Walking in the Ancestors’ Footsteps

The arrival of Polynesians via ocean trails, around 1,500 years ago, resulted in large changes to the plants and animals on the west side of the island of Hawai‘i: partial clearing of dry land vegetation (such as sandalwood and loulu palms), planting of crops such as coconuts and taro, and the introduction of pigs, dogs, and chickens. The development of the ahupua‘a system of land use, however, meant that the island population lived for many centuries on the island’s natural resources. Established in 2000 for the preservation, protection, and interpretation of traditional native Hawaiian culture and natural resources, the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail is a 175-mile trail corridor full of this cultural and natural heritage.

Challenging Journeys

The early Polynesians were skilled ocean navigators who traveled long distances on double-hulled canoes capable of carrying colonists as well as all their supplies, domestic animals, and plants. Navigating by the stars, ocean swells, and bird flight patterns, they sailed eastward, crossing thousands of miles of ocean to colonize many Pacific islands in the area known today as the Polynesian Triangle.

Ocean Trails: the beginnings of change

![Taurus constellation](image)

Ahupua‘a Trails: uniting the lands of the gods and the people

A typical ahupua‘a, or land division, was wedge-shaped and extended from mauka (the mountains) to makai (the sea). As water flowed from the upland forest down through the ahupua‘a, it passed from the wao akua (the realm of the gods) to the wao kanaka (the realm of man), where it sustained agriculture, aquaculture, and other human uses.

Island Trails: connecting a kingdom

![Polynesian sailing canoes replica](image)

Island of Hawai‘i

1797 Mamoalaha, law of the splintered paddle, provided safe public access to all trails
1848 Great Mahele, private property laws, removed guaranteed access to trails
1892 Highway Act ensured that all people could cross the island on public lands
1924 much of the Ala Kahakai coastal trail remains under private ownership

A Vision for Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail

Because much of the coastal trail remains under private ownership, the largest threat to its cultural and natural resources is rapid development (cattle ranching, hotels, houses, golf courses, marinas, light industry, and roads), bringing with it a multitude of invasive plant and animal species. Securing the Ala Kahakai National Historic Trail as land accessible to the public will provide an opportunity for future generations to learn about and preserve Hawai‘i’s unique cultural and natural resources.