

# Planting an Idea

Written and photographed by Bill Harby



*A new day dawns for Kaho‘olawe: Visitors chant a greeting to the rising sun before setting off to plant the native succulent, ‘ihi (right), in the dry uplands.*



As the re-greening of Kaho‘olawe continues, visitors learn to nurture more than an island.

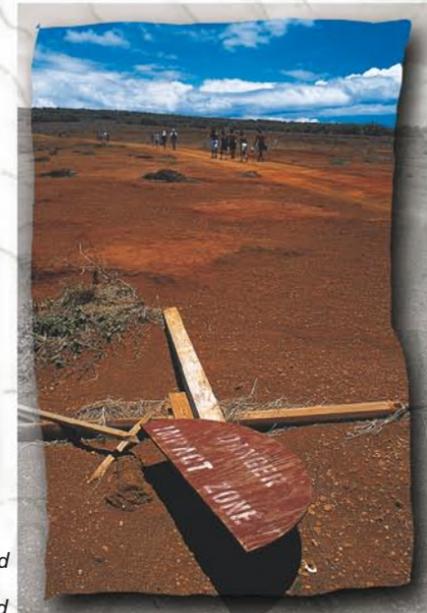
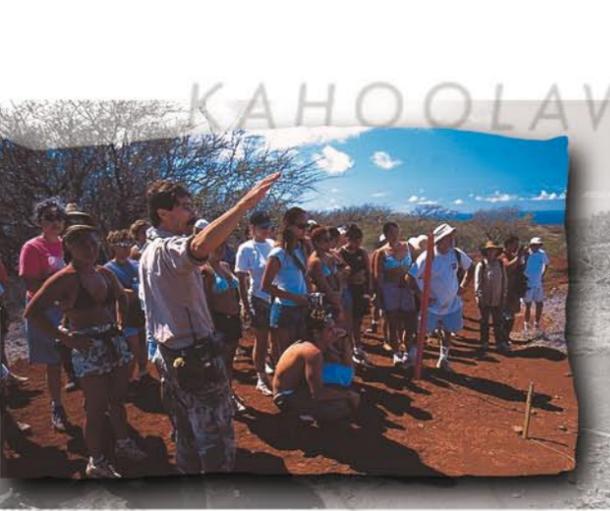
His act seems foolhardy to some, absolutely necessary to others.

Uncle Walter is on his knees. Using a broken twig, he’s digging a small hole in the powdery dirt. Around him, the ground is strewn with hundreds of pieces of black basaltic rock, most of them no bigger than a pack of cards, most of them obviously chipped and shaped by human hands. Here and there among these angular rocks are a few round stones. These shaping tools were brought up here from the seashore miles below.

This is an ancient adze quarry at Pu‘u Mōiwi (Bone Cut Hill) on the island of Kaho‘olawe. But Uncle Walter Kanamu is here this day not to make adzes. He is here to plant a species of ‘ihi, a tiny succulent plant endemic only to Kaho‘olawe and neighboring Molokini islet. And he is here to plant an idea in the hearts and minds of the four dozen visitors with him.

## A LEI OF CLOUDS

Three days before planting with Uncle Walter, our group begins its adventure at dawn on Maui’s south shore. We are a mixed bunch—teachers from various Hawai‘i schools who are participating in a program put on by Bishop Museum, girls from St. Andrews Priory in Honolulu, and several members of an extended Hawai‘i family. Also here are the kua (work leaders) from the Protect Kaho‘olawe ‘Ohana.



(Left to right) • Archeologist Rowland Reeve describes how ancient craftsmen at Pu'umōiwi shaped obsidian adzes from sea-worn stones. • Unexploded ordnance like this mortar round became exposed by eroding soil, making it necessary for visitors to stay within safety zones. • Another kind of mortar relic was found on this trip while cleaning trash by a seaside ledge.

The 'ohana was formed in the late 1970s to lead the effort to end the use of the island as a military bombing and gunnery range, and return it to the Hawaiian people as a cultural reserve. The bombing, begun in 1941, was halted in 1990. Four years later the island was established as a cultural reserve.

Now, with \$400 million in federal funds, the 45-square-mile island is being systematically cleared of unexploded bombs, artillery shells, mortar rounds and other ordnance. The work is expected to take until at least 2004. (For more on the 'ohana and the island, see its Web site at [www.kahoolawe.org](http://www.kahoolawe.org).)

While the work progresses, about once a month Protect Kaho'olawe 'Ohana brings interested groups to experience the island for a few days. They learn the island's past and help create its future.

When the fishing boat that will ferry us to the island arrives, we form a line into the water and pass dozens of bobbing, watertight bags and buckets of gear to be loaded onboard. Everyone works together, hand-to-hand, not yet realizing we are already learning the first, most important lesson about Kaho'olawe: laulima (cooperation).

