

*the glory of sunlight, and some night by moonlight. It will ever remain one of the great scenic wonder surprises that have made life seem to me something that should last forever rather than for a day. We rode quietly home. [pages 151-156]*

Returning to the road, you may follow your track back towards Lānaʻi City, the way you came, or you may continue through the eroded region towards the shore at Polihua (approximately 5 miles). If you continue to the shore you will pass many interesting geological formations and the myriad colored soils reflecting the minerals of the volcano. Along the way, the slopes smooth out and tilt towards the shore where Polihua Beach, a 1.5 mile stretch of white sand, can be accessed.

## **The Northwestern Region of Lānaʻi**

The trail becomes more rugged as you leave Keahiakawelo and begin your descent towards Polihua. At various locations you will have vistas of the northwestern point of Lānaʻi, the islands of Molokaʻi and Oʻahu, and glimpses of the northern coast of Lānaʻi at Awalua.

You can see the United States Navy vessel YO-21, a former navy yard oiler, at Awalua, which used to provide fuel oil to other vessels in ports of call. The oiler was built in New York in 1918 and was assigned to the 14th Naval District at Pearl Harbor in 1924. YO-21 is one of the few remaining vessels that were at Pearl Harbor on December 7th, 1941. According to oral reports, the vessel was intentionally grounded sometime in the 1950's.

## **Lae o Kaʻena (The Point of Kaʻena)**

At the northwestern point of Lānaʻi, there are several places of importance in ancient lore and in the period of early western history in Hawaiʻi. The tip of Lānaʻi is at a point named Kaʻena, which may be translated as “The wrath.” The name is descriptive of the rough seas which strike against the shore, causing a froth to form and at times be lifted from the ocean surface, floating in the winds. This region is host to numerous house sites, petroglyphs, fishermen’s shrines, dryland planting terraces, water sources, and other features.

Lae o Kaʻena (Kaʻena Point) is the site of one of the early post-Western contact historic narratives of Kaʻā Ahupuaʻa. In the late 1830s and early 1840s, it was used as a “walls-free” penal colony for women who were convicted of crimes under the western system of law; Kahoʻolawe Island was the penal colony for men. It appears that both men and women were initially sent to Kahoʻolawe, but of course, this didn’t address the problem of the moe kolohe (adultery) or mea hoʻokamakama (prostitution), so by the



**Lae o Kaʻena, Lānaʻi. View from Ocean to Uplands of Kaʻā—Area Formerly Used as Penal Colony for Women. (Photo KPAC2-6604)**

early 1840s, women were separated from men and sent to Lānaʻi. The women would be dropped off from canoes, and later from government boats such as the Hooikaika, and left to swim into shore to fend for themselves.

Little documentation from this period of history survives the passage of time, perhaps out of shame on the part of the missionaries who encouraged the action. There also appears to be some discrepancy in how long Kaʻena was used for this purpose, but there are a few primary source records that document the use of Kahoʻolawe and Lānaʻi for incarceration during this period of Kingdom history, for a short period.

In 1842, Dwight Baldwin of the Lāhaina mission station wrote to the secretary of the American Board Christian Foreign Missions to report that Lānaʻi had recently been established as a penal colony for women convicts.

**July 18, 1842**

**Letter of Dwight Baldwin**

**Sabbath attendance, and women convicted of crimes recently being sent to Lanai**

*...At some of our outstations things appear promising. The natives consider it a time of turning to the pono. At Lanai, where I went to spend Sabbath before last, attendance at meeting was very great considering the population of the island. The Spirit seems to have been some time at work there, & the waking up to be general. The female convicts from other islands have lately been banished by the government to that island; & all or the most even of these hardened creatures now profess to be on the side of the Lord. How permanent this turning will prove, or how many individuals will, in the end, be found really converted, cannot now be even a matter of conjecture. These are somewhat trying days; but we may be sure the Lord will not desert his cause...* [page 4 – Reel 800:205]

In 1839, Miriama Kekāuluohi (mother of Charles Lunalilo, who was later elected King of Hawaiʻi) became the premier of Hawaiʻi under Kamehameha III, and served in this office until her death in 1845. She formalized use of Kaʻena, at Kaʻā, Lānaʻi, as a prison for women during her premiership. Although Lānaʻi's use as a woman's penal colony was short-lived, the coast today still reveals evidence of terraces and house sites at Lae o Kaʻena and Kaʻena iki, which also hosts the largest heiau on the island of Lānaʻi.

