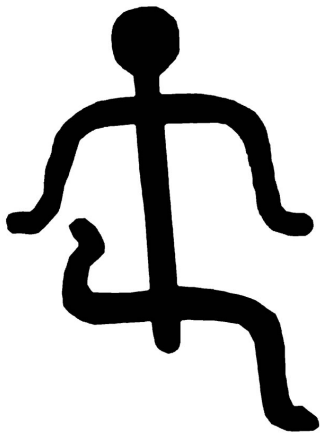


Kūkini Trails

Some of the old Hawaiian Trails recovered by the Hawaiian Trail & Mountain Club are believed to be kūkini routes used prior to Western contact.



Kūkini were the fastest runners in ancient Hawai'i. The swiftest kūkini served as messengers and couriers under the service of the King. Not only were they fast on foot but kūkini knew the most direct routes across the island which often meant climbing up and over steep pali (cliffs) to shave days off a journey to the other side of the island.

So legendary was their speed that Uluanui, a famous kūkini of O'ahu, is said to carry a fish from Kaelepulu pond in Kailua to Waikiki still alive and wriggling. A similar story is told of Kane'aka'ehu, who ran back and forth between Kona and Hilo by a steep and precipitous trail. In times of war, kūkini acted on behalf of the King to assemble warriors from allied chiefs and as spies on opposing chiefs from behind enemy lines.

Opposing chiefs often attempted to stop kūkini from completing their missions, so speed, stealth, and the ability to escape pursuers was essential. Kaohele, a noted runner of Molokai, is said to have leapt a distance of 36 feet to the opposite side of a bank to elude pursuers to warn his chief of impending invasion from Maui.