

Ka‘ānani‘au of Kūkaniloko: An Expansive View of the Cultural Landscape on O‘ahu

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Abstract

The site of Kūkaniloko in the central plateau of O‘ahu is well known for its sanctity as a regal birthing place. Less well known are the *ka‘ānani‘au* of Kūkaniloko, a concentric alignment of rock pilings that demarcates a much broader region than the current State of Hawai‘i five-acre Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument and that pre-dates the *moku* and *ahupua‘a* territorial system. Interviews with a steward of this site (conducted for Cultural Impact Assessments) detail how these *ka‘ānani‘au* are connected to the creation of land and people, land divisions, ceremonial practices, and chiefly traditions. Salient for archaeologists working in cultural resource management, this paper reveals an expansive view of the cultural landscape on O‘ahu that highlights the connectivity among cultural sites.

The site of Kūkaniloko in the central plateau of O‘ahu is well known for its sanctity as a regal birthing place (Figures 1-4). Located near what some people consider the *piko* (navel or center) of O‘ahu (Becket and Singer 1999:64), Kūkaniloko is a site of *mana* (divine power) that the gods recognized in the child born there (Mililani High School 2001), “an *ali‘i*, an *akua*, a *wela*—a chief, a god, a blaze of heat” (Kamakau 1992:38). These *ali‘i kapu* (sacred managers¹) were Lo Ali‘i, a class of *ali‘i* who lived in the mountains of Wai‘anae and Ko‘olau, preserving their *kapu* through prescribed ceremonial rites (such as intermarrying among themselves) (Kamakau 1964:5; Sahlins 1992:23).

Mo‘olelo (traditional comprehension²) describes that Kahihokalani, the wife of the *ali‘i* Nanakaoko, gave birth to their son, Kapawa, at a birthing stone called Kūkaniloko in approximately A.D. 1060, an event witnessed by 36 chiefs (Fornander 1920:247; Kamakau 1964:12). With the beating of two special *pahu* (drums) to inform the families connected of the birth of a new *ali‘i*, Kapawa and subsequent newborns were taken to nearby Ho‘olonopahu Heiau, where 48 *ali‘i kapu* presided over the ceremonial cutting of the naval cord (Thrum 1911). *Kāhuna* (experts of discipline³) prepared each pregnant *ali‘i wahine* (noble woman) for what was practiced to be a painless birth through a strict diet and exercise regime, hence the meaning of Kūkaniloko, “to anchor the cry from within” (Mililani High School 2001).

Kūkaniloko remained in ceremonial rite until the birth of Kākuhihewa in approximately A.D. 1600. Although the ancient structure had deteriorated, in 1797 Kamehameha I arranged for the birth of his heir, Liholiho, to take place at Kūkaniloko, but his wife’s illness, and possibly Kamehameha’s practice of human sacrifice, prevented this distinguished birth rite from continuing within the Kamehameha lineage (Fornander 1878, Vol.2:20). As the most sacred site on O‘ahu, Kūkaniloko was protected by the Daughters of Hawaii in 1925 until stewardship was transferred to the Wahiawā Hawaiian Civic Club in the early 1960s, then listed on the National and State Registers of Historic Places in 1973, and finally placed under the jurisdiction of State Parks in 1992 as a five-acre site noted to be Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument (Omandam 1998). Today, the naturally weathered stones of Kūkaniloko still embrace the ancients (*kilipue nā kūpuna mā*).

The rise of divine management at Kūkaniloko in the uplands of Lihue, Wahiawā, and Halemano played a role in the creation of territorial land divisions. Tracing *ali‘i* genealogies and their linked traditions back in time 23 generations from just prior to European contact using an

¹ According to Tom Lenchanko, the term *ali‘i* originally meant “managers of the land” prior to a shift to “chief”

² *Mo‘olelo* is usually defined as “oral histories or stories,” but “traditional comprehension” is clarified by Tom Lenchanko

³ *Kāhuna* is usually defined as “priests,” but “experts of discipline” is clarified by Tom Lenchanko

average 20-year interval, Patrick Kirch places the *ali'i* Māweke at approximately A.D. 1310, who partitioned O'ahu into three districts among his sons: the Kona region, the 'Ewa, Wai'anae, and Waialua region, and the windward Ko'olau region, each with core areas of irrigation lands, dryland farming, and fisheries (Figure 5). Then, in approximately A.D. 1490, the '*aha ali'i*' (council of *ali'i/kāhuna*) chose Mā'ilikūkahī, an *ali'i kapu* who was born at Kūkaniloko, to be the new *ali'i nui* (paramount manager) of O'ahu. After his paramountship was installed at the *heiau* of Kapukapuākea in central Waialua, Mā'ilikūkahī instituted an explicit land division and administration structure: O'ahu was divided into six *moku*—Kona, 'Ewa, Wai'anae, Waialua, Ko'olauloa, and Ko'olaupoko (Figure 6)—that were further divided into 86 *ahupua'a* and smaller territorial units (Kirch 2010:84–90)⁴ (Figure 7).

