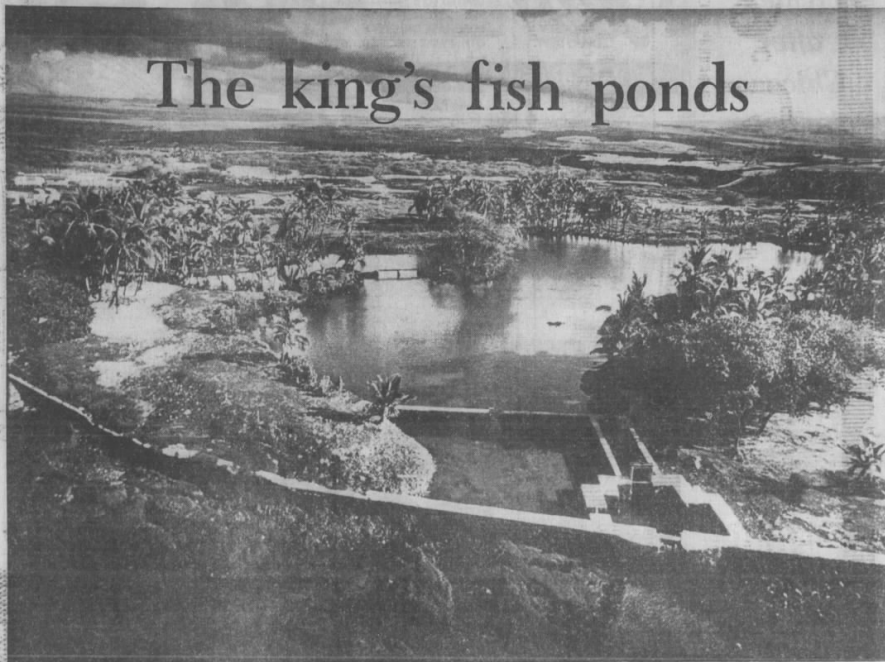


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Food Report

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The king's fish ponds



By Mary Cooke
Maui Food Editor

Men to now and future guests at the new Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Big Island gold coast:

...ll, on a special occasion, you choose good mullet for your dining enjoyment, pause and consider this:

...The fish will be harvested from one of a series of legendary ponds once owned by, and operated to serve Hawaiian chiefs and kings only.

...In the ancient order, no person of lesser rank was permitted to eat the fish from these ponds.

...Of the few remaining ponds that did serve the great Kamehameha and other Hawaiian ali, those at Mauna Lani are now the most visible and productive.

...The manner in which the ponds are maintained, and the methods used to trap, raise, fatten, store and harvest the fish, provide an almost unbroken link between contemporary Hawaii and the Hawaii of Kamehameha I.

...And before Kamehameha? That, too, says Hawaiian legend.

Mauna Lani's four principal ponds — Kalahupua'a, Waipahu, Manoku and Hopena — are remnants of Waimaali Fish Pond, a pre-historic 600-acre pond which once fronted the Kohala coast. It extended from Kalahupua'a (site of the hotel) to Kiholo.

...Somewhere back in time, this vast monument to the aquacultural skill of ancient Hawaiians was divided and fragmented by the Karika lava flow, accounts of which have been preserved in Hawaiian legend.

...It's in the folk memory," said Kenneth F. Brown, president of Mauna Lani Resort, Inc.

...Supporting Hawaiian folk memory, Brown cited a contemporary report written by the Oceanic Institute on the archeology and history of the ponds at Mauna Lani.

...By carbon dating samples of sediment from one of the ponds, it is found to be about 1800 years old," he said. "It was a pond and its integrity is still there. It's a very ancient place."

...Of the original 600 watery acres, the Mauna Lani complex now owns and operates about 11 acres of working ponds, restocked with the fish that once were royal favorites: Silver pond mullet, aua and moi.

...More than five acres of new ponds, replicas of the old, have been built and are being worked in the ancient manner to increase the production of fish.

