Mākua … the Valley
Where Secrets Sleep

I went to an old church to meet three kupu ka‘aina – those who were chosen, by their ancestors, to be keepers of the Hawaiian traditions. These men held the secrets of the ancient terraces at Mākua.

Clarence Delude, one of the kupu ka‘aina, introduced us. We talked, then Alika DeSilva, asked me “Why are you here?” A few months ago I had gone hiking on one of the mountain ridges which overlooks Mākua. Soon the earth beneath my feet shook ever so slightly ... like the kind of tremor caused by a bulldozer. I learned that it was no bulldozer that I felt, but the detonation of bombs.

I knew long ago hundreds of people had lived in Mākua and that they built impressive heiau, sacred sites. It was an important fishing village, and the valley was kept green by the farmers. Then foreigners came to Hawai‘i, which ended the old ways. Eventually, with few Hawaiians living there and new species taking over the land, Mākua began to dry up. Now fire is always a danger and a fear.

These were not secrets, though. I knew these things. What I didn’t know was why Mākua is said to be more sacred than other ancient Hawaiian sites. The kupu ka‘aina talked story. They told me that even before World War II, the military began to use the valley for target practice. The Hawaiians were not asked to leave, they were evicted. They recalled stories of people being loaded onto trucks and relocated. They were never given the choice of being able to stay. One of the people evicted was the minister of the Mākua Protestant Church which once stood near the beach. After the people were removed, the army painted a white cross on the roof of the church, and other buildings, and bombed them.

Ever since, many people have been angry. Some want the military to leave Mākua. Some want the US government to leave Hawai‘i. Some want the environment to be protected. All want Mākua to be respected. One group, Mālama Mākua, with the help of Earthjustice, stopped all military training in the valley for three years. In 2001 they won their lawsuit, so now community members can go on cultural visits twice a month.
I still wanted to know why Mākua was so special. The men told me it is a wahi pana – more than sacred and kapu. Wahi pana, said Glenn Kila, one kupu ka 'aina, is a place that has certain Hawaiian phenomenon. Probably the most sacred site is Kaneana cave. Its name means Cave of God. It is said to be the arrival and departure point for Pele on her visits to and from Kaua'i. It is also said to be the dwelling place of the shark god, the brother to Pele.

A Mākua resident is quoted as saying the cave was a "chamber where Kāhuna conducted...pagan rituals in the light of flaming torches."

I knew this, too. I wanted to know more. I was asked to give my word that I would write nothing of what I was told from that point on. We talked for three hours. While I cannot tell you what I was told in that time, I can tell you that I am sure that Mākua is a wahi pana. It was not merely in the stories I was told, or the facts I was given, but in the aloha I felt from these three men. Their voices, their knowledge, their aloha of the 'aina convinced me that they were the keepers of great secrets, of which I had only seen the surface.

**Makahiki Returns to Mākua**

Adapted from William Cole article, Honolulu Advertiser, Feb. 16/02

Recently, members of the Hawaiian community celebrated a return to the old ways in Mākua Valley with an overnight stay and offerings for the close of the Makahiki season — a tradition not seen for generations in the Wai'anae Coast valley. "This is probably the first time in about 180 years that this Makahiki ceremony has been celebrated in Mākua," said Wai'anae resident William Aila Jr., who has relatives who lived and are buried in the valley.

The ancient Makahiki season began with the temporary retiring of Ku, the god of war, and reign of Lono, god of peace, over the Islands. Yesterday saw the preparation of ho'okupu, or offerings, to be placed on bamboo or rock altars in Mākua Valley and the two valleys flanking it, Kahana Hāʻiki, and Koiahi, Aila said. The offerings include fresh water, bark, kukui, pig, 'aweoweo (a red fish), taro, breadfruit, sweet potato and banana — each having a connection to Lono.

"This is part of everyday life, the changing of the season, and also the changing of the mindset of Hawaiian people to one of peace — wars were stopped at this time of year," Aila said. "It (the celebration) is very important because it brings back into focus the role of sharing, and that it's important to treat the land well. And more importantly, we get to live the culture."