

## **Preserve Pao'o**

Folks of North Kohala have been passionately working to preserve the open space of their coastline for more than 30 years. Decades before many people worried about the impacts of development and way before the most recent building boom, kupuna, community groups and leaders envisioned a stretch of coast, forever preserved, free of development.

Why? The coast is home to the best and most numerous intact, pre-contact archeological and cultural sites in the state. The remains of entire villages stretch the length of it. The only navigational heiau on the Island is here. Many of these sites were used by and important to King Kamehameha I.

Described by many as the last and most contiguous sweeping ocean viewplane in Hawaii, the coast is a visual jewel for both locals and tourists. The county General Plan and State recognize the sweeping open vistas as needing protection.

Families from all over the island have continuously used this open coast for cultural and recreational activities for generations. It is not uncommon to meet people from Ka'u or Hilo camping along the shoreline as their grandparents did. Many lifetime Kohala people tell stories of hiking to the coast to camp, long before the highway was built, carrying only a pot and bag of rice, catching and gathering whatever else they needed.

With all these various public uses the undeveloped leeward Kohala coastline is well cared for. People respect and leave alone the cultural and archeological sites. They haul out their garbage. We have heard arguments that the best protection for some of the sites is private ownership and locked gates. We strongly disagree. It is up to the local Hawaiian community to decide how the historic sites should be preserved and to the public how access should be allowed.

We all need some places that are open, not dissected with resorts and vacation homes. Even if our only regular contact with the North Kohala coast is when we drive by it daily to work, the freedom of its openness sustains our spirit to know one place is untouched by modern sprawl.

All this is now threatened by another culturally insensitive, luxury vacation compound at Pao'o, just south of Lapakahi State Historical Park. Plans by the family of Massachusetts's financier, Jonathan Cohen, call for a giant vacation complex surrounded by a rock wall enclosure, 7-foot, 9-foot, up to 11-foot high. This fortress would tower over the existing settlement remains and burial sites making them seem insignificant -- a major cultural insult. The Cohen walled complex would dwarf the prominent burial compound of the Hawaiian Ali'i Kauwe. Instead of a prominent feature on the bluff overlooking the beautiful shoreline, Kauwe's burial site would be dominated by the giant paved terraces, six structures and swimming pool of the vacation home. Chlorinated treated wastewater would be leached in the ground near Kauwe's burial enclosure.

Direct and lineal descendants of the original property owner, including a very revered Kawaihae kupuna are opposed to the project. Before the Hawaii Island Burial Council the kupuna said "No building in that area, period!" The kupuna said the entire property should be left as an historical area.

Because it is on conservation land the fate of the Cohen vacation compound is before the State Land Board. The DNLR staff of planners have recommended denial of the project as it does not meet the criteria for residences on conservation land. The owner is challenging the staff

recommendation. Two Kohala groups, Maka'i Kamakani o Kohala and Kamakani o Kohala Ohana (Kako'o) have called for denial of the permit and filed for a contested case hearing, which has been scheduled for September 20-23 in Kapa'au.

When Native Hawaiians and other long time residents see these coastal lands used for private purposes, when in their minds and hearts these lands have been open for public use, the effect is very devastating. The cancerous feeling of cultural loss and environmental impact breaks the heart, soul and spirit of those who have had continuous access to the an open shoreline.

For many years, long before this luxury vacation house permit, Kohala groups including Kako'o, Hui Lihikai, and Malama Kohala Kahakai have talked to the state, the county and land trusts about protecting the coast by purchasing the few private parcels. Now the need is immediate. A land trust has submitted an offer to buy the property at Pao'o from Mr. Cohen, but Mr. Cohen has not accepted the offer and, instead, is forging ahead trying to secure a permit from the State to build his luxury vacation home.

Thirty years ago Kohala's kupuna had the foresight and wisdom to begin to secure permanent protection for the coastline. We hope Mr. Cohen will agree to sell this land soon so their vision can be realized.

To help in this effort e-mail [kohala\\_open\\_coast@yahoo.com](mailto:kohala_open_coast@yahoo.com) or write to PO Box 40, Kapa'au, HI 96755 or call 938-8853.

What's been done to preserve the North Kohala Coast in open space:

- petitions of 8,000 people called for an open, undeveloped coast in 1988, 2000, and 2002
- State legislative and county council resolutions supporting an open Kohala coastline
- multiple state, county and community plans calling for cooperation in protecting the open coastline
- work by community groups -- Kako'o, Maika'i Kamakani o Kohala, Malama Kohala Kahakai, Hui Lihikai (Citizens for Protection of the North Kohala Coastline), Kohala Preservation Committee, Hawaiian Civic Club, Save Our Surf --to protect sites along the coast
- Hawaiian Civic Clubs National Association calling for more protection of Kohala coastal historic sites
- community sponsored Kohala Coastline Conference 1990
- community produced video of the Kohala Coastline - The Silent Treasure in 1990, featuring revered kupuna calling for permanent protection

Submitted by:

Maikai'i Kamakani 'O Kohala  
Kamakani 'O Kohala Ohana  
Malama Na Wahi Pana O Kohala  
Kohala Historic and Cultural Preservation Group  
Malama Kohala Kahakai