Less well known of Kūkaniloko are the *ka'ānani'au*—religious and cultural landscape markers pre-dating the *moku* and *ahupua'a* territorial system of land divisions that indicate a much larger area and traditional significance than the current State of Hawai'i five-acre Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument. There are very few documented sources that describe *ka'ānani'au*. Pukui and Elbert (1986) define *ka'ānani'au* as the “Same as *ahupua'a*, the altar marking the land division. *O'ahu. Rare.*” In a Traditional Cultural Property study of Kāne'ikapualena (Kamaile) in Wai'anae, Christopher Monahan and Alike Poe Silva, learning from *kupuka'āina* (indigenous people, possibly a local Wai'anae usage or style) about Mauna Lahilahi, note that *ka'ānani'au* do indeed function similar to *ahupua'a* for the dividing of resources, but are also a specific kind of religious place, “a place where heaven and earth meet” (Monahan and Silva 2007:131). Alike Silva provides some of the broader meanings of *ka'ānani'au* on the website of Hawaiian Nationals Mana'o I'o (2009). He translates *ka'a* as “rolling time, over generations,” *nani* as “beautiful or glorified,” and *'au* as “management,” so that the term *ka'ānani'au* can be glossed as “management of the beautiful time in the past, present and future.” He describes the *ka'ānani'au* as a system of property rights and natural resource management of the indigenous agrarian population, an egalitarian society that adhered to the religion of Kāne in the Wai'anae region. As religious altars and cultural landscape markers, the *ka'ānani'au* simultaneously embrace natural resources and their management, the religion of Kāne, and a cosmology that places Kūkaniloko at the center of O'ahu, the Hawaiian archipelago, and the entire world (Hawaiian Nationals Mana'o I'o 2009).

Tom Lenchanko, *kahu* (guardian) of Kūkaniloko, shared his understanding of the *ka'ānani'au* of Kūkaniloko, gained through his *kūpuna mā* (those we choose to follow⁵), in a series of

⁴ Other land divisions exist, including Wahi Pana, a *kupuka'āina* term for four divisions on O'ahu based on the four main gods—Kāne (Wai'anae), Kū (Ko'olau), Kanaloa (Waialua), and Lono (Kona)—as indicated through *mo'olelo*, *na'aumakua* (family gods, referring to chants and personalized chants and prayers), and the Kumulipo (Monahan and Silva 2007:87)

⁵ Definition by Tom Lenchanko

interviews conducted in January and February, 2011, for cultural impact assessments of proposed development projects in the uplands of Kamananui and Kawailoa Ahupua‘a, and through subsequent collaborative writing, editing, and mapping. Our meetings were really a series of teachings that took place at the central sites of O‘ahu nui and Kūkaniloko to stimulate his sharing and my learning of the *ka ‘ānani ‘au* (Figure 8). Mr. Lenchanko’s teachings expand Alikea Silva’s documentation (Hawaiian Nationals Mana‘o I‘o 2009), but merely touch the surface of the multiple layers of *kaona* (hidden meanings) and comprehension of the *ka ‘ānani ‘au*. I gratefully and humbly acknowledge Mr. Lenchanko’s sharing of some of the knowledge of his *kūpuna*.

Mr. Lenchanko describes how, with the simplest level of understanding, the *ka ‘ānani ‘au* are an approximate concentric alignment of rock pilings (*kuahu*, or altar) placed throughout the landscape of O‘ahu demarcate a broad area of Kūkaniloko, with the current State of Hawai‘i five-acre Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument at its center (Figure 8). This area includes the lands of Lihue, Wahiawā, and Halemano. Using the 1929 Hawai‘i Territory Survey of O‘ahu map, Mr. Lenchanko traces the boundary of Wai‘anae with extensions into the Ko‘olau region to conservatively estimate the area of Kūkaniloko as encompassing about 36,000 acres (Figure 9).

Within this network and roughly concentric alignment of *ka ‘ānani ‘au* are the lands of the Lo-Ali‘i, *ali ‘i* with divine status (*hoa ali ‘i*; descendants of Kāne) and the highest genealogy (*iku pau*). According to Mr. Lenchanko, “*Kūpuna mā* taught us that these lands are those of the Lo-Ali‘i, whom were like gods, unseen, resembling men; for they lived here continually, guarded their *kapu* and from whom a guaranteed *ali ‘i* could be obtained.” The Lo-Ali‘i instituted the hallowed birth rite described above, and maintained many disciplines, including instruction of *ali ‘i* and the arts of healing. Most recently, John Papa ‘Ī‘ī, who was the agent for the Department of Instruction under Kamehameha III, managed these Kingdom properties as traditional school lands. Inclusive of this concentric alignment of *ka ‘ānani ‘au* are the lands of the *kāhuna*, including, for example, *‘ili kūpono* Waimea, Pupukea, Hakipu‘u, Waiāhole and the lands of the connected families.