When Kenneth Emory conducted his survey on the island in the early 1920s (Emory, 1924) many island residents shared memories of Lānaʻi's role as a penal colony for women. A special edition of the Maui News in 1939 mentions the island's use as a penal colony along with general observations of the Kaʻā region:

**October 11, 1939 (pages 1-3)**

**Maui News**

**Lanai Served as a Penal Colony.**

*...in more recent times the island was known as a place to avoid. Little more than a century ago, in 1830, Lanai was used as a type of Devil's Island.*

*As a penal colony for Maui's incorrigible women, Lae-o-Kaena on the northern coast served its purpose well. The cruel existence of these women became the subject of much controversy, and finally this law of exile was abandoned by the chiefs of Maui who had put it into effect.*

*Today, the only spot on this fair island which seems to symbolize destruction is the northern coast of Lanai. Swept by gales from the treacherous Molokai channel, the beaches here are covered with ancient vessels which have found a final resting place.*

*Once famous ships such as the W.G. Hall, the J.A. Cummings, the bark Helene, and the Mikahala are in this ships' graveyard...*

## **Heiau at Ka'ena Iki**

Lāna'i's largest heiau (temple) is found on the western shore of Lāna'i at Ka'ena iki (the little point of Ka'ena). The heiau measures 55 feet wide by 152 feet long. In ancient Hawai'i, ceremony, ritual and prayer accompanied nearly every facet of life. Renowned Hawaiian scholar Mary Kawena Pukui observed—

*"It is impossible to enumerate the hundreds of gods and goddesses of old Hawai'i. Some of the gods were inherited from exceedingly ancient times, from our ancestors who came from southern islands and they can be said to have been 'brought' along by them, just as truly as were the material things in the canoes because they [the gods and goddesses] were in their minds and souls..."*  
[M.K. Pukui Ms. page 2.]

Heiau, large and small, were constructed at places all around Lāna'i. In some instances they were the ceremonial sites of "state" worship, where only the highest chiefs and priests would officiate and commune with the gods. These heiau, like that at Ka'ena iki, were bound by stringent kapu (laws and restrictions), and powerful sacrifices were required to ensure success in the endeavors and matters of state. Other heiau served various functions for chiefs and commoners, such as heiau associated with successful crops, bountiful catches of fish, cleansing and purification from wrong-doing, rainfall, healing from ailments, safe passage across the land, knowledge of specialized practices for both men and women, navigation, the skilled crafts, and many other aspects of life and death.



**The Heiau at Ka'ena Iki and valley with terraces on south. View to the upland slopes of Ka'ā. (Photo No. KPAC2-6590)**

At Ka'ena iki, the point yields to form a small bay and sits in front of a little valley where ancient village and dryland agricultural terraces may be seen.

## **Polihua Beach**

The great beach at Polihua extends for approximately 1.5 miles along the northern coast of Lāna'i. The name "Poli-hua" is derived from a native tradition that describes how honu (turtles) came to frequent Hawaiian waters and climb onto the beach to lay their eggs. Poli-hua may be literally translated as "Cove of eggs." Walking the beach, enjoying the vistas and relative solitude of the area is a unique experience.

### **It Is Important For You To Know That Polihua Beach Is Not Safe For Swimming.**

Polihua is unsafe for swimming and ocean activities. The sea conditions are unpredictable, and the surf and strong currents make the ocean hazardous. The near shore ocean bottom is steep and drops off sharply to depths that are over one's head. Even when it is a calm, wind-free day, the water and subsurface currents are unpredictable. The beach is exposed to strong ocean currents driven through the Pailolo and Kalohi channels between Lāna'i and Moloka'i. The beach has no protective reef and only scattered rocky points. At times, the winds are so strong that they drive sand along the surface, giving one the sense of walking through a sand blaster.

There is no potable water or facilities in the Polihua region. So your trip should be well planned. Also state law prohibits driving on Hawai'i's sandy beaches. In this instance, doing so is likely to get you stuck and unable to move your rental car or jeep. The result will likely be a long walk back to the city and a substantial price tag on getting the vehicle back.

