

# Kamehameha: Early life traced in Kohala

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son, because it had been foretold that she would bear a *keiki kipi* "rebel infant," a *keiki luku na'ali'i* "a slayer of chiefs."

'Alapa'inui, the Big Island king, issued a harsh decree on the advice of his priests: "Ou aku i ka maka o ka wauke oi opi'opi'o, o nui aua neia ka wowo aku." ("It is better to nip the bud of the wauke lest it grow and flourish.") (This phrase still survives as a family name in the Stillman family of the Big Island.)

When Keku'iapoiwa set out for the Big Island, she knew her child would be in danger if she was discovered.

The spot selected — by whom? the desperate mother? her relatives? *kahuna* sympathetic to her cause? — is almost as deserted today as it probably was then. It sits at the edge of pastureland, sandwiched between fields and a rocky coastline, off a dirt road.

Our group, driving three large vans, didn't dare the drive the rutted, often muddy track to reach the site.

But I'd been to the birthplace before, and I returned a few weeks ago, and found the going easy in a rented Ford — even if I did get scolded later by the rental agency for muddying the car in the puddles. (See Details for specific directions.)

Along this road is the gate to Mo'okini Heiau, possibly one of the oldest in the islands, certainly standing and in use when Kamehameha was born. There are brochures to help you with a self-guided tour (if they haven't all been picked up that day); there is an altar stone and a phallic rock. Be respectful.

Kamehameha's birthplace is a few minutes farther on. The spot is marked by a pair of walled squares, one inside the other, with an entrance in the outer gate on the mauka side. The inner walls, unbroken, enclose scattered boulders, some of which are believed to be the actual birth stones.

Each of the four corners of the inner wall is marked by a pointed kapu stick, as is the single opening in the outer wall. On the stick the day I



Robert W. Bone/Special to The Advertiser

Kumu hula Nani Lim Yap and sister Lorna Lim researched chants telling of the early life of King Kamehameha I in North Kohala.

visited several dried lei rasped in the wind. Offerings of stones wrapped in ti leaves topped the wall in several places.

I recalled Lorna Lim's description of the bad luck that befell a young man who stole one of these stones. I cannot understand how anyone would have the courage to do such a thing. There are places where the *mana* (spiritual power) is strong enough to be felt. This is one.

A sign proclaims "Kamehameha 'Akahi Aina Hanau, Kapakai, Kokoiki, Kohala. 'E'oni wai e no oukou. i ku'i pono 'a'ole pau." ("Birthplace of Kamehameha I at Kapakai, Kokoiki, Kohala. Endless is the good I have given to you to enjoy.") (The use of "a" rather than "e" in 'akahi is merely a dialect difference.)

On another sign are detailed some of Kamehameha's accomplishments. But so much is not told: Why this spot — so close to Mo'okini Heiau, dedicated to the war god — was picked. Why 'Alapa'inui was so willing to believe ill of one to whom he was related.

Nor can you learn here what happened to the baby afterward — wrapped in *kapa* (mulberry bark cloth) and handed, still wet with

afterbirth if the stories are true, to Naeole-a, a chiefly cousin of Kamehameha's mother.

To Naeole-a, a *kukini* — one employed by ali'i as a swift runner to carry messages between villages — fell the job of carrying the swaddled child to another cousin, Kahoapulani. She would act as the child's wet nurse, raising him alongside her own daughter.

Her family would secret the child away in the cave Hula'ana, at the foot of Awini Valley — to this day reachable only by trail. Kahoapulani's mother was the chanter who assured that no signs of chiefly birth, such as rainbows, or certain cloud formations would appear to lead the king's warriors to the child then known as Pa'iea.

Naeole-a literally ran the roughly 15 miles with the child in his arms. His name, appropriately, means "without gasping."

Today, you can drive, as we did, along a smooth paved road, stopping to eat and shop in Hawi, and to gaze at the statue of the grown Kamehameha in Kapa'au in front of the courthouse. This is the original statue of Kamehameha, by ordered King Kalakaua's friend John Baker

from a sculptor in Italy. The statue was to have been erected in Honolulu, but it was lost at sea off the Falklands Islands.

By the time the first Kamehameha statue was salvaged and delivered, another had been ordered and erected at Ali'iolani Hale. So tiny Kapa'au, in Kamehameha's homeland, got the statue, which many people consider even more lifelike than the Honolulu version, because of its painted-in eyes.

We stopped and Lorna removed her shoes and stood at the base of the statue to chant *Mele Inoa No Kamehameha* "Name song of Kamehameha." The chant speaks poetically of Kamehameha being "plucked from the side of the goose," because he was snatched from his mother's arms and as a "white shark" because it is said his mother craved the eye of the shark during her pregnancy.

At the end of the road, 8 or so miles from Hawi, is Pololu Valley, reached only by trail. The next valley over is 'Awini; three valleys from there is Waipi'o. The valleys here are fronted by headlands that look as though they've been sliced off by a bread knife, steep black walls facing into the sea.

In one of these walls is the cave where the boy they would someday name "The Lonely One" was hidden.

We stood in a pasture just off the road's end, drinking in a spectacular vista: the headlands, the rocky beaches rhimed with white water, the choppy sea and the blue haze beyond.

Lorna, transformed by a change into kahiko-style hula gear, took her place and indicated her readiness to dance. Nani slapped the *ipo* gourd and the chant, "Aia 'o 'Awini Pali Ali'i Hula'ana," began.

"Yonder stands 'Awini, the sheer cliff of royalty  
"Where Kaha'opulani lived  
"To rear Pa'iea the chief. . ."

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