"Kaho'olawe is like a canoe," Noa Emmett Aluli has said, "where everybody has got to care for each other." Aluli, a Moloka'i physician and founding member of the 'ohana, frequently invokes the island when discussing the health of Native Hawaiians. Replanting and revitalizing Kaho'olawe offers lessons for revitalizing the health of Native Hawaiians, he says. Yes, it is a big job. Yes, it will take a long time. But it can be done. "It takes a commitment to one's own dignity."

During the three days our group explores Kaho'olawe, we will have ample opportunity to see this commitment that so many have made.

After floating in all our gear and swimming ashore (there's no dock on Kaho'olawe) we set up our tents under kiawe trees, sharing the space with frantic little mice who live off kiawe beans—and the generosity (or carelessness) of campers.

Then we gather under plastic tarps in the communal kitchen for a safety orientation by ordnance disposal expert, Wayne Crupper. Only about 1,000 acres of the island have been cleared of unexploded ordnance (11,000 acres of the 28,800-acre island need to be cleared). We are not to venture outside of these "free roam" areas, and no matter where we are, we

are not to touch any metallic or unidentified object. "If you didn't drop it, don't pick it up," says Crupper.

Derek Mar, one of the kua, gives us another similar, yet very different no-no: "Try not to step on anything green." We need only look around us to see that plant life on dry Kaho'olawe lives a precarious existence. Only tough, thorny kiawe trees have a firm grip here around the bay. Eventually this alien species will be eradicated, but for now, the trees provide some shade and help hold the soil until native species can be replanted.

The re-greening of the island is one of the priorities for the 'ohana and the Kaho'olawe Island Reserve Commission (KIRC), the state agency that is spearheading the clean-up. With the help of community groups like Na Pua No'eau and the United Methodist Church, and schools across the state (especially Kamehameha and Wai'anae), volunteers are putting plants in the ground. Some of the vegetation is surviving on the windblown slopes and in rutted gullies; much of it is not.

Kaho'olawe was not always so dry. It is said that there used to be a "lei of clouds" connecting Maui,

Moloka'i, Lāna'i and Kaho'olawe. Now the lei is usually broken over Kaho'olawe.

#### FIX IT OR LET IT GO?

The island's climate began to change after goats were released around 1800. By 1850 the growing feral herds were having a visible effect on the vegetation. Things got worse when sheep ranching came in 1859 and cattle in the 1880s. The animals denuded the scrub and dryland upcountry forests, causing widespread erosion.

Then, beginning in 1941, the bombs and bullets started chewing up the bare soil, leaving it to bleed into the ocean, smothering the coral, killing the reef fish. On windy days, people on Maui sometimes see the red dirt of Kaho'olawe swirling away out to sea.

One good thing has come from the erosion. It has exposed evidence of the ancient Hawaiians who lived on Kaho'olawe at least as long as 900 years ago. On our first day, archeologist Rowland Reeve shows us house sites, petroglyphs and other relics of the settlement that existed around Hakioawa Bay until about 1850.

It's OK to pick up artifacts for a closer look, says Reeve, but we're to always put them back exactly where we found them. "If you take something, it's like tearing a page out of a book," he says.

Through the afternoon Reeve

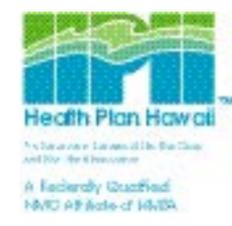
# Breathe a Sigh of Relief

Managing your  
asthma can help  
you enjoy life more!



Asthma is a serious condition that can be a daily struggle for some people. The good news is that asthma can be controlled, and the more you understand it, the easier it will be to prevent asthma attacks. And that may let you live your life with a little more adventure.

Members of HMSA and Health Plan Hawaii are eligible to become part of our Asthma Disease Management program. To learn more about how to control your asthma and enroll in our asthma program, please call 948-5096 on Oahu, or your local HMSA office



shows us pages from this book—a stone knife, a coral file for polishing fishhooks, the foundation of a house, a heiau.

What happened to the people who lived here? The village and other settlements on the island were abandoned in the early 1800s, says Reeve, probably because of three factors: Western diseases, inter-island war and the lure of the lights of Lahaina just across 'Alalākeiki Channel.

We can see the lights of Maui twinkling as night falls and we lug buckets of seawater to the outdoor kitchen for dishwashing after a big dinner.

Later the group gathers in a circle beneath propane lanterns, and we introduce ourselves. Uncle Walter tells us his family has lived on Maui for 10 generations. Then he tells us about his beloved old '65 Mustang. He loaned it to someone and it came back with a crushed fender. He floats a question: "Do I fix it or get rid of it?"

This simple question suddenly grows in complexity and importance when Uncle Walter relates it to kids who get in trouble: "What you gonna do, help them or put them away?" It's the same for Kaho'olawe, he says. "Do you fix it or let it go?"