The *ka ‘ānani ‘au* markers include, but are not limited to, O‘ahu nui, Halemano, Kūkaniloko, Paupalai, Halawa, Hawea, Kou, Maunauna, Ku‘ua, Kulihero, Kānewai, Halahape, ‘Ō‘io, and Mauna Lahilahi. Monahan and Silva (2007:131–142) have documented the location and deep spiritual importance of one of these *ka ‘ānani ‘au*, Mauna Lahilahi (Figure 10), based on information that *kūpuna* shared directly with Alikea Silva. They express the special qualities of this place as “*Ike pono maka ‘i‘o au o Wai‘anae ka ‘ānani ‘au o Lahilahi*,” which is paraphrased as “The timeless righteous/harmonious wisdom and vision of the Lahilahi shrine of Wai‘anae,” and connotes a place of true vision or sight (*maka ‘i‘o*) where one communes simultaneously with the heavens and the earth (Monahan and Silva 2007:123).

The specialized, spiritual knowledge of the *ka ‘ānani ‘au*, as exemplified by the documentation of Mauna Lahilahi, contribute to specialized knowledge of Wai‘anae that has remained within

families for generations. There is understandably expressed concern for sharing this knowledge beyond those families in a *pono* (just and right) manner. With this in mind, Mr. Lenchanko begins his instruction of the *ka 'ānani 'au* with O'ahu nui, but any mapping and documenting of the other *ka 'ānani 'au* requires permission from his *kūpuna*, and self-reflection and individual understanding on my part (or other interested learners). Thus, my current level of understanding of the *ka 'ānani 'au* is limited to the Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument and another centrally-located *ka 'ānani 'au* near the *piko* of O'ahu, called O'ahu nui, and a single *ka 'ānani 'au* that forms part of the surrounding alignment (Mauna Lahilahi) (Figure 11). Future work may reveal the locations of additional *ka 'ānani 'au* to amend this estimated region of Kūkaniloko.

Kūkaniloko begins temporally and spatially with the genesis of the first people from the gods at the *ka 'ānani 'au* of O'ahu nui in the center of the island, according to Mr. Lenchanko. The *ka 'ānani 'au* of O'ahu nui is composed of several *kuahu*, or rock pilings, totaling about three thousand stones on a hill north of Waikakalaua Stream, which is associated with two large *pōhaku*, O'ahu nui and O'ahu iki, located nearby in the stream and upon its southern bank. According to oral traditions of the Kumulipo, a cosmogonic, genealogical prayer chant, Mr. Lenchanko describes how the people of O'ahu originally descended from the gods at O'ahu nui or *ka lua a 'a hu*, “the pit from where we descend.” At the dawn of human life, *o 'a* was the intertwining of the blood lines of La'ila'i, the woman who first stood down from the heavens, and Ki'i, the image, whose union resulted in the people known as the hu (O'a-hu). *Ali 'i* who viewed upon the *ka 'ānani 'au* of Oahu nui are said to have managed all of O'ahu. After O'ahu nui, the region of Kūkaniloko became centered at the *ka 'ānani 'au* of Halemano, and finally at the contemporary site of the Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument.

Mr. Lenchanko summarily states that the land of O'ahu is the *heiau* and Kūkaniloko its *mana*. The broad region of Kūkaniloko estimated at 36,000 acres and associated with regal births, instruction, and healing of the Lo-Ali'i, is linked to the divine power of I'o, the first Hawaiian god, which is imbued within the *ali 'i*. While the *mana* of Kūkaniloko is concentrated at O'ahu nui, Halemano, and the contemporary site of the Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument, the *mana* expands throughout this 36,000-acre region, connecting all components of the landscape. This includes cultural sites and subsurface *iwiawaloa* (ancestral burial places) quite distant from any particular development project

This strong connectivity among cultural sites is highlighted with two examples shared by Mr. Lenchanko. Several *pōhaku* on the plain close to the northern edge of Schofield Barracks and Pu'u Makali'i (Figure 12) form an astronomical alignment used for sighting the setting of the seven stars of the constellation Makali'i (Pleiades), which are etched upon one *pōhaku*. In addition, the areas of Kamananui and Halemano were known to be the general locations for the *pahu* (drum) *heiau* 'Opuku and *pahu heiau* Hawea, respectively, sounded at the birth of *ali 'i kapu* and during the purification ceremonial rites within the *heiau* of Ho'olonopahu in the vicinity of the Kūkaniloko Birthstones State Monument. From such an expanded view of the

cultural landscape of Kūkaniloko, development projects will create an adverse impact upon the land of the project's footprint, and, by extension, the *mana* of Kūkaniloko. Of critical note is that the *mana* of a traditional cultural site remains despite the unauthorized removal of its physical features and structures.

