

Within The Sound of Kapalua Bay

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An online magazine dedicated to the Hawaiian history of Honokahua Maui, the ancient land division that became Kapalua Resort



Archives Manifestation of the Gods September 2007

Haweia Point: Sacred to Hewahewa

This dramatic array of spectacular sights at Kapalua Bay will never show up in a resort brochure or on a Hawaii Visitor Bureau TV ad. Nevertheless this show runs 24-7, with new acts daily — full of surprises, thrills, and billowing beauty. A Nānā ao, an educated Hawaiian cloud-watcher would tell you that Kāne and Lono bring life and abundance in the clouds of Honokahua.

[The Ahupua'a of Honokahua](#)

[Honokahua Bay](#)

Perhaps you have already discovered this magnificent feature of our landscape. But we are not the first to appreciate the ever-evolving skies of Honokahua, that now hold court over games of golf and tennis, and trips to the beach. For the people of ancient Honokahua, reading clouds accurately and predicting rain patterns meant life or death, full stomachs or famine; for the Chief, blessings of Kāne and Lono were essential to producing crops for the King, and maintaining honored stewardship of the land.



Ke Kumu o na Ao, Source of Clouds



"Cloudforest" by Kit Gentry

Where do the clouds come from? Look no further than 5,788 foot tall Pu'u Kukui, the volcano that formed West Maui. On an average 85 degree day at sea level, the temperature on the slopes of Pu'u Kukui at 3500 feet elevation is right at the dew point. Customary trade winds pick up moisture as they cross the sea north and east of Maui, and when this water-laden air rolls up the slopes of Pu'u Kukui and cools to the dew point, the water vapor condenses to form our familiar rain forest clouds. The size, shape and density of clouds depends on wind speed and humidity.

Clouds are birthed on the windward sides of the Hawaiian islands, producing rain on the windward flanks of the mountains (mauka, or upland showers) and then pushed over and around to the leeward



side where they accumulate in a canopy of cloud that may stretch out for several miles when the humidity is high. Moderate 10-15 knot winds cause clouds to “break away” from the canopy and carry rain to other places. Maui’s trade wind cloud canopies send breakaway clouds to Moloka’i, Lana’i, and Kaho’olawe. Moloka’i and Lana’i are dryer than Maui, simply because their mountain peaks are barely high enough to pu rarely generates it’s own rain, and relies heavily on a long plume of cloud that trails from across the channel.

I remember the day I was playing the Plantation Golf Course and figured out that the “lei of clouds” on the West Maui Mountains was actually forming right before my eyes. This revelation did not do a thing for my game, because it distracted my eye and head from the game, but since that day, my fascination with Honokahua clouds has continued. Watching “cloud birth” and “break away” clouds releasing from the mountains behind Honokahua, and floating down the Pailolo Channel, is a peaceful, spiritual retreat, a source of solace and communing with creation. Not many people can say they have a natural cloud chamber in their back yard, and the ancient ones who studied clouds first, left behind a rich language of clouds and weather to help us understand just what we are watching.

The name for cloud in Hawaiian is ao. The same word has the alternative meaning of “daylight”. The verb for a cloud covering is ho’omalumu, to make shade or to protect. Studying the old Hawaiian names for clouds, and cloud signs has allowed me look at clouds from another perspective, and made me a much better Nānā Ao, predictor of weather around Kapalua Bay—and this helps my game!

The planters of old Hawaii depended on rain to grow crops; rain kept streams flowing to irrigate their taro patches, softened the hard clay for planting, provided moisture for dry land crops like sweet potato, and kept timber of the upland forests healthy. Hawaiians saw clouds as kino-lau (physical manifestations) of two gods: Kāne, deity of light, day and fresh water who comes in the white puffy clouds of the trade winds, and Lono, deity of fertility, whose thunder and lightning is present in dark threatening storm clouds, and particularly those that come in on kona southerly winds. Weather, like all Hawaiian natural phenomena, is viewed as a balance of opposing northerly trade winds and southerly kona winds.

I used to gauge wind direction at Kapalua Resort by standard cues, “feeling” the wind, listening to the wind, or watching how the trees blow. Golfers always throw bits of grass up into the air to test the wind. I understand that the grass blows away from the wind source, but good golfers never mention wind direction after they toss the grass—instead they mysteriously convert an estimated wind velocity into a number that represents the number of “clubs” to add to their club selection for the same shot on a windless day. Obviously, there are only a few golfers who can really do this, but on windy days, even novice golfers throw grass in the air and mumble something about “clubs”.