## **Native Traditions and History of the Polihua Region**

In ancient Hawai'i, all facets of the environment were believed to be physical manifestations of gods and goddesses who were the creative forces of nature. Various occupations were inspired by deity who excelled in the areas of arts and valued skills. Some of the gods took human form and lived among the general population. Among these gods were Kualā and Hina-puku-i'a, who were the gods of fisher-people. Their son 'Ai'ai followed them in the practices of catching fish and aquatic resources. In one native tradition, we learn how honu (turtles) came to Hawai'i and how Polihua is connected to the tradition. An account published in 1902 Hawaiian Annual and Almanac reveals this history:

### **Ko'a (Fishing Stations) on the island of Lāna'i Kū'ula becomes turtle and is the source of the place name, Polihua**

*Aiai went to Lanai where he started fishing for aku (bonito) at Cape Kaunolu, using his pearl [mother of pearl lure] Kahuoi. This is the first case known of fishing for aku with pearl from the land, as it is a well-known fact that this fish is only caught at deep sea, far from shore. In the story of Kaneapua it is shown that he was the only one that had fished for aku at the Cape of Kaunolu, where it was started by Aiai.*

*From Kaunolu Aiai went to Kaena cape where, at a place close to Paomai, was a little sandy beach now known as Polihua. Here he took a stone and carved a figure on it, then carried and placed it on the sandy beach and called on his parents. While making his incantations the stone moved towards the sea and disappeared under the water. His incantations finished, the stone reappeared and moved toward him till it reached the place where it had been laid, whereupon it was transformed into a turtle and gave the name of Polihua to that beach. This work of Aiai on the island of Lanai was the first introduction of the*



*turtle in the seas of Hawaii, and also originated the habit of the turtle of going up the beach to lay their eggs, then returning to the sea... [HAA 1902:121]*

**One of the Heiau Ko‘a (Fisherman’s Shrines) Near Ka‘ena Point.**  
 (Robin Kaye Photo No. RK\_2260 Dec 17, 2010.  
 Lat (N) 20 54.77; Long (W) 157 03.15)

**Ka Huaka‘i Pele i Hawai‘i  
 (The Migration of Pele to Hawai‘i)  
 And Her Visit To Polihua**

The goddess Pele and many members of her family traveled from their ancestral home lands to the Hawaiian Islands. As Pele sought out dry regions in which to keep her volcanic fires burning, she traveled down the island chain from the northwest to the southeast. On this trek, Pele and her traveling companions arrived at Lāna‘i where she enjoyed a brief period of quiet and respite. An ancient mele (chant) which has survived the passing of time describes Pele’s stay on Lāna‘i, and references the famed valley of Maunalei (where water flowed from mountain to sea), and the sands of Polihua, where turtles were found. The mele (In *Ka Hoku o ka Pakipika*, Pepeluali 20, 1862:1) observes that Pele found particular pleasure in eating the turtles that frequented Poli-hua—

*...A Nanai Kaulahea  
 A Mauna-lei kui ka lei  
 Lei Pele i ka ieie la*

*...It was on Nāna‘i<sup>4</sup> of Kaulahea,  
 At Mauna-lei the wreath was made,  
 Pele wore the ‘ie‘ie as her  
 Adornment,*

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<sup>4</sup> Nāna‘i is an ancient variation of the name Lāna‘i.

*Wai hinu poo o Hiiaka*

*Holapu ili o Haumea  
Ua ono o Pele i kana ia  
O ka honu o Polihua  
Honu iki ai nounou  
Kua papai o ka moana  
Ke ea nui kua wakawaka*

*Hoolike i ka ai na Pele  
I na oaoaka oaka i ka lani la  
Elieli kau mai...*

*And Hi'iaka's head glistened with  
water,  
Haumea's skin was burned,  
And now Pele desires to eat her fish,  
The turtle of Polihua,  
A small turtle with a thick neck,  
Crab backed turtle of the deep sea,  
The great hawksbill turtle with its  
razor-like back,  
Made into food for Pele,  
As lightning flashes skyward  
Awe possesses me...  
[Maly, translator]*