Now Aluli's words—"Kaho'olawe is like a canoe where everybody has got to care for each other"—come into sharp focus.

While our circle ponders Uncle Walter's mana'ō (idea), he asks us to consider two phrases: aloha 'āina (love of the land), mālama 'āina (caring for the land). "What does that mean?" he asks.

#### MĀLAMA 'ĀINA

The next morning we get an inkling. The Priory girls mālama 'āina by repairing a trail—lugging rocks and pulling weeds under the hot sun.

The rest of us have it easier. The rocky beach is strewn with thousands of bits of washed up flotsam—colorful pieces of plastic from buoys, bottles, floats, pens, lighters, cups, nets, fishing line—a hideous confetti on this wild beach.

"This is a different kind of beach combing, eh?" laughs Stephanie Place, from the Big Island. After a couple hours, we've created a big pile of the stuff on a cargo net. Eventually the Navy will chopper it out.

Our third and final full day on island we take a day-long hike mauka. After greeting the sunrise with a welcoming chant ("E ala e!"—Arise!), the whole group treks inland, up the trail leading to two

of the island's special sites—the adze quarry at Pu'umōiwi, and the navigator's halau, one of the highest points on the island, where navigators were trained. From here you can see the sea and the currents and the stars in every direction.

But that is still ahead. Right now we are catching our breath where 200 native 'a'ali'i seedlings were planted years before. On this dry slope, small catchments have kept the plants moist, but most of the seedlings have withered.

Nearby, 'ākulikuli, a native succulent plant, is doing better thanks to cartons of "dry water"—a super-absorbent substance that slowly releases water to the plant.

Not far away, big bales of woven fiber wait to be unrolled and used as ground covering to trap the blowing soil.

Before all the erosion, these highlands were thick with dryland forest. Up here Hawaiians grew sweet potatoes and a native cotton.

Now rows of tamarisk trees stand guard, planted as wind-breaks to prevent further erosion. Introducing this alien species, even for conservation purposes, caused controversy. Australian salt grass is also being planted to break up the hardpan, leaving loose soil for planting. It will die off in a couple of years, by which time the earth

should be rich enough to support native grasses and shrubs.

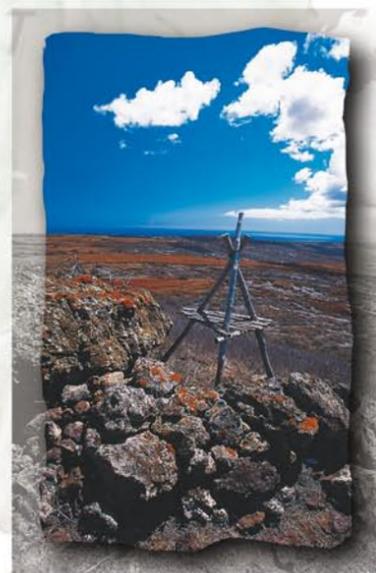
Meanwhile, the replanting continues with efforts big and small. The Sierra Club, The Nature Conservancy, The Navy, KIRC, the 'ohana—all continue to help.

And so does Uncle Walter, with his planting stick and with his stories. Up on Pu'u Mōiwi on our final day he coaxes each of us to plant a tiny sprig of 'ihi. Afterward we stand back and wonder how the tiny plants will ever survive in this powdery soil.

That night, in our final gathering before our dawn departure tomorrow, Kau'i Quinones reassures us. She comes to Kaho'olawe nearly every month to run the kitchen and be camp mother to the groups. "I want you all to know that I'm going to be thinking of you," she says. "And I'll go up to Pu'u Mōiwi and water your plants. And throughout the year, if I'm not here, somebody will go up there to water your plants, because we are remembering you guys and all that hope and effort and mālama to see that tiny plant grow."

To inquire about a trip to Kaho'olawe, phone 988-5903 on O'ahu. 15

(Left to right) • "Dry water" cartons gradually release moisture to 'ākulikuli ground cover planted to hold the soil. • A morning of beach cleaning yielded this pile of 'ōpala to be choppered out by the Navy. • This lele (an altar for gifts) is on Pu'u Mōiwi, where ancient navigators studied the currents and the stars.



## Your child is almost a teen ... got protection?

Many teens are not protected against serious diseases like hepatitis B, measles, mumps, la, chickenpox, diphtheria and tetanus. Diseases can be deadly. Teens may think they're too old to get shots ... not so.

Before children celebrate their 13th birthday, they should have the following shots:

- 3 hepatitis B shots
- 2 MMR (measles, mumps, rubella) shots
- 1 varicella shot (if they haven't already

had chickenpox)

- They also need a tetanus diphtheria (Td) booster between ages 11 and 16

To find out what shots your children already have or still need, please call their doctor.

Immunize for a lifetime of protection.

