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The Koke‘e Camps: Kaua‘i’s Mountain Paradise

Between 1918 and 1951 more than 100 rustic cabins were built on three tracts of lots at Koke‘e, Halemanu, and Pu‘u ka Pele on the island of Kaua‘i. Located at elevations between 3,200 feet and 3,680 feet, the lots were dispersed among the streams, valleys, and forests of what eventually became Koke‘e and Waimea Canyon State Parks. The tracts were created for the express purpose of providing mountain retreats for Hawai‘i residents who had the means to escape the coast’s hot, dry summers. The Koke‘e Camps and Pu‘u ka Pele Lots, as they came to be known, were unique. These “camps” were the only summer homes permitted on public land in Hawai‘i. They were formally planned and modeled on the recreational residences in the U.S. National Forests. The history of Koke‘e demonstrates that the camps were created in the spirit of achieving the greatest public purpose. Consequently, the land was set aside not only for the protection of forest resources and the watershed, but also for recreational pursuits and public access.

Kaua‘i pioneer Valdemar Knudsen established the Koke‘e area as a recreational mountain retreat in the late 1800s. In 1856 Knudsen obtained a lease for more than a hundred square miles of Crown

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The USGS map shows the locations of Kaua'i's three Waimea District "camp" areas: Halemanu, Koke'e, and Pu'u ka Pele. Hawai'i Division of State Parks, Department of Land & Natural Resources.
land in the Waimea district and used some of the uplands near Köke‘e for ranching. Although Knudsen’s primary activity was ranching, he also took a special interest in exploring the area’s natural and cultural features. He was fascinated by an area called Halemanu, which translated from the Hawaiian as ‘bird house.’ Family lore stated that the Hawaiian bird catchers used a grass house at Halemanu while on their feather-gathering expeditions. Knudsen liked the area so much that he had a small grass house built for his own use as a weekend retreat and base for his explorations. Knudsen’s hut was built of timber from the Halemanu forest and thatched with pili grass gathered from a nearby ridge.

About 1868 Knudsen imported lumber from New Zealand so that he could build a more permanent summer home for his growing family. He had the lumber hauled up the mountain on ox carts as far as the trail allowed, and then carried by horseback or on foot the final distance to Halemanu. The Knudsens retreated to the Halemanu house for three months each year to escape the hot, dry summers at their Waiawa home. In the cool, mountain environs of Halemanu, Knudsen enjoyed taking his children on scenic horseback rides and picnic excursions to nearby Kalalau Valley and Waimea Canyon. He was especially fond of telling them about the Köke‘e legends and lore that he had learned from the Hawaiians. Knudsen and his visitors referred to these mountain experiences as “camping.” The comforts of home, however, were not sacrificed, as the family’s servants were also brought to Halemanu to manage household affairs such as pig hunting, chopping wood for the cook stove, and tending to the yard, garden, and horses.

In 1898 Knudsen died and his estate passed to his sons, Augustus and Eric, whose firm was known as the Knudsen Brothers. Under Augustus’s leadership, Köke‘e became well known as a camp site and recreational area. Perhaps more importantly, Knudsen was instrumental in responding to environmental problems at Köke‘e. He realized that cattle were ruining the upland forests and that the Köke‘e uplands were almost useless for ranching. Knudsen estimated that two hunters might make a poor living by hunting wild cattle and selling the meat and hides, concluding that hunting was a losing venture as it cost more to transport the cattle out of the forest than the meat
was worth. He observed that wild cattle trampled and denuded the forest, which eliminated vegetation and caused soil erosion. Knudsen emphasized that the end result of this forest destruction was dry mountain bogs and stream beds. He, along with others involved in the Hawai‘i sugar industry, recognized that upland forests were essential to storing water and preserving the watershed. Köke‘e mountain streams were critical for irrigating sugar lands, providing power, and supplying nearby communities with water.

Knudsen carried on his father’s traditions and transformed the family retreat into a recreational site that was enjoyed by friends from Kaua‘i and beyond. He frequently entertained guests at his Hale-
manu retreat and was known for his annual "camping parties." Knudsen was a well-respected, avid outdoorsman who "instinctively" knew the topography of the land, exercised the "most uncommon sense," and was a "perfect genius" in finding paths. His parties were made famous by his visitors from Honolulu, who would write about them in newspapers or magazines. As the Knudsens continued to use their Halemanu house, a variety of other camping structures were used, including canvas "buildings" and tents. At some point, another camp site was established higher up the mountain at Kōke'e, which was a convenient starting point for Knudsen's hiking expeditions.

The most important objective of the "Kōke'e Camps," as the area eventually came to be known, was to escape the hot summer days of the seaside towns in favor of the cool "bracing" air, rushing streams, songs of upland birds, and scenic beauty of the mountains and Waimea Canyon. Early photographs depicted Knudsen and his friends, who were generally prominent members of Kaua'i and Honolulu society, enjoying a variety of "camping" activities. Time in Kōke'e was spent outdoors and included swimming in the cold streams, playing tennis on Knudsen's courts, tending the rose garden, hiking, picnicking, and horseback riding. At some point, probably in the early 1900s, Knudsen allowed his associates from the Kekaha Plantation to establish their own camps on his land. He also permitted the Kumwela Camping Club to use a site on a branch of the Kōke'e Stream.

