

Waimanalo: Navigational Stones

October 9th, 2007 by Shad

There is not much I can remember about Waimanalo on that drive from Wahiawa to Nanakuli to visit relatives. I think I must have been about 5 years old. The year must have been around 1949 or 1950. As a matter of fact I cannot ever recall anyone in my family including those that lived in Nanakuli ever referring to the name of Waimanalo. It was never mentioned as if it never existed. It was just another valley like all the others as we drove on our quiet way to Nanakuli.

It was much different during those years. I can remember being the only car on the road for miles. Isn't it interesting how life can be? I can honestly say that I never became aware of the name until it became a landfill. I find it interesting that it took trash to draw our attention to this once culturally significant valley. I will share some interesting aspects of Waimanalo that I think by the end of this story you will find it difficult to think of it as a heap of trash. Sadly, it may be trash that future generations will think of this once important place.

When Kamehameha won control of the island of O'ahu by defeating Kalanikapule he divided up the island amongst his leading war chiefs. He awarded the Ahupua'a of Honouliuli to Kalanimoku as panilaa lands or conquered lands.

We are not exactly sure where he and his wife Kuahine resided during this period however we suspect perhaps in an area anciently known as Lepau. It was known as an area of chiefly residence.

John "Papa" I'i who is a source of the many stories I share with you is also from the area of Lepau. John "Papa" I'i and Kalanimoku served jointly in governance of these islands during those early years. Lepau was on the eastern point of Waipio Peninsula. A short paddle across Kaihuopala'ai (West Loch) was Pu'uoloa ('Ewa Beach) another chiefly residence.

Stories have it that Kuahine ran away from her husband and hid in a village at Waimanalo. It is described as a community of people who lived along the trail to Waianae that we know of as Farrington Highway today. It was an area adjacent to the shoreline and entrance to Waimanalo where a river exited the valley. These homes appear in early maps drafted of the 'Ewa and Waianae shorelines. These friendly people were rewarded for hiding Kuahine by having their homes burnt down by the chiefs.

Although we today think of Waimanalo as a hot and dry area, it until recently had a permanent stream. During these early years Waimanalo Gulch was fed by numerous springs whose origins were at the higher elevations of Palehua. There were also many sinkholes that provided fresh water for drinking. These sinkholes were providing fresh water as recent as the 1950s and 60s.

Kumu John Kaimikaua also shared a story told to him by a Kupuna of a spring by the name of Haulele. The spring came from a cave where the water fell from the roof of the cave. Today this spring and cave lies beneath tons of municipal solid waste. Today there are places where some of these ancient springs return after periods of rainfall. The water however would only travel a

short distance then return into the permeable soil. One spring in particular, after 3 months of steady rainfall last year, had water running for about 6 months after the rainy season.

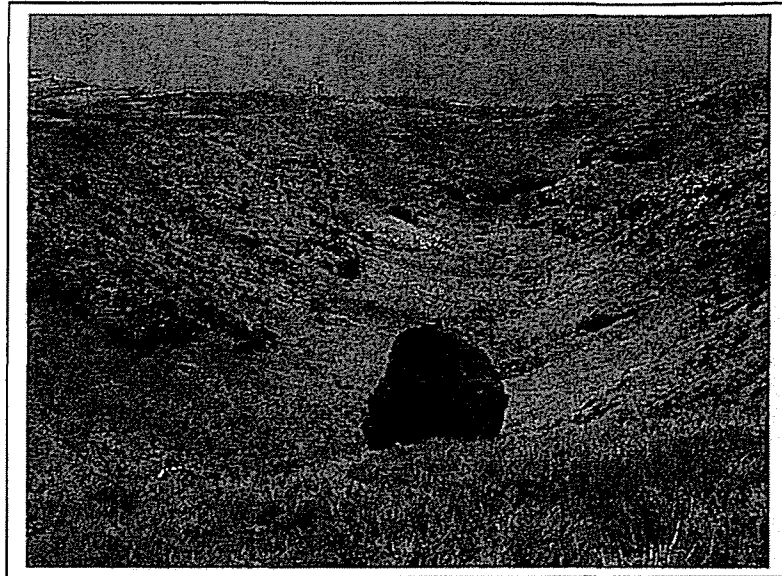
In order to understand the larger role that Waimanalo may have played anciently we need to take a look at similar places on other islands and weave that into how 'Ewa was perceived by the ancients. Waimanalo is in the Moku of 'Ewa. There are similarities associated with the geography of every island. Some islands are more eroded than others nevertheless these similarities can still be seen.

