



Cultural Remnants from the Summit to the Sea

The story of this setting has been passed down through many generations

Hawai'i Volcanoes National Park is comprised of 333,000 acres, stretching from the summit of Mauna Loa to the southern coastal shoreline of the Puna-Ka'u District. The National Park Service has been the steward to this landscape for nearly 100 years. For centuries prior to European contact, this land was cared for and occupied by the native Hawaiian people. The physical remnants of those who lived and thrived within this setting can still be seen today in the archeological resources that are spread across this vast landscape.



The archeological resources at Hawai'i Volcanoes cross a range of prehistoric Native Hawaiian and Euro/American historic sites. Spatially, ruins extend from the coast to the upland alpine regions. Radiocarbon data suggest that Hawaiians settled in this region of Puna and Ka'u by the early 15th century. Evidence of their life on this lava landscape can be found in the remnants of house platforms and caves scattered throughout the lowland and upland areas. Enclosures which may have been used to pen livestock and excavated pits and rock mulch mounds suggest animal husbandry and widespread farming took place on what today appears to be barren lava. Five centuries ago, however, this area was host to thriving family communities, or ohana, who etched carvings (petroglyphs) that represented their families, traditions and beliefs into the cooled lava surface.

The Native Hawaiians who lived in this region were linked together by trail systems which connected families who lived and fished along the coast, with farmers who lived and worked further inland. The intricate trail systems also provided people with access to prized upland resources such as volcanic glass and basalt used to make their tools, petrel nests where seabirds were caught for food, shrines where they worshiped their gods, and plants collected for medicine and dyes, and wood for canoes and houses.

These resources are a testament to those who chose to live in the shadow of Kilauea and Mauna Loa and were shaped by the power of Pele.