The early Halemanu camps consisted of a variety of structures; most permanent cabins were no more than simple board-and-batten shelters that served as sleeping quarters. Many of the early camp shelters were wood platforms with canvas walls and a canvas roof supported by 'ohi'a branches. Some canvas structures were quite elaborate, while others were no more than "pup" tents. Outhouses and most kitchens were separate facilities. Like the Knudsens, many of the other families apparently could not do without servants while camping; other buildings circa 1900 included servants' quarters, as well as tack rooms and stables. Photographs from the period illustrated that transporting families and servants up to Kōke'e was a major undertaking that required numerous horses and wagons to carry people, crates, and bags of necessary supplies. To make travel to Kōke'e easier for his guests, Knudsen built a road along the rim of Waimea Canyon.
While Knudsen was enjoying the recreational pursuits at his mountain retreat, he was also trying to repair Kōke‘e’s environmental damage and protect the watershed. The Knudsen Brothers quit ranching activities in the area and concentrated on eliminating cattle and wild goats from the upland forests. Knudsen reported that their relentless hunting had nearly eliminated the wild cattle problem by 1882. In 1890 he claimed that wild cattle were nearly extinct not only on his property, but also in the adjacent Nā-pali area. To improve the long-term chances of success, the Knudsen Brothers built a fence to prevent cattle from re-entering the forest, estimating that it protected up to 30,000 acres. Their mission was only partially completed. To repair the damage and improve the watershed, he reforested his land with a variety of trees. Non-native trees were planted, including Australian koa and ironwood, but he also observed that once the cattle were gone, the native koa forest began regenerating. Knudsen emphasized that this work was not a complete success due to the difficulty of eradicating wild goats from the cliffs of Waimea Canyon. As a result, the goats continued to denude the pali [cliffs], leaving bare rock in their wake.11

In 1903 the Territory of Hawai‘i enacted legislation that created the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry (BCAF) and authorized the framework for forest reserves. Although the Kingdom of Hawai‘i had the authority to set aside land and understood the importance of watershed protection, it had done nothing, and it was not until the BCAF was established that action was initiated. In 1907, Nā pali-Kona Forest Reserve was proclaimed, which included nearly 20,000 acres of land leased to Knudsen. When his leases expired in 1917 and 1920, the land was to automatically revert to the government and become part of the forest reserve. The BCAF astutely recognized that Knudsen had established a model for how Kaua‘i’s uplands ought to be managed, and praised Knudsen Brothers’ contributions in eliminating cattle, regenerating the forest, and improving the watershed. Over the course of the decade until his lease expired, Knudsen cooperated with the BCAF in determining Kōke‘e’s future. Documents show that Knudsen and Superintendent of Forestry Charles S. Judd not only established the precedent for how to manage Kaua‘i’s forests and watersheds, but also set the standard for public enjoyment of the land as well.
While there was no doubt that the new reserves would protect the forests and watersheds, maintaining the right to recreational activities at Kōkeʻe was not a foregone conclusion. The earliest written reference to the possibility of public camps in the forest reserve at Kōkeʻe was probably a 1912 Division of Forestry report. First, the document emphasized that the primary importance of Waimea’s upland forests was for watershed protection and irrigation development. The report, which was probably written by Judd, mentioned that Knudsen wished to continue camping at Halemanu after his lease expired. The writer speculated on what might happen to Knudsen’s camping areas. He believed that Halemanu was one of several valleys that offered “extremely attractive” camp sites. “Unquestionably,” the report stated, “some arrangement should be made, when the present leases run out, to lease these valleys, under restrictions, as camp sites.” The writer observed that leasing government lands for camp sites in forest reserves could be profitable, pointing out that both Wisconsin and New York had similar arrangements. The Kōkeʻe area was considered suitable for such activities as it “would not be injured” by campers. The report emphasized that areas further up the valley where streams originated should be protected and restored to their pristine condition. It is difficult to determine the writer’s motive for suggesting public camp sites at Halemanu. On one level, he may have believed that the New York and Wisconsin precedents would be good for Hawai’i’s people, especially if it could be economically profitable. On the other hand, the writer may have suggested public camp sites in order to lay the groundwork for Knudsen’s continued use of the Halemanu lands after his lease expired.

Whether the Superintendent of Forestry developed his ideas independently or not, by 1915 Knudsen was publicly promoting the idea of public camp sites at Kōkeʻe. That year, three articles about the Kōkeʻe region appeared in the Mid Pacific magazine. Two of the articles described Knudsen’s camps, one of which was an entire feature about his “tropical mountain park.” Author Philip Weaver enthusiastically detailed the beauty of Waimea Canyon and his exhilarating Kōkeʻe experiences. He praised Knudsen for sharing his camp sites with Honolulu school boys, making trails accessible to hikers, building a road into the area, and working to preserve the forest. Knudsen used the article as an opportunity to promote the preservation of the
region for future generations, not just “a lucky few,” and argued that Kōkeʻe could be tremendously valuable to the general public. He extolled the benefits of preserving the forest, including maintaining a healthy watershed and attractive camp sites. Knudsen opined that preserving Kōkeʻe would be just as much a delight for Kauaʻi residents as Yosemite was for Californians, emphasizing that “campers could find a paradise for short trips and at little expense.” He pointed out that the government would soon take control of the Kōkeʻe forests (without mentioning that he personally would lose his lease and Halemanu rights) and urged people to make their views known if they wanted the area to be open to the general public.14 Although Knudsen’s motives were not clear, he seemed to have two objectives. On the one hand, the article reiterated his long-standing concerns about cattle grazing, perhaps an indication that he worried about what the government would do when it reclaimed the land; would it issue a new lease to a cattle enterprise? On a personal level, he was probably anxious about keeping the right to use his summer camps. The Mid Pacific article seemed to suggest, as did the 1912 Forestry Division report, that one way for Knudsen to keep the rights to his camps was to convince the government to develop Kōkeʻe camp sites for the general public.