Keep in mind our Kupuna were the greatest navigators this world has ever seen. Their world was a series of parallel and intersecting lines that extended across all the islands and beyond the horizon to distant stars and constellations. It followed the path of the sun and the moon. It crossed intersecting points on land along ridges, cut the apex of mountain tops and it cut across the top of a mountain with the bottom of a valley much like how a shooter would line up the rear site of a gun with the front site. Lines that connected Kumukahi on Hawai'i Island with Pu'uokapolei. Lines that connect Mauna Kapu on O'ahu with Hualalai on Hawai'i Island. The line that connects Mauna Kapu with Hualalai also strikes the tip of Kaho'olawe at the Kealahiki Channel. Building a hale such that the door is facing the setting sun at a certain time of the year. Or lining up the walls of a heiau with the setting sun at solstices or equinox. This is the story ofWaimanalo.

The similarities of the islands are convincing. On O'ahu, the Ko'olau Mountains separated from the Waianae Mountains by a "saddle". Maui, Haleakala separated from the west Maui Mountains by a "saddle". Hawai'i Island, Maunakea separated by Mauna Loa and Hualalai by a "saddle".

We are in the same kind of location. Palehua on O'ahu is situated above Waimanalo and Ko Olina at the bottom. The oral traditions and stories associated with the region makes no distinction between Ko Olina and Waimanalo. They seem to be referring to the same place. This is important to grasp. Three place names along this coastline, Kaupea, Ko Olina and Waimanalo seem to be drawing our attention to points on the horizon. The stories associated with Ka'u (South Point) on Hawai'i Island make reference to it being a point of departure to the southern latitudes. It is also considered by the Maori of Aotearoa as their homeland.

Ukumehame on Maui, likewise, is considered a place of landing and departure through the Kealahiki Channel between Kaho'olawe and Lana'i. Waimanalo on O'ahu is in the same kind of location. 'Ewa in the traditions is referred to as the "celebrated lands of the ancestors". They are not referring to our ancestors here but to our ancestors to the south. At the time of the winter solstice, when the sun is in the south, the sun sets on the long walls of the Palehua Heiau simultaneously on an upright Pohaku (shall we call this a navigational Pohaku?) on the high ground above Waimanalo Gulch as it sets in the very bottom of the apex of the valley much like the rear site and front site of a gun.



This navigational pohaku can be seen from the ocean during the hot season. It is located in the center of Waimanalo Gulch lined up much like the front sight of a gun and the gulch serving as the rear sight.....but what is it sighting on?

I was recently invited with other cultural practitioners from both Waianae and 'Ewa to view several upright stones identified by archaeologists that are within the area of the proposed expansion of Waimanalo Gulch Landfill. These upright stones are being referred to as "Navigational Stones". They are without question important from a cultural perspective, however there is still more to learn of their significance. What are they trying to draw our attention to? Is there a relationship between these Pohaku and the upright stones mauka of the valley?

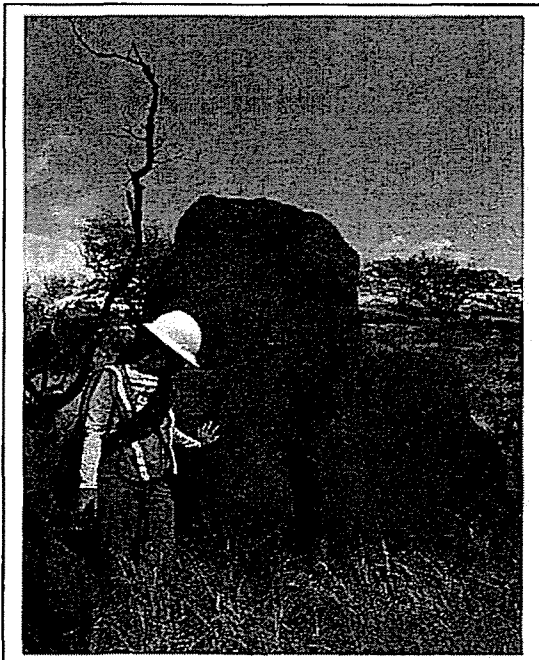
The mauka Pohaku can be seen from the lower level of Waimanalo because of its substantial size however the makai Pohaku are difficult to see. When you stand on the mauka Pohaku, the makai navigational stones are on that line, you just cannot see them. However you know that they are there. To remove these navigational stones and preserve them somewhere else would be a mistake. Unless they can be preserved in their original location they would lose their sense of importance. They would just be another bunch of stones.

