “It’s possible that there were other areas of the cliff with images, but we did not try to search further.” Just a few years later, in 1929, another Bishop Museum researcher did explore the area further, include side gulches. His name was Winslow Walker, and he drew sketches of what he found:



Nuu petroglyphs sketched by Winslow Walker.

Walker’s field notes about the petroglyphs are below. The numbers in brackets have been added to correspond with the numbers in the sketches above.

“Petroglyphs at Nuu, Kaupo: On the smooth rock by the side of the trail are several figures bruised and scratched which appear recent [1]. A hundred yards up a small gulch Kailiili are some petroglyphs on the rocks over the entrance to some small caves. The caves have been recently used as pig pens. These are pecked and scratched and bruises have been made all around these [2]. The walls of the cliff contained eighteen more figures of the same type. Some had the legs and hip at right angles. The scratches and names were of recent origin. One figure had a spear over the head [3]. Two curious animal figures were seen [4]. Dogs with open mouths were suggested. Another rock contained two unusual human figures deeply pecked. Evidently a mother and child [6]. Two more triangular type figures were found on another rock [7]. Figures on cliffs by shore: Four triangular pecked figures [8]. Two of them have these figured hands. One figure like this [9]. Several more pecked figures [10]. Marks of red ochre on same rock. On a smooth slab were two large pecked figures 2 feet or more high. They were also smeared over with red ochre. Ten triangular figures were counted around there. One turtle figure [11]. Red outlines about

coincide with pecking. Next slab has four triangular figures and an animal [12]. One figure marked over the pecking with red has arms unusually long [13]. Another figure only in red [14]. Next slab has three triangular figures. Six on the next. One has arms up [15]. Two linear figures [16]. Another partly gone [17]. Petroglyphs on Nuu cliff: Near the ko'a are eight figures of triangular type, two of which are unusual [18]. This may represent Kaneapua, birdheaded man. Figure holding spear [19]. Four more usual type triangular figures. On the walls back of the koa are six triangular figures of usual type. One shows a parent and child [20]. Just beyond the ko'a are some pictographs which may represent an eel [21]. More petroglyphs. A large pecked and scratched figure and two small figures of usual triangular type. Another slab has figures in red [23] and a figure bruised with coral [24]. Above the canoe shed are six small figures in red. A figure [25]. Curious figure may represent 2 [26]. Two more of this type [27]. Two figures have been scratched and bruised until most of the color is gone. Probably a turtle [29]. Near the high wall are several bruised figures with names scratched [30-31]. Three triangular figures around the corner. Figures in red [32]. Beyond the wall inside the enclosure are a series of ten pictographs and petroglyphs of this type [33]. Two unusual figures [34-35]. Modern names and scratches over them."

In a later manuscript, Walker added additional detail about the petroglyphs: "One figure looks like a female figure in a holoku and may possibly represent a white missionary or teacher." Regarding the birdheaded figure, he noted that it "is similar to the one shown by [Kenneth] Emory from Kaunolu, Lanai."

The modern names Walker mentions are petroglyphs of Roman letters. Sidsel Millerstrom also studied these, writing about Nuu that, "The early post-European contact period is characterized by Roman lettering that reflects early Missionary efforts at literacy."

## Naholoku

The second location of petroglyphs is near the current Kaupo Ranch headquarters at Naholoku, in the uplands of central Kaupo.

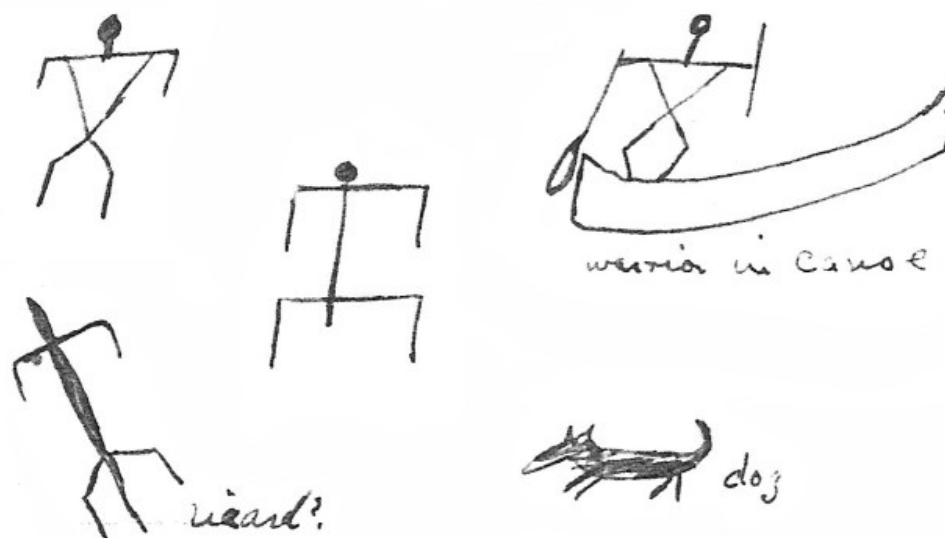
On May 8, 1922, Thomas Maunupau, the same Bishop Museum researcher who observed Nuu, visited the Naholoku images, writing:

I ka hora 3:30 o keia auwina la ua haalele i ka hale nei o Joe Maciel, Mrs. Maciel, F. Maciel, Sr., H. Munroe, ka meakakau ame kamalii no kekahi wahi awawa uuku, aole i mamao loa mai ka hale aku. Ke kumu o ko makou hele ana no keia wahi, o ia no ka nana ana i na kii pohaku i kalaiia ai iluna o ka pohaku, elike no hoi me na kii pohaku i hoike mua ia ma keia mau kolamu, ma kekahi mau wahi e ae o Kaupo nei, ame Nuu. Ua nui no ke kii pohaku maanei, he kii waa ame ke kii kanaka.

At 3:30 in the afternoon, Joe Marciel, Mrs. Marciel, F. Marciel, Sr., H. Munro, the writer and some children left the house for a small gulch not far away. The reason for going here was to look at petroglyphs carved into the rocks, like the petroglyphs described earlier in this account in other areas of Kaupo and Nuu. There were many petroglyphs here, including canoes and people.

In 1929, Winslow Walker, also for the Bishop Museum, recorded the Naholoku images, noting that they were primarily pictographs, not petroglyphs:

“Pictographs at Naholoku, Kaupo. Red ochre used to make pictures and marks on side of small cliff near house of Antone Marciel Sr. One figure like a headless man. Several shapeless splotches of color. Probably made with fingers or a sliver of wood. Farther up the gully are more figures representing men, animals and canoes. Pecked and scratched marks over them made by children since 1922.”



Naholoku pictographs as sketched by Winslow Walker.

## Miana

The third and final known petroglyph site is at a rock shelter in Miana. Miana occupies an area above broad Mamalu Bay and is filled with the remains of sweet potato fields that supported a [Kaupo population of up to 17,000](#).





Petroglyph at Miana.

The site does not appear in any historical records. Neither Thomas Maunupau nor Winslow Walker made note of this site when they visited Kaupo in the 1920s, so it would appear that their local guides also did not know of the site. Duane Aimoku “Moku” Beck, son of former Kaupo Ranch manager Leighton Beck, found this site on one of his many hunting expeditions and graciously shared its location before he passed away.

The cliff face in this area is quite fractured, and there are presumably a number of images that have cracked off and are now buried. The fact that this site went unknown until the late 20th century highlights that there could well be other petroglyph sites in Kaupo waiting to be discovered.



Miana petroglyph.

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