In sum, Tom Lenchanko's expansive view of the cultural landscape on O'ahu, which draws from the cosmogonic and genealogical origins of the Kumulipo, highlights the connectivity among cultural sites within the vast region of Kūkaniloko that pre-dates and is superimposed upon the fifteenth century *moku* and *ahupua'a* system of land division. Archaeologists and cultural anthropologists working in cultural resource management should consider this alternative conceptualization of land divisions and connectivity of cultural sites when thinking about the boundaries of development projects and their potentially far-reaching impacts.



Figure 1. Kūkaniloko (Photo by Joseph Genz, February 2011)



Figure 2. Kūkaniloko (Photo by Joseph Genz, February 2011)



Figure 3. Kūkaniloko (Photo by Joseph Genz, February 2011)



Figure 4. Kūkaniloko (Photo by Joseph Genz, February 2011)

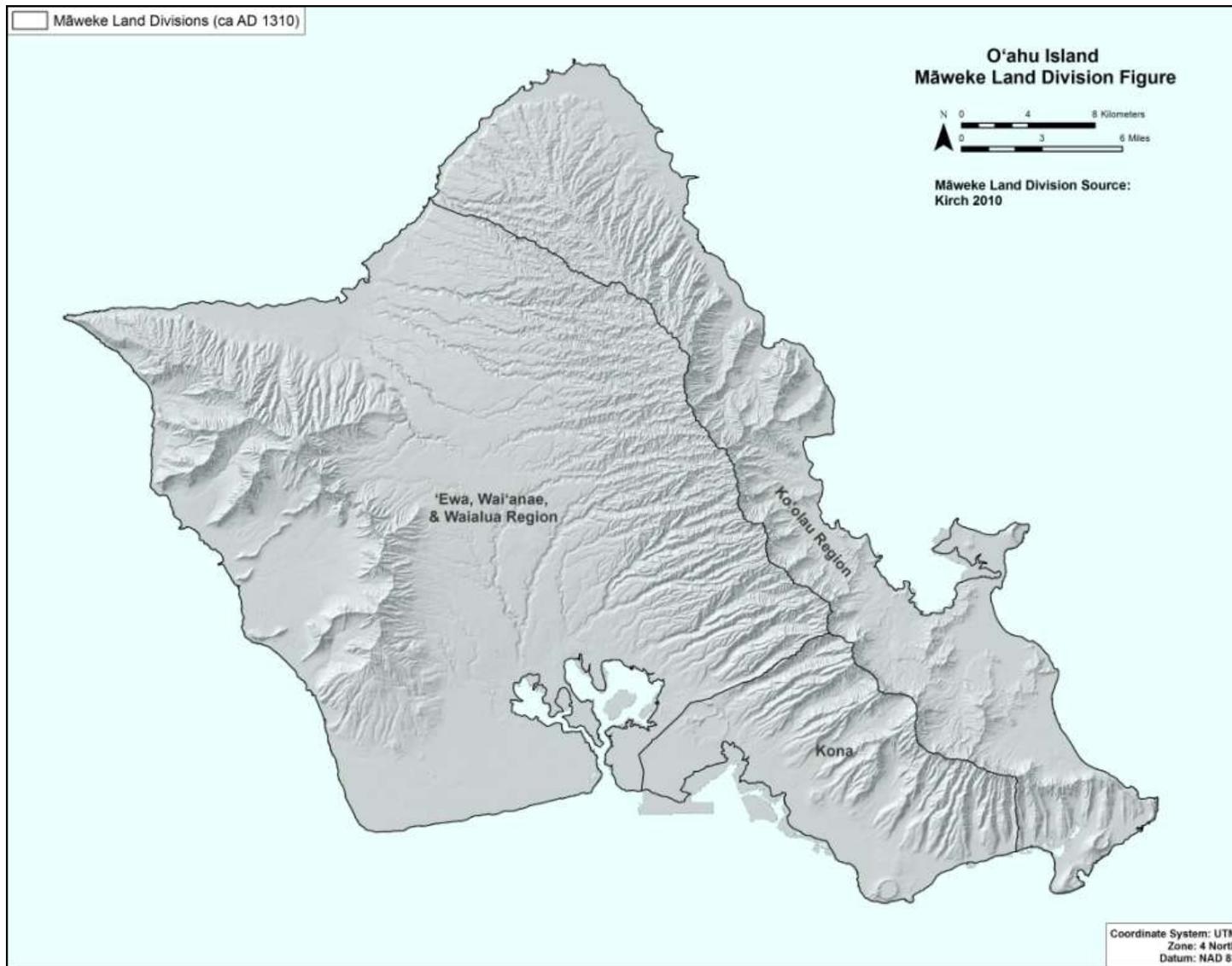


Figure 5. Māweke land divisions ca. A.D. 1310 (Kirch 2010)