I think most of us are aware of the stories surrounding the discovery of what some people refer to as the "pueo" stone of Waimanalo when the initial construction of the landfill was taking place. There were a lot of accidents occurring with the construction project. Equipment was breaking down and workers were getting hurt. Kupuna Emma Defries was contacted and helped locate the source of all the accidents when she identified this Pohaku. She indicated that it was a sacred Pohaku and suggested that a protocol be established for its removal and placed in a safe place.



What are these navigational stones looking at?

To this date we do not know if accidents or equipment damage have stopped. We do know that the landfill operations have been plagued with problems since it first opened. We also know that beyond the proposed expansion area are more "pueo" stones. However....this is not what this story is all about.



Navigational pohaku.

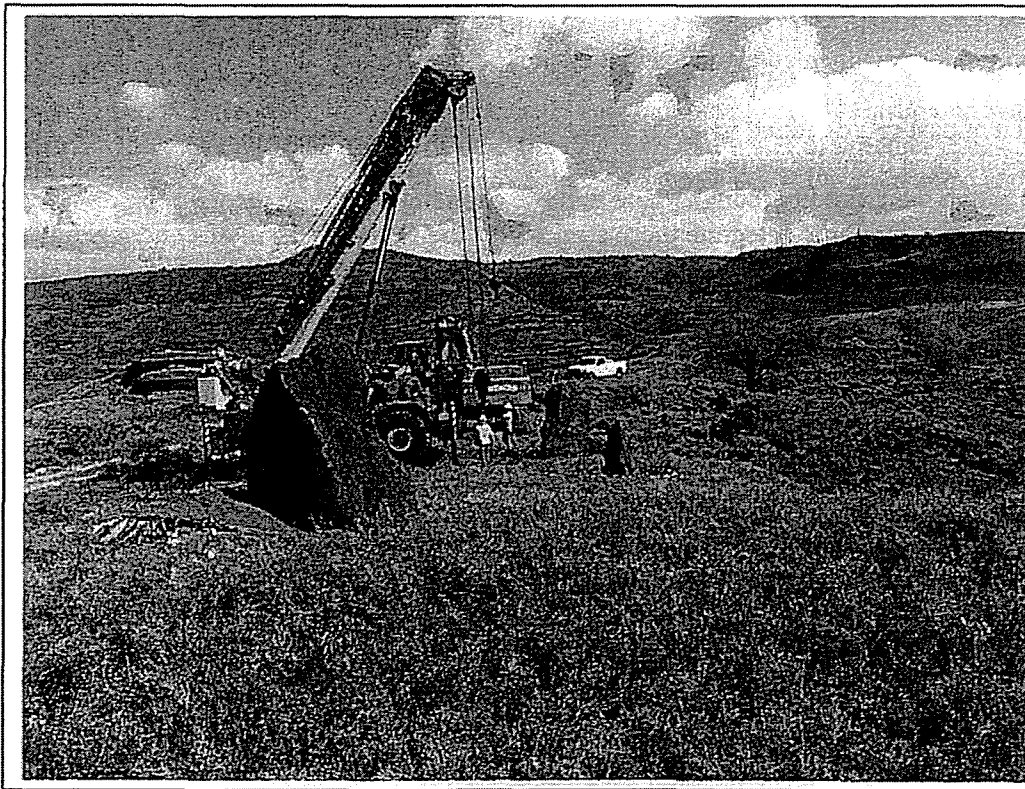


Navigational pohaku.

It is the same story that I have shared repeatedly. It is a story of our efforts to piece a history back together and preserve it for future generations. Stories alone are not enough. In our world of today we need scientific proof that our Kupuna were the greatest navigators this world has ever seen. A piece of that proof is in Waimanalo Gulch. Perhaps there is a reason why these navigational stones have made their presence known to us today. Things happen for a reason. There are no mistakes. The only mistakes..... are the choices made by people.

I doubt that anyone can say with certainty what this all means. I think that we can say with certainty though that there is something important to be learned here. The message is if we lose any more of this traditional cultural landscape we may never learn what it all means. It comes down to choices. Butisn't that the defining aspect of life.....choices. Are we capable of makingthe right choices?

Mahalo a me aloha no.....



The temporary relocation of the Waimanalo navigational stones to the top of Fort Arizona along the western ridge of Waimanalo Gulch. The plan is to return them to their original location when the landfill is closed. What is interesting though is they do not even look the same at this new location.