



## LEARNING FROM OUR KŪPUNA

## MO'OLELO

### Kaulu and the *Lepo 'Ai Ia*

*O Kailua, nui kuapapa*  
 O Kailua, great is your legacy  
*Ke pala mai ka hala*  
 When the *hala* blossoms  
*'Ula no ka a'i*  
 Red *lei* for the neck  
*Aia I Kahiki, Kaulu-a-kalana*  
 There, in Kahiki, Kaulu-son-of-Kalana  
*Nānā I Kiwa'a*  
 Eyes fixed on Kiwa'a  
*I ka lepo 'ai ia*  
 There, the *lepo 'ai*

(Words by Kihei DeSilva for the song "Ka 'Ulu Hala"; Musical Album "Keale: Wehekeala - The Way is Open" by Walt Keale, 2006)

If you've ever taken a drive down the short road between the Pali highway and Mōkapu Boulevard (some call it "dump road") in Kailua on the windward side of O'ahu, you may have noticed the massive *pōhaku* (stones) on the slopes of the *pu'u* (hill or mountain) overlooking the present-day Kawai Nui Marsh. These stones are another story for another time. However, long before the marsh thickened with the silt of mountain run-off and long before it was a swamp...even before it was a large network of *loko i'a* (fishponds) and *lo'i* (farming terraces), the ocean lapped gently against its shores. Here it was that Kaulu began to discover his *kuleana* or destiny.

Kaulu lived in Kailua just a few hundred years after the first arrivals of Polynesians to these islands. Yet the stories passed down through the ages tell us it had been long enough for those early inhabitants to lose touch with parts of their culture such as navigating by the stars. In fact, during the time Kaulu lived, Hawaiians then looked up at the night sky and saw only constellations where once their ancestors had seen maps and star trails! On the day he decided to rediscover those trails, many people then living in Kailua privately laughed and ridiculed the young chief. And with no knowledge of star navigation it would have been certain death to travel very far by sea.



Still Kaulu looked fearlessly out on the horizon from the massive *pōhaku* of Kawai Nui (the big water). On the first day he sailed in the direction of Hawai'i Island. Not far along the coastline of O'ahu he spotted Moloka'i, then Lāna'i, and headed for what he saw. As the islands grew on the horizon he passed one, then another until finally, there was nothing to head toward except the open sea between here and the pillars of Kahiki (*kūkulu o Kahiki*).

On the first night, Kaulu dropped his sails and just sat in his canoe. Looking up at the night sky, he drew lines in his head from star to star. Yet nowhere did he find a star



map for the next day's journey. Finally he drifted off to sleep. That night he dreamed of terrifying, dark storms on an open sea and hanging on for his life with no idea of where and when it would all end! Then out of nowhere a dream took him into a deep forest where, seated on a *lau hala* (woven pandanus leaf) mat, he gazed up at a cloudless sky full of stars. Five stars came spiraling down only to become birds, four *pueo* then finally, one giant, white 'iwa bird that was strong and fierce. All of them came to perch in the *kukui* forest surrounding him but the white 'iwa sat right in front of the young chief. Strangely, he felt no fear in the forest of dreams.

When he awoke the stars still shined faintly. At the dawning of first light on the horizon Kaulu looked up. His breath caught in his throat; for right in front of the *wa'a* (canoe), hanging in the air, was the fierce, giant 'iwa from his dream! It seemed to be waiting for him to hoist the sail. In a flurry, the *wa'a* raced to follow the bird.

Day after day, Kiwa'a, a canoe-leading *kupua* (supernatural guardian) led the way. And night after night, Kaulu would chart the journey, carving the long forgotten trails into the front of his *wa'a*.

Stories of the many exploits of the great chief Kaulu and his journeys to the pillars of Kahiki (*kūkulu o Kahiki*) were passed down by the generations that followed him. We can say for sure that the return voyage of Kaulu in the *wa'a* was full of danger. Some days the *nai'a* (porpoises) rode the currents indicating the journey would be easy. On other days, the *koholā* (whales) swam on the surface of the water signaling stormy and dangerous travel ahead.

When the day finally dawned for his arrival, Kaulu set his foot upon the highest *pōhaku* (stone) overlooking the shore of Kawai Nui. From this *wahi nānā* (sighting place) Kaulu



looked out on the sea feeling the deep knowledge of his *kūpuna* (ancestors) in his *na'au* (soul).

Nevertheless, the people of Kailua doubted it had happened at all. After his return, they said, "He's only been to Moloka'i hiding out all these years!" and to Kaulu they said, "Prove to us that you really have traveled beyond the horizon." Kaulu then reached into his belongings and pulled out a large *'umeke* (wooden bowl). In it was a strange substance they say was the consistency of *haupia* (coconut pudding) but it tasted better and brought the best of health! Legends tell of the *lepo 'ai ia* (edible mud) found only in Kahiki when the star trails had been lost. After sharing some with the people of Kailua, they also said that it was hidden in Kawai Nui only to be brought out in time of the people's greatest need.

*(Mo'olelo provided by Walt Keale, September 2006, for Project Aloha 'Āina)*