In 1916 the debate over Kōkeʻe’s future had moved into the more widely circulated public forum of Kauaʻi’s newspaper, the Garden Island. The topic was frequently discussed by the Kauaʻi Chamber of Commerce and territorial government officials, and was singularly focused on the question of who should benefit from public lands at Kōkeʻe. George K. Larrison, the Territory of Hawaii Superintendent of Hydrography, expressed his personal opinion to the governor that a Kōkeʻe park would be a “wonderful thing for the islands.” Larrison’s suggestion came after he visited Kōkeʻe, where he camped, woke up to the chilly 36-degree air, and prepared his breakfast over a wood fire before setting off on hikes and horseback rides. He believed that Kōkeʻe’s cool change of climate and cold breath of air was just what Honolulu and other coastal residents needed to refresh themselves during the hot summer months. Furthermore, Larrison emphasized that Kōkeʻe camp sites would be an accessible retreat for residents, who would no longer need to travel to the U.S. mainland to find
The writer of a Garden Island editorial agreed with Larrison, stressing that Kaua‘i needed a “cool and delightful” place for its own residents to escape “the heat and depression of the beaten paths of nine months.” The editorial concluded that the government should not only provide camp sites, but also a good road so that Kaua‘i’s people could easily travel to this ideal summer retreat. Governor Pinkham enthusiastically supported Larrison’s idea and promised to consider the matter.

The Kaua‘i Chamber of Commerce eagerly embraced the concept promoted by Larrison and echoed by the Garden Island. Chamber member George Ewart pointed out that immediate planning was crucial as the Knudsen lease on the subject property expired the following year; thereafter the land would revert to the government. The chamber discussed a variety of needs related to the proposed camp sites, including water, fire protection, and an improved access road. It established a commission chaired by Kaua‘i County Engineer J.H. Moragne to study and promote the proposed Köke‘e camp sites. Several Kaua‘i citizens were appointed to serve, as were several Honolulu notables, including the Commissioner of Public Lands, B. G. Rivenburgh, Chief Forester Charles S. Judd, and Larrison.

The Chamber of Commerce immediately began investigating the need for a summer camp at Köke‘e and arranged for the Honolulu commission members to visit the area. They toured the proposed summer camp in December along with experts in road, water, and sanitary matters. The commission reported that it unanimously supported the proposed camp sites; however, they believed that the project was probably dependent on building a serviceable road to Köke‘e. Despite the commission’s unanimous agreement, Rivenburgh returned to Honolulu and criticized the camp plan in the Honolulu Advertiser. He complained that Hawai‘i did not need a camping park on Kaua‘i any more than a monkey needed two tails. As the Commissioner of Public Lands, Rivenburgh apparently saw no need to establish a formal camp area. Instead, he suggested that the land was already available because it was a public forest reserve, and that residents only had to ask for permission to camp on it. It is not clear why Rivenburgh first supported, then publicly condemned the Köke‘e camp proposal. It is obvious that he did not enjoy his Köke‘e
visit. He grumbled to the Honolulu Advertiser about the “sort of trail” (road) to Kōke'e and complained that he was “half frozen” most of the time.22

With only three months remaining before a portion of Knudsen’s leased lands reverted to the government, six written applications and several verbal requests for camp sites had already been submitted to the BCAF. These applications were from Knudsen’s friends who had been going to Kōke'e for many summers and had already erected “more or less permanent” camp buildings, i.e. summer cabins. By September 1917, the Division of Forestry plans for a public camp area were nearly ready. Forestry documents and newspaper articles indicated that Judd completed most of the planning and surveys for the Kōke'e Camps. Judd concluded that the Kōke'e region was suitable for a camping retreat because it was the most accessible and extensive area on Kaua‘i that could be used for that purpose. He reiterated that Kōke'e’s 3,500-foot elevation provided a respite and a “bracing climate for those who seek relief from the heat of the lowlands.” In planning the Kōke'e Camps, he used the National Forest Service as a model, since that agency administered areas that allowed private individuals to lease land for summer homes. After studying the Forest Service “recreational residence” program, Judd concluded that granting camping permits on Kaua‘i was feasible if there were specific restrictions to protect the forest reserve. His recommendations included revocable five-year permits for designated camp lots, a “small” permit fee, and a time limit of 14 days for campers to reside at Kōke'e. He also recommended that $100 worth of improvements be made to each lot and that a septic system be built. Finally, Judd wanted fire rules and a ban on cutting live trees. With this in mind, he recommended that a survey be prepared to lay out the camp sites. Judd also advised the BCAF to set aside land at nearby Pu'u ka Pele for Nā pali-Kona Forest Preserve when Knudsen’s other lease expired in 1920. He wanted to ensure that the land along the edge of Waimea Canyon would be protected for future generations.23

Halemanu and Kōke'e reverted to the Territory of Hawai‘i and to the jurisdiction of the BCAF when Knudsen’s lease expired in December 1917. Judd prepared a survey and staked the summer camp sites at Kōke'e in mid 1918.24 A survey map illustrated that the Kōke'e Camps were situated along the shallow valleys at Kōke'e and
Halemanu, with camp sites laid out along the Kōkeʻe, Maluapopoke, Nawaimaka, Noe, and Elekiniʻiki streams.\textsuperscript{25}

In its decision to accept Judd’s recommendation to establish public camp sites at Kōkeʻe, the BCAF emphasized that it was responding to requests from area residents who wanted privileges similar to the “many thousands” of mainland residents with summer homes in the U.S. National Forests.\textsuperscript{26} The Kōkeʻe program was significant as part of a larger national movement for recreational residences. Franklin K. Lane, U.S. Secretary of the Interior, commented on Kōkeʻe’s importance, which he recommended should follow the idealism that U.S. public lands should be available to all:

Those in the lower altitudes need the change in air that comes with the ascent to the mountains, and I am in hope that out of your public lands... there will be reserved on every island mountain a public park where those may resort who come from the lands below, where the transient may pass the night, or those who wish may have their cottages... As the man of wealth now wisely has his hill house and his seaside house, so should there be reserved for those of more modest means some opportunity to gain the advantages of the rarer, cooler air of higher altitudes.\textsuperscript{27}

The Kōkeʻe Camps, which included the Halemanu area originally used by Knudsen, were opened to the public in 1918 for “the recuperation of bodily energy.” The BCAF noted that its decision to set aside land for the camp sites responded to Lane’s comments and Kauaʻi residents’ desire to escape the heat of the lowlands for Kōkeʻe’s “invigorating” climate and pleasant surroundings. The BCAF pointed out that the camp sites were favorably located near Waimea Canyon’s scenic beauties, where rainfall was not excessive, and the nights were always cool. Forty-seven camp sites that varied in size from .3 to two acres were established. Campers were issued five-year permits at the rate of $25 per acre and required to post a $500 bond to ensure they would fulfill the terms of their agreements.\textsuperscript{28}

The first lists of applicants for the Kōkeʻe Camps did not necessarily reflect Lane’s assertion that those of “modest means” should be able to obtain leases for public land. As expected, the families who already had permanent camp structures at Kōkeʻe while Knudsen had his lease were granted permits: Knudsen, Danford, Fayé, and Han-
Another list indicated that new permit holders were also from Kaua‘i’s most prominent families, including various members of the Rice and Wilcox families. Permits issued to clubs may have made some of the camp lots more available to the general public. Knudsen leased one of his family’s four lots for the “boys camp” that he had already established. The Hawaiian Trail & Mountain Club, Kumuwela Camping Club, and the YWCA were also granted permits.

While Knudsen and his friends were likely relieved that they finally had their permits to continue camping, many Kaua‘i residents were not “happy campers.” Within months, other Kaua‘i citizens complained that the Kōke‘e Camps permit costs were prohibitive for the average resident. A Garden Island editorial pointed out that Secretary of the Interior Lane had wisely observed that the wealthy in Hawai‘i already had suitable mountain and seaside homes. The writer agreed with Lane’s declaration that those of modest means should have a fair chance to lease a camp site in the forest reserve. He continued by explaining why the Kōke‘e leases were not suitable for those of modest means, although he did not define what that meant. First, the editorial stated that $25 dollars a year for “absolutely unimproved waste land fifteen or twenty miles from anywhere” should not be considered a nominal cost, which was what the Division of Forestry had promised. The article then criticized the other lease conditions. A major problem was perceived in that the lease was only for five years. Lessees were required to make $100 worth of improvements on land that they might occupy for only five years as the leases were not automatically renewable. In addition, the lessee had to furnish a bond of $500, which was considered an extraordinary amount of money. One camper complained that the lease conditions were “shameful and outrageous.” The editorial concluded that the government was exploiting the man of moderate means. “We are almost ready to wish ourselves,” the writer continued, “back under the monopolistic but fairly generous control of the private lessee [Knudsen].”

The Chamber of Commerce led the crusade for more reasonable camping fees. The organization was disappointed that it had worked so hard to assure that local residents had reasonable access to Kaua‘i’s uplands. Rather than achieve reasonable access, chamber members strongly believed that the camp site leases were so overpriced that only the well-to-do could enjoy Kōke‘e, which left out local families.
Chamber members felt that a $2.50 to $5.00 per acre rental, rather than the set price of $25 an acre, would be a fair lease fee. They charged that the $500 bond was "a humiliating and unnecessary annoyance" and asked the Division of Forestry to review its policies. Eric Knudsen joined the Chamber of Commerce debate and also complained that the lease rents were too high. He noted that his family had occupied their summer camp for sixty years. "In all that time," he added, we "never realized how exceedingly 'valuable' that country was." He reported that the Knudsen's previous rent for the entire area was only $100 annually, which he considered to be more than the land was worth. Again, neither the newspaper nor the Chamber of Commerce ever defined who was of "moderate means."

The Chamber of Commerce formed another committee to investigate the situation at Koke'e and issued its recommendations to the BCAF. The chamber's outcry against excessive permit costs continued until the end of 1918. In January 1919 the BCAF relented and announced that it had accepted the Chamber of Commerce committee recommendations. As such, the annual camp site fee was reduced from $25 to $10 an acre, and the $500 bond was no longer required in most situations. The Division of Forestry still refused to give lessees the right of renewal, but to encourage campers to make the improvements, the lease terms were extended from five to ten years.

Judd's work of protecting the forest was not completed. His next challenge was to determine how to incorporate the Pu'u ka Pele area into the forest reserve after Knudsen's lease for that portion of land expired in 1920. As previously stated, Judd's main concern was that a section of land along the edge of Waimea Canyon be left untouched and preserved for future generations.

In October 1918 Judd made his case for adding 4,900 acres of land at Pu'u ka Pele to Na pali-Kona Forest Reserve, an area consisting of the deep gorge country of the upper Waimea Canyon and an upland plateau running from Pu'u ka Pele Ridge. Judd observed that the upland plateau had been fenced since 1898, and the *koa* forest had regenerated. He further noted that this forest was worthy of protection because of its similarity to land in the adjacent forest reserve. Judd felt that Pu'u ka Pele Ridge was also suitable for camp sites because it was naturally protected by inaccessible valleys and cliffs, and on the south, the Knudsen's fence. He recommended that the
remaining portion of the land be added to the forest reserve because it featured the most scenic parts of Waimea Canyon, including the Waiahulu and Po’omau Stream valleys. Judd described the scene:

Canyon walls rise precipitately, in many cases for several hundred feet sheer, while in the remainder of the two thousand or more feet to the top of the ridges the cliffs are hardly less steep. In many places the steep side ridges are sharply cut by erosion into pinnacles and castellated outposts, which with the distant waterfalls, and the variety of brilliant hues furnished by outcropping strata, the red volcanic soil, and the green vegetation make the section one of the very great scenic interest[s]. It is eminently fitting that such an area be retained permanently under the control by the Territory and its delights made available to the public.37

Judd continued his report by heartily recommending that the BCAF create the Pu’u ka Pele Forest Reserve. He reminded the board that wild goat damage continued on the canyon walls, and suggested that government control of the land would be the best solution to this problem. The Pu’u ka Pele Forest Reserve was proclaimed by Governor C. J. McCarthy on December 31, 1918; the Knudsen Brothers maintained control of the land until their lease expired in 1920. The new forest reserve encompassed the entire 4,900 acres and included the most scenic part of Waimea Canyon as well as a large area of upland plateau with a regenerating koa forest. The BCAF planned to protect the new reserve by fencing the area and removing wild goats.38

While Kauaians were demanding lower rents and other amendments to Koke‘e’s original lease conditions, they were also watching the BCAF’s action regarding Pu’u ka Pele. Even though 19 of the 47 Koke‘e lots remained unleased, Kaua‘i organizations, namely the Chamber of Commerce and the Kaua‘i Planters’ Association, spearheaded a drive for new camp sites in the new Pu’u ka Pele Forest Reserve.

The Chamber of Commerce “camp site committee” envisioned a resort and determined three uses for Pu’u ka Pele. First, it wanted camping areas set aside for those who preferred a site makai [toward the ocean] of Koke‘e. The committee asserted that Pu’u ka Pele was an ideal camp site, as it had a cool, invigorating climate like Koke‘e,
but less rain. It was a lovely, open, mountain setting and closer to the grandeur of Waimea Canyon. In certain areas, there were spectacular views of Ni'ihau. The committee wanted these camp sites to be smaller lots and less expensive than the Koke'e Camps and determined that the annual rent should be $2.50. Pu'u ka Pele was also a preferred site as it was only twelve miles from the main road. The committee’s second goal was to establish a public camping ground for short-term visitors. Finally, it believed there was a “crying need” for lodge accommodations for residents and Mainland tourists of “modest means.” The Chamber of Commerce planned to raise money itself to build the necessary improvements.

The Chamber of Commerce was in a great hurry to accomplish its mission and planned to have Pu'u ka Pele ready for the summer of 1919. In January that year, they seemed to have organized a “preemptive strike” to secure the land. The Chamber committee met with Augustus Knudsen, who agreed to lease them ten acres for Pu'u ka Pele camp sites. The chamber hoped that when the land reverted to the territorial government, the BCAF would simply extend the generous conditions that Knudsen had granted. The selected site was at an altitude of 3,435 feet, about two miles from Halemanu on the edge of Waimea Canyon. The committee was quite pleased that the site was closer to the main road, which provided quick (about three hours) access from Lihu'e.

The sugar plantations had played a role in Koke'e’s history since Knudsen began inviting his friends from the sugar companies to his camping parties. The plantations became involved once again when the Kaua'i Planters’ Association (KPA) enthusiastically endorsed the Chamber of Commerce’s proposed Pu'u ka Pele summer camp. E. H. W. Broadbent, who apparently belonged to both organizations, spoke to the KPA and emphasized that every plantation on Kaua'i would take advantage of Pu'u ka Pele camp sites, should the opportunity present itself. He believed that the new location would be a “perfect bonanza” for hard-working plantation employees who needed a change and might otherwise have to travel to the Mainland for rest and relaxation. Broadbent predicted that after a few weeks at Pu'u ka Pele, “plantation men” would return to work as good as new. He liked the site because it was easily accessible and would provide a good family vacation at a nominal expense. The KPA subsequently
appointed its own committee, which included long-time Kōkeʻe camper William Danford, to work with the Chamber of Commerce on the matter. In an era when most Hawai‘i residents could not afford to travel to the Mainland, Broadbent’s statement made it quite clear that the proposed Pu‘u ka Pele park, while opening camp sites for more Kauaians, still would not be within the means of the majority of island residents.

The joint committee believed that its best chance for moving forward with the plan was to secure title to the land that Knudsen had granted them beyond the 1920 expiration of his lease. Without a long-term lease from the Forestry Division, the organizations hesitated to begin building permanent improvements. They believed their best option was to convince the Knudsen Brothers to relinquish all rights to the land immediately, which was more than a year prior to their 1920 lease expiration. Several committee members spoke to the Knudsens, who heartily supported the organizations’ efforts to provide additional public access to the forest and agreed to the early termination. With the Knudsens willing to relinquish a portion of their lease early, the Kauaians could immediately go to the BCAF, the territorial legislature, and the governor with the request for a long-term lease rather than wait until 1920 to make their request. Once the lease was obtained, the organizations could raise money and begin making improvements at Pu‘u ka Pele. In order to facilitate the plan, the Chamber of Commerce and KPA decided to present their ideas to the Kaua‘i County Board of Supervisors in the hopes that the county would endorse the proposal and agree to be the authority for the new Pu‘u ka Pele park.