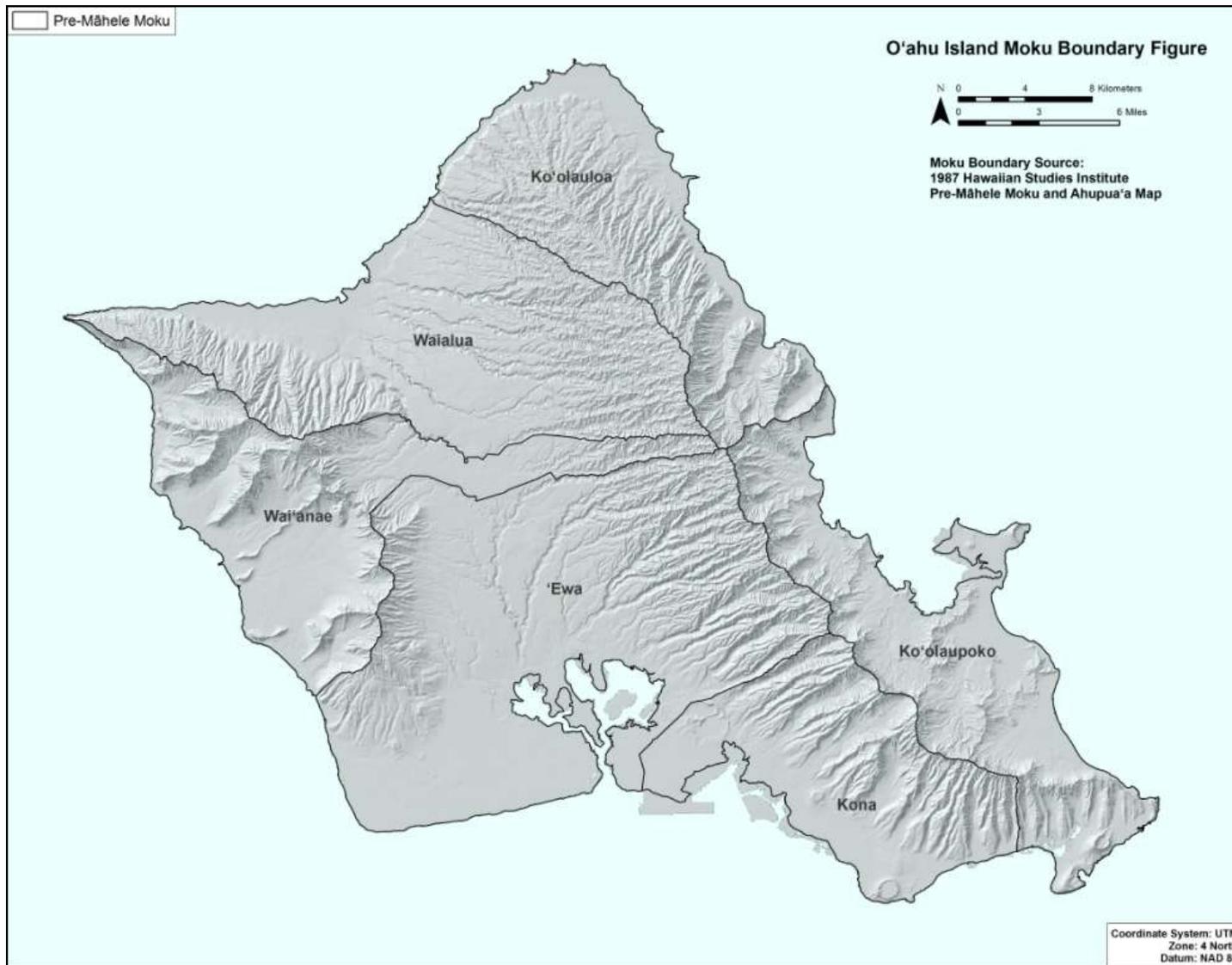


Figure 6. *Moku* of O'ahu (based on Hawaiian Studies Institute 1987)