In 1868 a group of Hawaiians visited notable places of Lāna'i. Upon leaving Keahiakawelo, they descended to the shore of Polihua. There are notes in the narratives about the habit of honu (turtles) climbing the shore to lay their eggs, as well as information about the native custom of making salt in the area and a native plant called mānewanewa (*Vitex trifolia*), which was used in making lei by the visitors—

#### **January 9, 1869 (page 4)**

#### **Nupepa Kuokoa**

#### **Moving about to see the island of Kaululaau**

*[Traveling from Keahiakawelo] ...We descended down a rocky ridge and arrived on the plain. It is a rugged descent, by which the horses could be crippled, but we were led by our native captain, who was familiar with this difficult journey... But we desired to reach Polihua, so our natives pushed on... We saw a boat below, as if it was held fast by the currents, buffeted by the surging waves as we passed through the long wilderness of akoko, and the horse could not go forward. Mr. Pali, junior said,*

*"This rubbish makes it difficult to travel the plains,  
Moving back and forth,  
Like the mamō birds drinking the water of the kanawao blossoms,  
In the cool uplands of Halona.*

*Thus we made our way to stand upon the shore of Polihua.*

*This place is famous for the movement of the turtles to the inland areas, and for their birthing in the sand and pohuehue. We were not there at the time of the birthing of the turtles, perhaps had we been there in those days we would have seen it.*

*This place is a fine, wide beach, with hallows and some salt ponds; and it is said by the natives, "It is known that you have seen Polihua, when you wear a lei of manewanewa." So we quickly went and stripped it, just like how you strip the maile. When we finished our work, we placed it upon our necks. Its fragrance is second to none, like the fragrant pandanus of Panaewa, also like the fragrance of a rose. Its fragrance is born across the sea beach.*

*It is beautiful beyond compare to travel here, and as we went on we felt the Maaa blowing behind us, causing the sails to billow, and we reached Awalua.*

*There is a different beauty here, it is the boat harbor, and there are many good houses here along the shore... [Maly, translator]*

An ancient saying handed down on Lānaʻi also commemorates the legacy of honu at Polihua:

**Na honu neʻe o Polihua.**

The moving turtles of Polihua.

Polihua is a place on Lānaʻi where turtles come to lay their eggs.

(ʻŌlelo Noʻeau No. 2219, M.K. Pukui, 1983)

**ʻOhuʻohu Polihua i ka Mānewanewa  
(Polihua is Adorned by the Mānewanewa)**

Mānewanewa is an important native plant for which the coastal region of Kaʻā was known. This plant, indigenous to the Hawaiian Islands, is generally known as pōhinahina or kolokolo kahakai on the other islands, and is commonly known as the “beach vitex” (*Vitex trifolia* var. *simplicifolia*).



**Mānewanewa at Polihua Beach. The Last Old Growth of Mānewanewa Plants Known on the Island of Lānaʻi (Photo No. KPAC-2289)**

The significance of the mānewanewa to Lānaʻi's people from the Kaʻā-Paomaʻi coastal lands still lives in the memory of some of Lānaʻi's oldest native Hawaiians and their descendants today. In the 1930s, Tūtū Papa Daniel Kaopuiki, Sr., celebrated the mānewanewa and its association with the families who lived along the coast of Kaʻā in the lines of a song, composed for the Hawaiian Churches of Lānaʻi:

***‘Ohu‘ohu Polihua i ka mānewanewa, I ka lei kaulana ‘oia ‘āina...***

*Polihua is adorned by the mānewanewa, the famous lei of the land...*

Kūpuna (native Hawaiian elders) M. Ku‘uleialoha Kaopuiki Kanipae (born 1915), Irene Kamahuialani Cockett Perry (born 1917), and Solomon Kaopuiki (born 1919) have shared recollections that when elders from earlier times traveled to gatherings at other locations on Lāna‘i, they wore lei of mānewanewa, to indicate their place of origin. This was the custom of those traditional people up to the turn of the last century.



**Rocky Point on Polihua Beach—Slopes of Ka‘ā in the Background.  
(Photo No. KPAC2-6633)**

## **Return To Lāna‘i City**

From Polihua you will return via the route you traveled to arrive at the beach. For more information on the history of Lāna‘i, you may want to visit the Lāna‘i Culture & Heritage Center in Lāna‘i City.