The chamber again worked with County Engineer Moragne, just as it had in 1916, on the proposal for the original Kōkeʻe Camps. Moragne had surveyed the proposed park site and prepared the metes and boundaries description. In March 1919 he presented the chamber’s proposal to the Kaua‘i Board of Supervisors, which enthusiastically agreed to the plan. The supervisors authorized Moragne to go to Honolulu to discuss the matter with the legislature, governor, and the BCAF, in hopes that the County of Kaua‘i would be granted a lease for forest reserve land. In addition, the Board of Supervisors committed the county to improving the road to Kōkeʻe, which had long been viewed as an obstacle to achieving greater public access.
Moragne traveled to Honolulu to meet with the BCAF, which considered his request for a much greater portion of land than the ten acres that had been given by the Knudsens. Moragne’s survey outlined 416 acres of forest reserve land for a county park. The BCAF approved his proposal and recommended that Governor McCarthy approve it as well. In 1919 the governor signed a proclamation that withdrew 415 acres of Pu’u ka Pele land from the forest reserve along the edge of Waimea Canyon and turned it over to the County of Kaua’i for development as a county park and camping area. The BCAF also supplied water to the area, which opened to campers the following summer. The new site was known as Pu’u ka Pele County Park, and the camp sites became known as the “Pu’u ka Pele Lots.”

The new park was apparently quite a success. In 1922, the Kaua’i County Board of Supervisors petitioned the BCAF for an additional 230 acres of forest reserve, which would be used for additional camp sites. The county’s request was approved by the governor in January 1923.

The sugar plantations and related organizations not only served as advocates for the creation of forest reserves and camp lots, the companies continued to be involved by leasing lots and building cabins that could be used by plantation owners, managers, and employees. The Grove Farm Company and Lihu’e Plantation Company both had company cabins at Kōke’e. Employees from various Kaua’i sugar plantations also built summer homes for themselves. One area at Kōke’e apparently had so many campers and cabins associated with the Hawaiian Sugar Company in Makaweli that it became known as “Makaweli Flats,” a name that was still being used in 2006. Many of the camp site lessees continued to be from prominent Kaua’i families who owed much of their wealth and social standing to the sugar industry.

Shortly after Kaua’i County gained control of the Pu’u ka Pele lands, the *Garden Island* reported that the summer camp site was already becoming popular. By mid-1919 the county had improved the road to Waimea Canyon as promised, which generated interest in traveling to the region. Improved access allowed local residents to arrive from Lihu’e in an easy 2½-hour drive. Some families went for only a day and might have spent their time picking thimbleberries. Other families took “camping outfits” and remained a weekend or
more. Koke'e opportunities were also available to those who did not live on Kaua'i. By the end of 1919, the Gomez Garage was advertising that it offered regular trips to Waimea Canyon. The company advised prospective customers to provide their baggage checks and bills of lading, the Gomez Garage would “do the rest.” The bills of lading may have indicated that families were still transporting a tremendous volume of goods to their Koke'e camping parties, or supplies may have been delivered to Kaua'i for building camp structures on the leased lots. The company also rented “u-drive” automobiles for those who preferred to travel independently. In any case, the Garden Island observed that the great and pressing need, now that people had discovered Koke'e was such a glorious place, was to build a lodge or campground shelter for transient accommodations. In early 1921, the astonishing total of 40 people traveled to Koke'e, among them six groups of tourists. This vacation traffic was considered better than average and was expected keep increasing once additional road improvements were made.

While the county government and Kaua'i residents were apparently pleased with the new Pu‘u ka Pele Park and Lots, territorial officials concerned with preserving the forest reserve for future generations were distressed by the county’s management of the camp sites. After several decades, it became apparent that the county administration either did not understand or preferred to ignore the territory’s dual goals of protecting and preserving the forest and public access for future generations.

Colin G. Lennox, president of the BCAF, noted problems that violated the executive order granting the county its rights to Pu‘u ka Pele County Park. Lennox’s concerns were based on the principles that Judd had expressed many years earlier. Lennox pointed out that the executive order required the county to maintain the land for park purposes. He observed that the land between the public road and Waimea Canyon’s rim had been leased as private camp sites. Lennox wanted these lots to be reserved as a public park rather than private camp lots, which echoed Judd’s desire that the land along the canyon rim should be preserved for the enjoyment of future generations. Lennox wanted to protect the views from the road to the canyon rim, not obscure the viewplane with private homes. As such, he asked Kaua'i County to revoke the permits of lots along the canyon rim that
did not yet have houses or had unoccupied houses. Lennox particularly objected to a small house that was being built along the canyon rim in what he saw as a “most conspicuous spot” that detracted from the approach to Koke‘e. He firmly believed that keeping the area between the road and canyon rim free from private houses would further the use of the Koke‘e area as a recreational park for all to enjoy.49

Two years later, the BCAF inspected Pu‘u ka Pele Park and discovered that Lennox’s request had been ignored. Rather than canceling permits, Lennox discovered that the county had issued three additional camping permits. Furthermore, he was dismayed to learn that the county had not been monitoring and enforcing the Division of Forestry’s rules for forest protection. He found numerous cases where lessees had been allowed to cut trees and forest cover without a permit or review by the county forester. Lennox accused the county of granting camp sites without considering whether the cabin construction would result in cutting trees and/or destroying forest growth. He viewed these problems as serious violations and reminded county officials of the importance of following the rules.50 Within a few weeks, the county notified Lennox that the permits in question had been revoked and that the county engineer had been directed to enforce the BCAF’s rules and regulations.51 In 1955 the lots between the road and canyon were transferred from county jurisdiction back to the territorial BCAF.52 The rest of Pu‘u ka Pele Park was transferred to Hawai‘i’s State Parks Division in 1965.53 The leases for camp lots on the Waimea Canyon rim were not revoked until the expiration of those leases in 1985.

In spite of the problems with the county’s management of campers in Pu‘u ka Pele County Park, the BCAF opened another tract of camp sites in 1951. The ‘Water Tank Lots’ as the area came to be known, were set in an area adjacent to the original Koke‘e Camps. Most of the new lots were less than an acre and were rented for $20 to $30 annually. The BCAF emphasized that new summer cabins were required to meet minimum specifications and be designed in a “rustic” style that blended with the landscape. When one of the new lots was selected by two applicants, the board demonstrated that equal access rights were given to all and held a drawing to assign camp sites. Of the 25 lots offered, only 18 applications were filed.54 Despite the
requirements, many of the structures built in the Water Tank Lots did not express "rustic" architecture, but instead were built in the residential plantation style common during the 1950s.