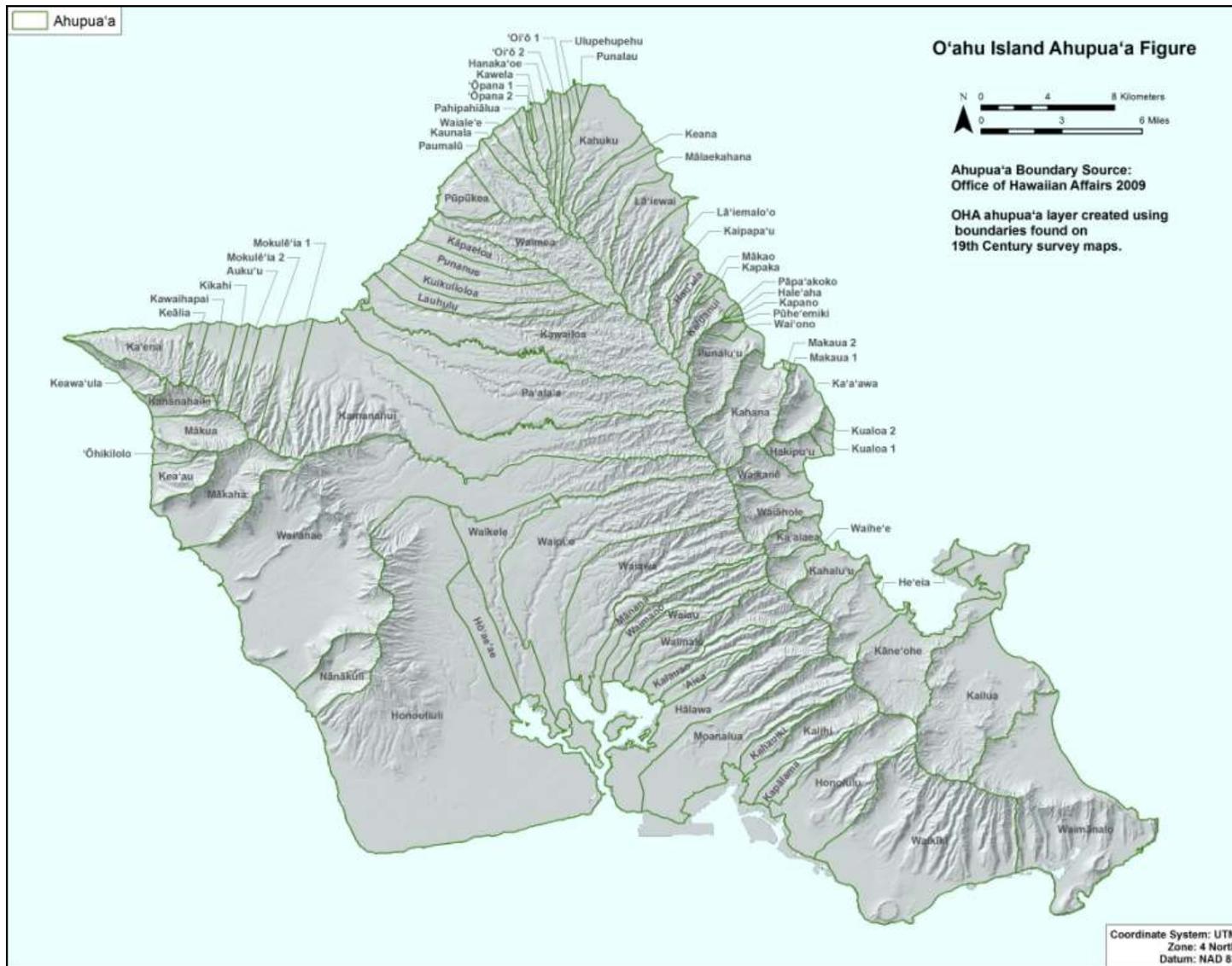


Figure 7. *Ahupua'a* of O'ahu (based on Office of Hawaiian Affairs 2009)