Lana’i in trade winds

Moloka’i in kona winds

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Trades from the north - clouds trail on left

Konas from south - clouds trail on right

However, since studying Honokahua clouds, I just glance at Lana’i or Moloka’i and immediately estimate wind direction, plus relative speed and humidity. In northeast trade winds, clouds formed on the windward end of these islands go over the summit and collect in a dense cloud canopy that extends out over the leeward side, or left side, away from the wind.

In southwest kona winds, clouds form on the southern or left end and trail in billows to the right. The stronger the wind, the longer the trailing clouds on the leeward end of the island. I leave it to Mark Roling to discover how the length of the trailing canopy exactly relates to “clubs”. I do know, the thicker the clouds, the more humid the air. That probably affects golf ball trajectory, but at my level of play, getting off the ground has nothing to do with humidity.

Trade winds prevail most of the year in Hawai’i and dominate spring and summer months; opposing kona winds, which blow for intervals of days or weeks primarily during winter months are called the “winds of discovery” because ancient Polynesians used them to sail from southern points in the Pacific like Tahiti and The Marquesas to Hawai’i, 2,000 miles to the north. This aspect of kona winds will be fully examined in an upcoming article on Hawaiian navigation.

Kane and Lono: The Hawaiian view of Clouds

War god Kū and growth god Kāne hold highest court in kau, summer months, when clouds are high, white and billowy, and short-lived showers tend to stay in the hills. This is the season of heavy work for planters, when the crops are developing. It is also when tapa cloth, rope, and preserved foods are made and stored. It is the time when timber for canoes and hale are cut and hauled and medicinal herbs are collected in the high forests.

Harvest begins in September-October, at the end of kau, when the trade winds die off and sometimes stop, resulting in hot and sultry days. Very few clouds form, and the air is hazy with increased humidity and volcanic particles from Kilauea. These "doldrums" may persist for long periods.

In November, deity of the harvest, Lono i ka uliuli (Lono of the highest dark blue heavens) returns from Kahiki (land of the ancestors of the Hawaiian people; a distant land across the sea to the south west), Ku retreats to the inner sanctum of the earth, war is outlawed, summer ends, and work ceases. Lono reigns, bringing pelting rain that begins Ho'oilō, cool winter months of leisure. You can imagine the delight of ancient planters when these first thick dark clouds and soaking rains appeared.

Hawaiians marked the return of Lono and the rainy season by the first appearance of the Makali'i constellation (Pleiades or Seven Sisters) on the western horizon, in late October or early November. When the seven twinkling eyes of Makali'i appeared, they knew Lono would soon start softening the soil with deluge from his glossy black clouds, and cold pelting rain punctuated by his thunderous voice and flashing eyes. The Hawaiian harvest and fertility festival that marks Lono's arrival and four month tenure as the ruling god, is called Ka Makahiki.

Aside from regular seasonal changes, Hawaiians accurately predicted rain based on their intimate knowledge of wind, sea, and cloud formations. A number of cloud types were recorded by Hawaiian scholar David Malo, who taught at Lahainaluna Seminary and pastored the Sandwich Island Ministries church in Lepolepo south Maui (now Kihei).

Some Predictors of Rain

Kahea Red cloud patches in the eastern sky before sunrise on a trade wind day

Papala Smooth clouds resting on the mountain at morning

Hiwahiwa Glossy dark clouds coming on a kona wind

Uliuli Blue-black band on western horizon at sunset

Palamoa Blue black clouds shutting in the mountains

Pua'a Small pig-shaped clouds moving up the channel

Ho'oluluhu Shut in sky with low threatening ceiling

"Rain with wind, passes. Rain without wind, stays"

Some Fair Weather Signs

Keokeo Plump white "happy" clouds

Newenewe Low-lying plump yellow clouds on the horizon with feathers on the upper side

Aka'ula Red glowing western skies at sunset with Trade Winds

These are but a few of the hundreds of cloud descriptors used by Hawaiian Kilo Ao cloud experts to describe clouds in general, and unique clouds of certain locales. At Honokahua, clouds are the dynamic engine of our Pu'u Kukui rain forest, and our source of lush windward vegetation and fresh drinking water. Look up and take in the panoramic show. See creative energy at its finest as waters of the earth return to the sky and to pour out life to us again. I hope your view of clouds will be forever changed by reading this article. As a Hawaiian proverb says:

Aia i ka 'ōpua ke ola; he ola nui, he ola laulā, he ola hohonu, he ola ki'eki'e

Life is in the clouds; great life, broad life, deep life, elevated life.

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