Along with the development of the Kōke'e Camps and Pu'u ka Pele Lots came activities that could be enjoyed in the cool mountain environs. While other Hawaiian Islands also had upland parks for recreational opportunities, certain pursuits became uniquely associated with Kōke'e, namely trout fishing and plum picking. Trout fishing began as early as 1921 and was a popular annual activity during the summer months. The territorial government would seasonally stock Kōke'e streams, as it did in 1940 with 25,520 trout eggs supplied by the U.S. Bureau of Fisheries.55

The successful establishment of plum trees eventually resulted in Kōke'e's other favorite activity, plum picking. According to a former cabin owner/camper Kathryn Hulme, the Methley plum was brought from South Africa to Hawai'i by Dr. Lyons of the Hawaiian Sugar Planters' Association. About 1930, L. W. Bryan of the Division of Forestry sent cuttings to foresters on Kaua'i. Kaua'i forester A. J. Mac-Donald began planting the trees along Kōke'e's trails and roads. The Civilian Conservation Corps enrollees stationed at Kōke'e during the Great Depression provided an extra boost to the planting project after 1935. An estimated 18,000 trees were eventually planted in Kōke'e.56

The territorial government estimated that 9,000 people picked plums in Kōke'e during 1952 and carried out approximately 70 tons of fruit. At some point, plum picking became so popular that the territory implemented a 'plum season' each year, which restricted plum picking to specified dates and decreed strict limits on the amount of fruit each person could harvest from government land.57

Kōke'e Camp lessees also enjoyed a variety of their own activities, especially gardening. Prior to the development of a water delivery system, gardening was usually done adjacent to streams where roses, pansies, dahlias, and other flowering ornaments could thrive, even during the dry summer months. Hydrangeas were frequently planted alongside the cabins where roof runoff would keep them watered and growing. Larger yard areas during Kōke'e's early decades were sometimes left untended so that these areas maintained a naturalistic "wild woods" appearance. Picnicking in the gardens or "wild woods" was popular.58 Social niceties were also observed at Kōke'e, as when Mrs.
Charles Rice gave a “delightful tea” for her friends after her new mountain home was completed in 1920.  

Hiking, of course, was always a popular pastime, and trails radiated throughout the park. Hawaiian lore and history remained of interest to many visitors and lessees, just as it had been with Valdemar Knudsen in the late 1800s. Hunters’ targets included pigs, goats, wild chickens, and game birds. During the 1920s, plover were also hunted. Kaua‘i’s fish and game warden released 250 jungle fowl for hunters’ pleasure in 1939.  

National events also impacted Kōke‘e’s history and activities. During the 1930s the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) had a camp near Kanaloahuluhulu. CCC enrollees participated in a number of conservation activities, including assisting the Territory of Hawai‘i with reforestation projects and helping to revegetate the eroded cliffs at Pu‘u ka Pele. Most of these efforts involved planting alien species, including haole koa, silver wattle, eucalyptus, and ironwood. The CCC’s most notable projects, perhaps, were planting an experimental fruit orchard at their camp and assisting in planting Methley plums throughout the region.  

World War II brought activities to a halt when martial law strictly limited access to Kōke‘e, which was occupied and extensively used by the U.S. military. Trails were closed for the duration of the war, and few campers were allowed access to their cabins. William P. Alexander was one of a few who had an unrestricted special pass from the military that allowed him to visit his Pu‘u ka Pele cabin. Most Kōke‘e campers had no such privileges. Civilians were allowed to visit their mountain cabins on Independence Day in 1942, but only if they obtained a pass from Kaua‘i’s provost marshal and strictly observed speed limits.  

Some unlikely benefits resulted from the U.S. military occupation of Kōke‘e. One of the most significant changes in Kōke‘e’s history was the construction of an all-weather road, which the military improved and extended to Kalalau Lookout during World War II. The improved road made mountain activities more easily accessible to the general public, which by that time, was increasingly relying on the use of private automobiles. Surplus Jeeps were purchased by some campers, which made it possible for them to use their cabins on a year-round basis. Prior to the all-weather road and the intro-
duction of the all-purpose Jeep, campers generally closed their cab-
ins for the winter before the steep road to Kōke‘e became muddy
and impassable. They could only return after the winter rainy season
had ended. The improved road was the impetus for making the Kōke‘e region
accessible to all Kaua‘i residents and proved what some Kōke‘e pro-
moters had been claiming for decades: that the success of the area
for recreation and tourism depended on easy access and a passable
thoroughfare. The easily traveled, all-weather road prompted the
BCAF to give “considerable thought” to how it could improve recre-
ation at Kōke‘e. After 1944 the area was extensively developed by the
Division of Forestry and later the territorial and state park divisions.
Forty-five miles of trails that had been closed during the war were
renovated and signs placed to guide hikers and prohibit them from
entering water reserves. In order to make Kōke‘e a “playground to be
enjoyed by many,” a parking and picnic area were built at the Kalalau
Lookout. The former CCC barracks at Kanalohuluhulu were reno-
vated for use as group accommodations, and six cabins were built
nearby for family rentals. A country store and museum were es-
blished in 1953. Another way that allowed average Kaua‘i families to
enjoy recreational opportunities was provided not by government
development, but instead by organizations that obtained leases at
Kōke‘e Camps and Pu‘u ka Pele Lots. These groups were religious
and social in nature, and included the YMCA, Seventh-Day Advent-
ists, United Church of Christ, the Boy Scouts, Hawaii Methodist