The old ponds cluster near the sea and they are included in a recently created 27-acre park preserve which contains other significant Hawaiian sites and archeological treasures identi-

The ancient Kalahupua'a Fish Ponds at the new Mauna Lani Bay Hotel on the Big Island have been restocked with fish that, in past centuries, were raised there and eaten only by the Hawaiian ali (rulers).

The ponds are tended and worked in the technology of early Hawaiians who, scientists say, probably were the greatest aquaculturists in the world.

Now a cluster of palm-fringed archeological treasures, these ponds link contemporary Hawaii with the Hawaii of Kamehameha The Great and his ancestors.

From these special areas, on special occasions, hotel guests will be offered choice food for the table. Daily, the ponds and their environs offer visitors "source food" for the spirit.

fied in a study made by Bishop Museum scientists. A portion of an ancient Hawaiian foot trail, which runs along the coast and passes through the Mauna Lani property, is part of a still-visible system that once connected coastal destinations and provided routes to and from inland settlements at Waimea and Puuwaawa.

Depending upon where the king and

chiefs were in residence (early Hawaiian rulers maintained a mobile court), their swiftest runners daily fled along the trails that led to and from the nearest royal fish ponds. Homeward bound, they carried calabashes of freshly caught fish surrounded by enough pond water to keep them alive until they could be delivered to the royal conclave.

Often, Kamehameha was at Kamakahonu, a mako settlement within running distance of the Kalahupua'a Fish Ponds. There, in his last years (1812 to 1819) he established his court. Historians have suggested the near location of these prime fish ponds may have been a reason for the great warrior's choice of residence.

Through time and tide, the Kalahupua'a ponds before they became significant assets of the Mauna Lani complex, was the late Francis H. I. Brown. He was a grandson of John Papa I'i, distinguished high-born Hawaiian who, from childhood, served in the courts of Kamehameha I, II and III.

John Papa I'i was given by his parents to the royal court when he was 11 years old," said Kenneth Brown, nephew of Francis Brown, great grandson of I'i and president of Mauna Lani. "They told him, 'This is our duty. It is your duty and privilege.'"

He was an early convert to Christianity, one of the first Hawaiians to learn to read and write, a devout Christian who spent his whole life in service to the ali. And in his youth he had participated in pagan ceremonies.

It's grandson, Francis Brown, cared well for the king's ponds. In the years he owned them, he repaired and restocked them. He planted thousands of coconut trees surrounding them and along the black lava coasts on either side of them. He also planted the pond areas with milo trees and Joutu, a rare native Hawaiian palm. Quietly, he removed any non-Hawaiian plant life.

From the beginning of their stewardship, Mauna Lani executives have been dedicated to the idea that these ponds must continue to receive the protecting, nurturing care that is their due.

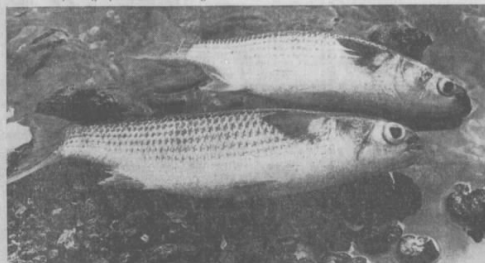
To maintain their productivity and status as a truly Hawaiian place—where there still lingers the spirit of the culture that was there before—they contracted with Alike Cooper, local commercial fisherman with a lifelong knowledge of the technology, care and working of Hawaiian fishponds.

Cooper's principal work has been to increase the number of fish in about 16 acres of ponds and to repair, replace or build anew the makaha systems for the ponds.

The makaha complex includes the ocean-side gates and holding pens adjoining the ponds. Cooper said. Purpose and uses of the makaha are three-fold: To trap wild, young fish from the ocean, to retain and fatten them and to provide areas to harvest them.

Traditionally, Hawaiian fish ponds

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Silver mullet, fresh-caught from the Kalahupua'a Fish Pond, rest on black lava cinders, cooled by limpid waters in this protected area. For

Mauna Lani Bay Hotel recipes to prepare mullet or any fine white fish, see page 12.