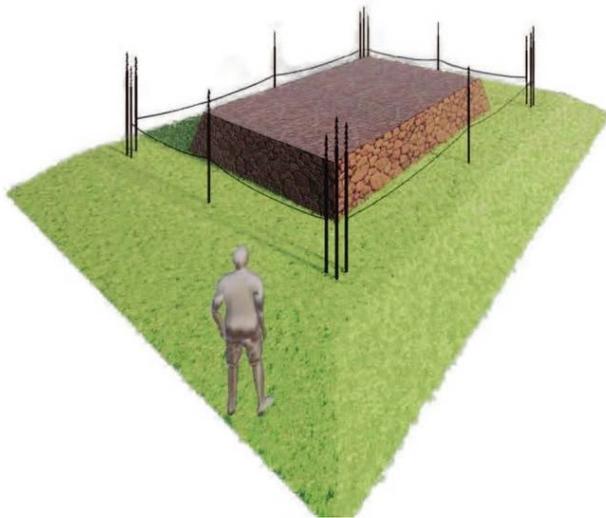


HAWAII NEWS

Skulls of female warriors to be interred at Nuuanu Pali Wayside Park monument

- By [Christie Wilson](#)



RENDERING COURTESY OHA

The skulls of 12 female warriors killed in the 1795 Battle of Nuuanu will be buried beneath a monument at the Nuuanu Pali Wayside Park.

The skulls of 12 female warriors killed in the famed 1795 Battle of Nuuanu will be interred at a monument to be built at Nuuanu Pali Wayside Park, more than a century after they were illicitly removed from the base of the sheer cliff and given to a British museum for study.

The remains were among 21 human skulls repatriated from the University of Cambridge's Duckworth Laboratory in England in a historic ceremony Feb. 29. The state Board of Land and Natural Resources on Friday unanimously approved an Office of Hawaiian Affairs proposal for the monument to be built on a small grassy area east of the main walkway to the Nuuanu Pali Lookout, a popular visitor attraction.

The monument would include an underground burial vault with an open bottom capped by a 15-by-20-foot stone and cement platform surrounded by eight stanchions resembling Hawaiian spears. Nearby, a 3-by-5-foot stone and cement ahu (altar) would be built to receive hookupu (offerings). A brass commemorative plaque would be installed "to honor the fallen dead and to educate the public on this significant site."

OHA would be responsible for construction costs as well as maintenance and repairs. The agency said it aims to have the monument built before the end of the fiscal year in June.

When asked during Friday's virtual BLNR meeting why the skulls were being interred at the top of the 1,200-foot cliff instead of at the base where they were found, Edward Halealoha Ayau, a longtime advocate of repatriation of iwi kupuna (ancestral bones) who advises OHA on such matters, replied it was mainly for "healing" and "to recognize these were warriors, these were people of honor and status who gave their lives for what they believed in."

In a report to the Land Board, the Division of State Parks said the memorial "would be minimally impactful to the existing park and may help deter visitors from accessing prohibited trails." The memorial also will add to the historic character of the park by providing "a tangible link" to the Battle of Nuuanu, the report said.

The fierce clash between Kalanikupule, ruler of Oahu, and the overwhelming forces of Hawaii island chief Kamehameha was a pivotal event in Hawaii history. The successful invasion allowed Kamehameha to unite the islands of Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, Maui and Hawaii under his rule. Among the combatants were all-female regiments on both sides of the conflict.

Ayau, former executive director of Hui Malama i na Kupuna o Hawai'i Nei, recounted for BLNR members a major initiative begun in the 1990s by OHA, the Department of Land and Natural Resources' State Historic Preservation Division and Native Hawaiian cultural practitioners to repatriate iwi kupuna from international collections.

He explained that as colonialism exerted itself around the globe, European museums had sought to collect human craniums from other cultures to study their shape and size in order to make the argument that Western civilizations were superior.

"Museums around the world are finally coming to terms" with that past and their illicit acquisitions, Ayau said.

In the case of the Nuuanu Pali skulls, all belonged to females and were deformed in a manner to suggest they had been subject to the traditional practice among alii of wrapping the heads of infants in kapa so as to flatten the front and back of the skull, he said. The shape was considered attractive and provided immediate recognition of someone as a person of status, according to Ayau.

A general query letter signed by then-DLNR Chairman William Paty and sent to the University of Cambridge in January 1991, seeking information on any Native Hawaiian skeletal remains in its possession, yielded a negative reply. Internal documents later revealed that Cambridge officials had passed the query on to the Duckworth Laboratory, one of the world's largest repositories of human remains, but no response was received, Ayau said.

When the Duckworth Laboratory published its first online inventory in 2010, a sharp-eyed OHA researcher identified the Native Hawaiian remains. A formal inquiry was made in June 2013, and researchers determined that more than half of the skulls likely came from the base of the Nuuanu Pali and were collected around 1894, according to OHA.

Others were believed to be from the Honolulu and Waialae areas and have already been interred, Ayau said.

In late February all 21 skulls were handed over in a ceremony at Cambridge, with OHA officials, Ayau and other cultural practitioners in attendance. It was the first time in the university's 800-year history that it had returned remains based on a request from an Indigenous group.

A single skull believed to be from the Nuuanu Pali area that was repatriated in 2018 from a family in Pennsylvania also will be interred at the proposed monument, according to the Division of State Parks.

During Friday's BLNR meeting, Alan Carpenter, assistant administrator of the Division of State Parks, remarked that discussion of the Nuuanu Pali monument comes at a time when the nation is reassessing monuments honoring Confederate "heroes" and other historical figures whose exploits came at the expense of Indigenous peoples and other oppressed groups.

"We've got the toppling of Confederate monuments at this moment when we are doing something like this, and we are also proposing to put a statue of King Kaumualii in Paulaula on Kauai, and I think we are sort of on the right side of history here," he said. "(These things) don't have to be hidden. These are important stories that I think can promote respect in the long run."