The recreational residences of the Kōke‘e Camps and Pu‘u ka
Pele Lots on Kaua‘i played a unique role in Hawai‘i’s recreational
and conservation history. The idea of summer homes in upland areas
for residents wanting to escape hot coastal climates was not new in
Hawai‘i. Summer homes had been built in other high-elevation
locales, including Olinda on Maui, Volcano on Hawai‘i, and Tantalus
on O‘ahu. The Kōke‘e Camps and Pu‘u ka Pele Lots differed from
other islands’ summer regions as these tracts were formally planned
and were built within publicly owned forest reserves. The camps,
which were modeled after recreational residences built in the U.S.
National Forests, were significant as they were a contemporary and
local expression of a national trend. Finally, the Kōke‘e tracts were
also important for their association with the 1903 establishment of the forest reserve system in Hawai'i and the idea that public lands could be used not only for conservation, but also for recreation.

Although Valdemar Knudsen's grass house and summer house are long gone, nearly 90 years after the Koke'e Camps were created, 114 cabins remain. Approximately 75 of the structures are more than 50 years old and retain some historic integrity. The cabins' historic character is evidenced in the unpainted vertical-board walls, lava-rock chimneys, and 'ōhi'a porch railings. Wood-burning water heaters are still being used to heat water at some cabins. Most, if not all, of Makaweli Flats lessees still choose to live by the light of oil lamps rather than connect to the electric grid that has been available since the 1960s. The landscape of the rural mountain area also contributes to the overall character of the rustic cabins. Like the historic buildings and landscape, traditional recreational activities at Koke'e continue, including plum picking and trout-fishing, both of which draw crowds

Kaua'i sugar plantations and their employees probably helped establish the "plantation-style" architecture that was evident in Koke'e by the mid 1920s. Rustic features such as the lava-rock chimneys continued to be incorporated into the design. Dawn Duensing photograph.
from all over Hawai‘i. Although the modern era and its satellite dishes have arrived in Kōke‘e, the collection of vernacular rustic architecture remains to help illustrate the rich history of the only recreational residence tracts in Hawai‘i.

NOTES
1 Several place names were historically associated with the Waimea District’s upland areas that became part of Kōke‘e and Waimea Canyon State Parks. For purposes of this study, these general areas are referred to as “Kōke‘e.” Other distinct locales and place names in the Kōke‘e area were Halemanu, a valley and stream in Kōke‘e State Park; and Pu‘u ka Pele, a hill/ridge area in Waimea Canyon State Park.
3 Knudsen and Noble, Kanuka of Kauai 126–127.
7 Kokee File, Knudsen Family File, Danford Family File, Photograph Collections, Kaua‘i Museum.
8 “List of Applicants for Camp Sites, Kokee Camps: General Permits,” circa 1917–1918, AH.
9 Kokee File, Knudsen Family File, Danford Family File, Photograph Collections, Kaua‘i Museum.
12 “Confidential Report to the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry, Honolulu, Division of Forestry,” 3 Sept. 1912, 1–2, 4, AH.
23 “Division of Forestry Report to the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry,” 21 Sept. 1917, 1–3, AH.
24 “Camp Sites are Laid Out by Chas. S. Judd,” *The Garden Island*, 20 June 1918: 1.
26 BCAF Report, Biennial Period Ended December 31, 1918, 40, AH.
29 “List of Applicants for Camp Sites in the Region of the Kokee Stream and Halemanu within the Na Pali-Kona Forest Reserve, Kauai, Board of Agriculture and Forestry,” n.d., circa 1917–1918, AH.
30 “List of Holders of Permits in the Kokee Region within the Na Pali-Kona Forest Reserve, Kauai, Board of Agriculture and Forestry,” n.d., circa 1917–1918, AH.
32 J. M. Lydgate, letter from Kauai Chamber of Commerce to the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry, 18 Oct. 1918, AH.
35 C. S. Judd, letter to Kauai Chamber of Commerce, 21 Jan. 1919, AH.
36 “Division of Forestry Report to the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry,” 21 Sept. 1917, 1–3, AH.
37 C. S. Judd, “Division of Forestry Report to the Board of Commissioners of Agriculture and Forestry,” 16 Oct. 1918, 1–3, AH.
38 BCAF Report, Biennium Period Ended December 31, 1918, 22, 24, 29, AH.
49 Colin G. Lennox, letter to William Ellis, Kauai Board of Supervisors, 19 Feb. 1947, KCC.
50 Colin G. Lennox, letter to William Ellis, Kauai Board of Supervisors, 3 Aug. 1949, KCC.
51 County Clerk, County of Kauai, letter to Colin G. Lennox, 22 Aug. 1949, KCC.
52 Office of County Auditor, “Report to the Chairman and Board of Supervisors,” 20 May 1957, KCC.
53 Kunji Omori, letter to Hartwell K. Blake, County of Kauai Board of Supervisors, 20 July 1965, KCC.
54 “Camp Sites At Kokee To Be Available Soon; Drawings to Be Held,” The Garden Island, 13 June 1951: sec. II-8.
55 “Trout,” The Garden Island, 5 July 1921: 3; “Trout Eggs to be Hatched at Kokee,” The Garden Island, 30 April 1940: 1; BCAF Report, Biennium Period Ended December 31, 1940, 44, AH.
57 BCAF Report, Biennium Period Ended June 30, 1953, 77, AH.
58 John H. R. Plews, Photograph Collection; John H. R. Plews e-mail to Dawn Duensing, 1 Nov. 2002.
64 BCAF Report, Biennium Period Ended June 30, 1946, 70, AH.