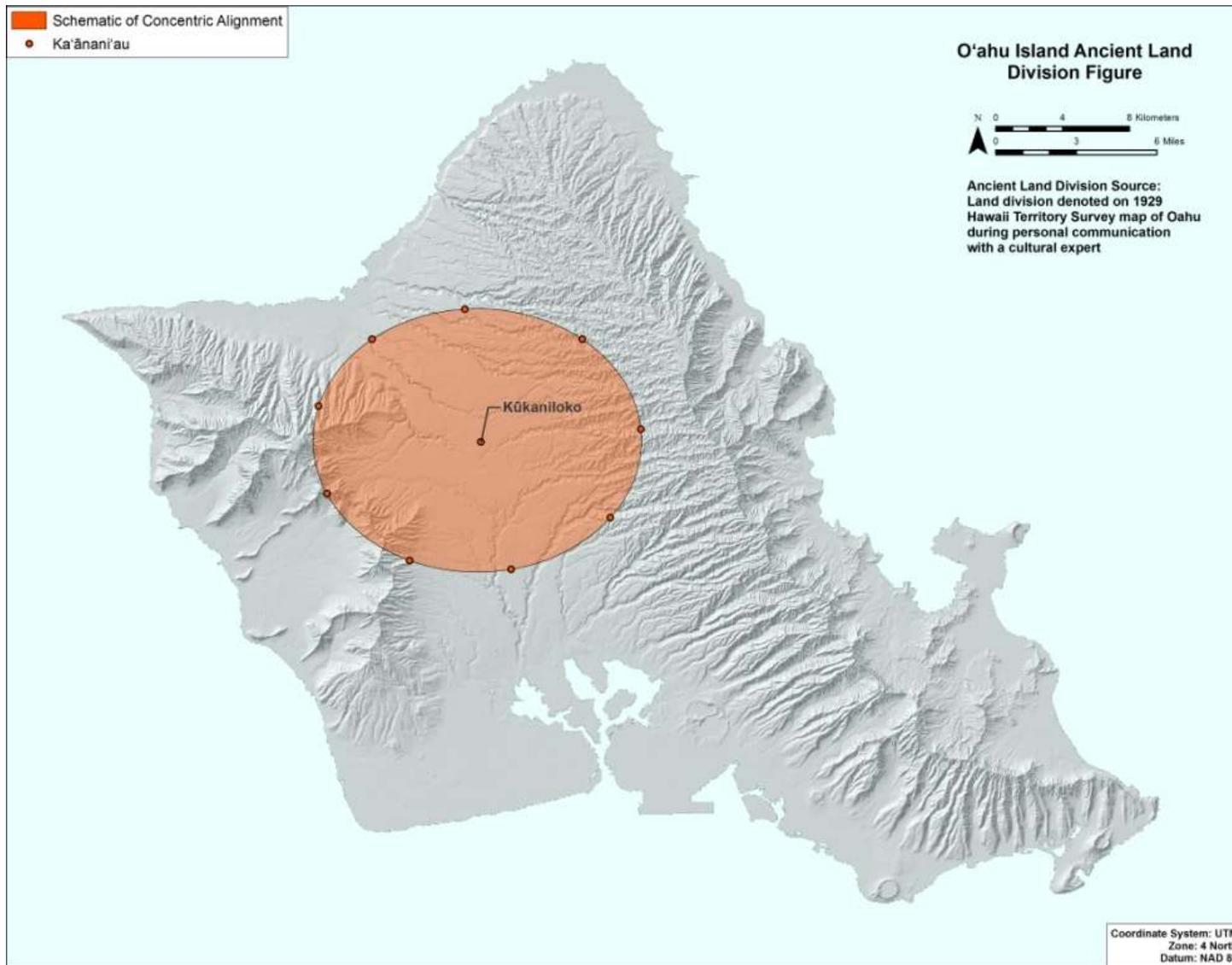


Figure 8. Schematic of the concentric alignment of *ka'ānani'au* surrounding Kūkaniloko

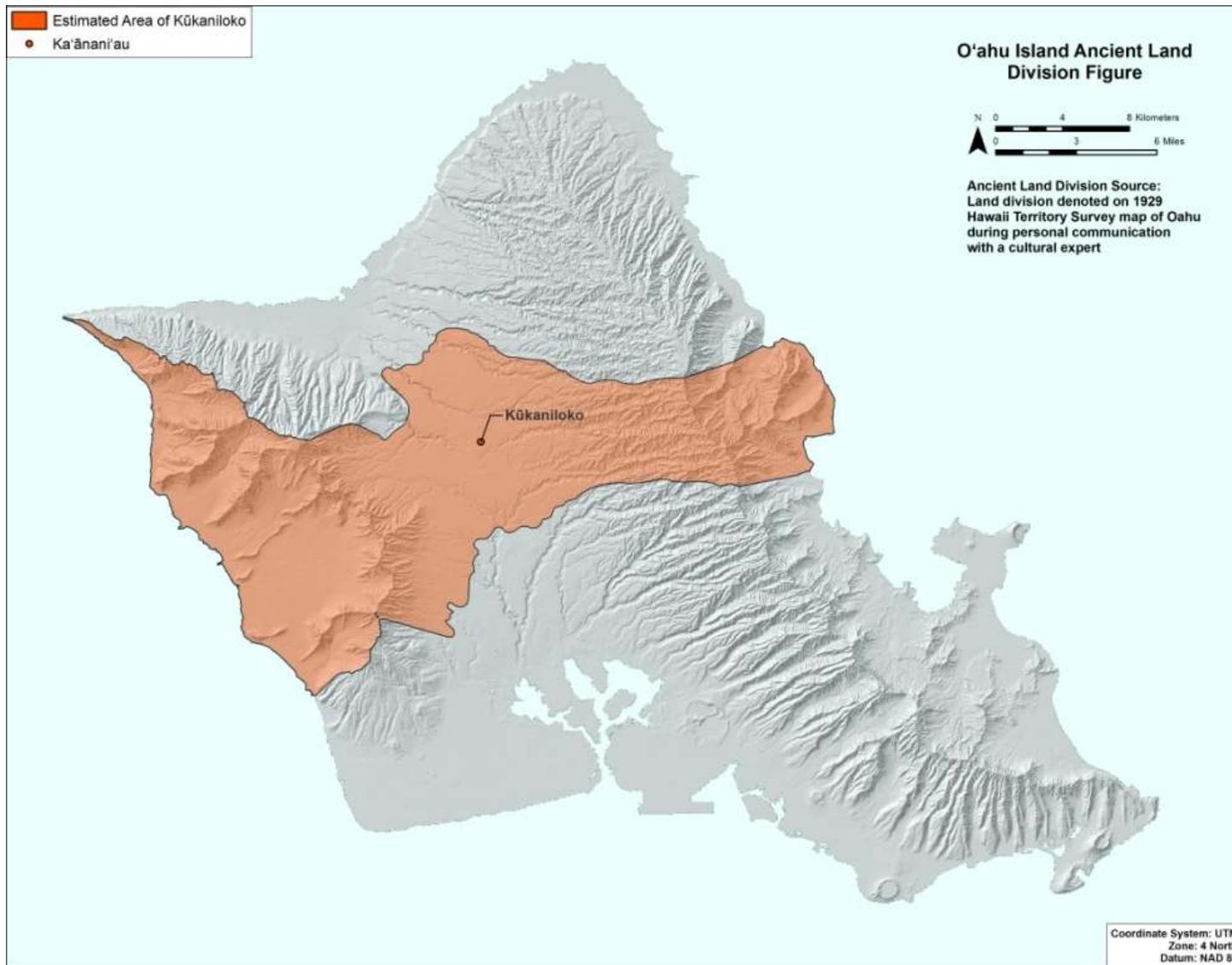


Figure 9. Conservative estimate of the area of Kūkaniloko, based on communication with Tom Lenchanko



