PERSPECTIVE: reflections of Mauna Kea

By Mrs. Faith Bean and Mrs. Brenda Duquette
Hawaiian Committee of the Waimea Hawaiian Civic Club

From the slopes of the Kohala Mountains, members of the Waimea Hawaiian Civic Club are able to view Mauna Kea and introspectively reflect their "mana'o" (or thoughts) about the great "White Mountain." Many members have one time or another used the mountain for the purpose of exploring, hunting, or sightseeing.

In 1971, the club with about 20 four-wheel drive vehicles, took an historical Hawaiian tour of the mountain. Their guide showed them several caves where the ancient Hawaiians carved the adzes for their tools. Some of the members were awed by the sight of the opihi shells found in the caves. It was soon explained that the ancient Hawaiians lived by the beaches and in their preparation for their stay on the mountain would probably take opihi, dried fish, perhaps some bananas and, of course, poi. Hopefully, this food would last them until they had completed the new adzes for their tools. However, all that was left for the modern-day Hawaiians to view were just some adze chips and opihi shells.

Later, the group visited Lake Wai'au, a lake caused by the melting of snow. A member of the club shared her family tradition of putting the umbilical cord of a newborn baby into a bottle and throwing it as far as possible into the middle of the lake. She and her mother and probably her mother's mother had done the same thing. Many of the others in their company agreed with her for all Hawaiians know that the umbilical cord if not properly disposed may alter the destiny of a child's life. For example, if the cord is stolen by a rat, the child could become a thief.

Recently some members mentioned how fortunate Hawaii had been chosen to facilitate the Mauna Kea observatories, our own "White Mountain" above all others in the world. Others said progress is good but "no more building." The mountain should not be "over crowded;" it may bring more building." The mountain should not be "over crowded;" it may bring more cars, and outsiders who do not have good "mana'o" (thoughts) about preserving the valuable history of the mountain! Then, too, as mentioned by another member, the existing road has been traveled so extensively that by the time the other observatories open, there will be irreversible effects such as full-scale erosion of the mountain itself, not to mention the devastating effect it has on the existing historical sites.

Between the 6,000-foot and 10,000-foot elevations are native Hawaiian ecosystems, including rare plants and birds. Many species are found nowhere else in the world. Hunting of feral goats, sheep, pigs, and game birds has become a traditional use within (and on the perimeter of) the Mamane / Naio Forest. With this in mind, the Waimea Hawaiian Civic Club introduced a resolution at the 1979 Association of Hawaiian Civic Clubs Convention on Maui, to implement and expedite the Mauna Kea Master Plan. Included in the resolution, was the request to have the entire Mamane / Naio Forest fenced off, for the purpose of preserving the critical habitat of the threatened and endangered "Palila Bird." However, since May 1979 at the Annual Convention, the Waimea Hawaiian Civic Club has received only one reply: that of Susumu Ono in his acknowledgement of our resolution and of his endeavors to act on the Mauna Kea Master Plan.

In short the members of the Waimea Hawaiian Civic Club continue to hold in awe the magnificence and unique landmark of Mauna Kea. Another historical tour is being planned by the club sometime this year at the 9,000-foot level. They will tour many historical housesites, caves, and perhaps share more mo'olelo (stories) of the area by reminiscing members. Our club's motto reflects the overall feeling of our great "White Mountain." "Ua Mau Ke Ea O Ka 'Aina Ika Pono." "The Life of the Land is Perpetuated in Righteousness."

Hunters express concern for mountain

By Mike Tulang and Al Inouye
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Hunting has and will probably remain as an important recreational activity for many Big Island families. Better than 5,000 Big Islanders are licensed hunters, and this might represent about 5,000 families.

Hunting on Mauna Kea has been and still is an important aspect in the lives of our local residents. In some instances, it provides a source of food for many families. However, to most of us it provides an unique experience which cannot be measured by the amount of food it puts on the table. The Mauna Kea Experience encompasses an appreciation in its natural beauty, an education in its history, an enjoyment in the sport of hunting and a setting for healthful mental and physical relaxation and recreation. For many of us, the mountain and hunting has been a cultural tradition treasured by families.

This is the Mauna Kea experience that most hunters are willing to share with other interest groups. It is with this feeling of "multiple use", that in 1975 the hunters represented by the Hawaii Island Archery Club, Sportsmen of Hawaii and the Big Island Fish and Game Association met the representatives of the scientific community, government planners and environmental groups to formulate the Mauna Kea Master Plan. After several months of meetings, the following decisions were agreed upon.

This plan was discussed at the local club level and it was felt that although it compromised some of our philosophical concerns, in the long run, it would be best for all Big Island citizens.

A. The Mauna Kea road to the summit from Hale Pohaku should be kept unpaved.

B. The development of Hale Pohaku as a mid-elevation facility would be kept at a minimum and temporary in nature.

C. Fencing program would be instituted for 25 percent of the critical habitat of the palila bird, or better than 10,000 acres of prime mamane forest. This would mean that at the current population of 1,500 palila birds, these would be about seven (7) acres for each bird. The fencing program would be coordinated with a management program for the feral sheep. The environmentalists claim that the sheep is causing the decline of mamane forest . . . but they refuse to accept the fact that the forest is larger and healthier now with less than 700 sheep.

The Mauna Kea Master Plan represents a real honest attempt by the Big Island community to determine what is best for our citizens. However, the current pressure to eradicate sheep hunting by the environmental groups and to develop the Hale Pohaku camp into a major scientific facility and pave the road to the summit is a great divergence from the agreed upon plan.

The eradication of sheep hunting represents a deviation from the Mauna Kea Master Plan. The sheep is not the only cause of mamane forest decline; this fact is known to the scientific community and professional foresters.

Where does the hunter stand today? According to the Pittman Robertson project no. W-15-5, study no. X1, dated 1972-1975, "unsuitable growing conditions at higher elevations, particularly near treeline, are responsible for reduced mamane growth and reproduction. Some observers feel that poor growing conditions and sheep damage are not the only problems affecting mamane reproduction on Mauna Kea. Other factors may be disease, drought, insects, frost, lack of ground moisture, and competition from exotic grasses and weeds." This affected area and prime factor in the environment suit is less than 5 percent of the palila critical habitat. In fact, this [illegible] considered as prime habitat.

The scientific community is asking that the Mauna Kea road be paved and for substantial expansion of the Hale Pohaku facility. The environmentalists represented by various groups and individuals have sued the state to eradicate the feral sheep and have won the initial verdict. The case is under appeal [illegible] higher court. At this point we feel [illegible] threatened and afraid to lose not only [illegible] type of hunting, but a tradition [illegible] which we have [illegible] [illegible] hunter [illegible]