Figure 10. Mauna Lahilahi (Source: American Environmental Photographs, 1891–1936, University of Chicago Library, Special Collections Resource Center, <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.award/icuaep.his253>)

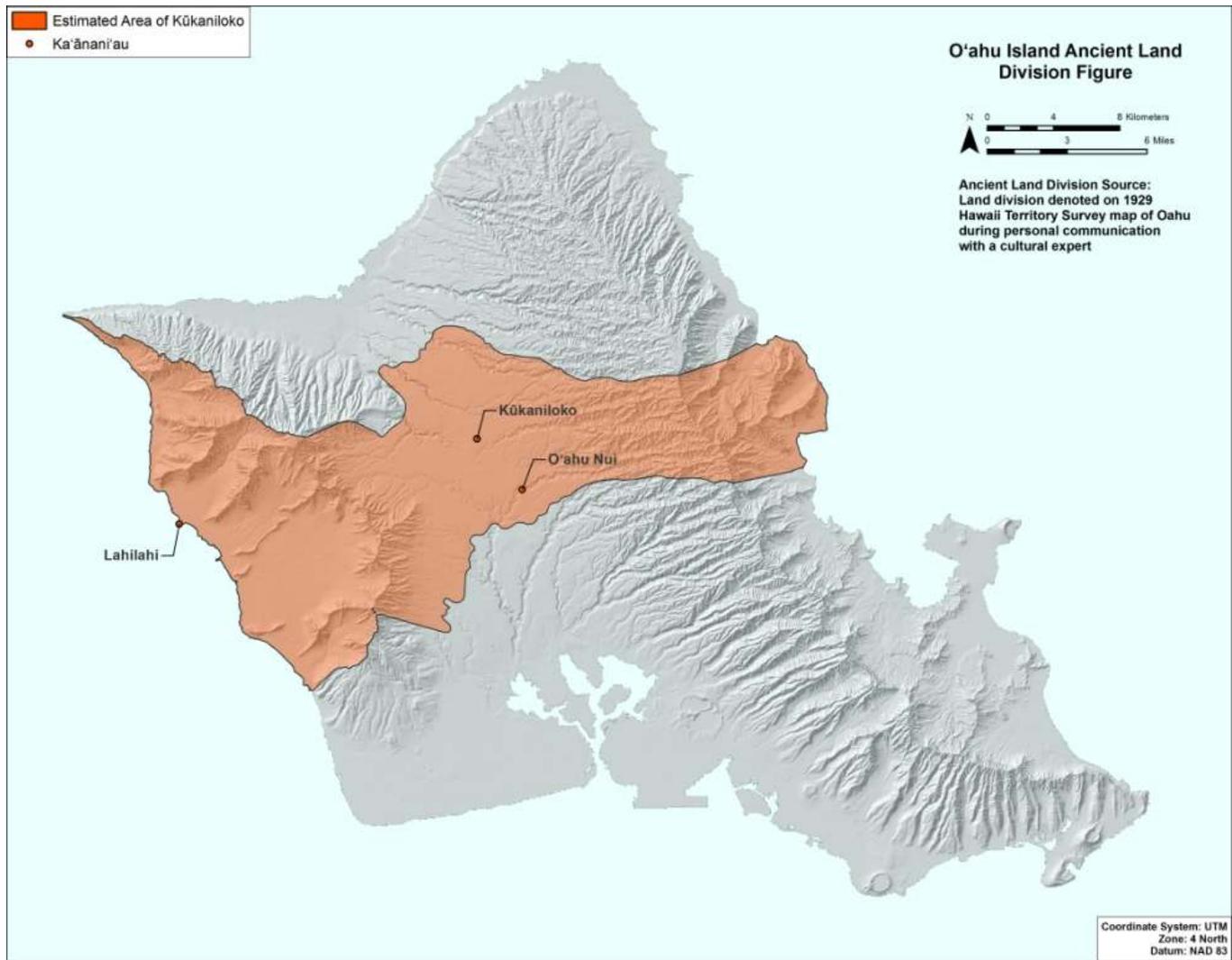


Figure 11. The locations of two central *ka'ānani'au* at the *piko* of O'ahu and one *ka'ānani'au* along the border, based on communication with Tom Lenchanko



Figure 12. Pu‘u Makali‘i (left peak) (Photo by Joseph Genz, February 2011)

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