**Kamehameha The Great: Warrior, unifier, surfer, trader**

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Voices of Maui By Norm Bezane

From Maui’s Iao Valley to Lahaina’s shoreline, to the rough volcanic landscape of Hawaii Island to the newly discovered harbor in Honolulu, the unifier of these islands returned again and again to each place. Both epic and trivial, these journeys transformed Hawaii.

Kamehameha, like all ali‘i chiefs, lived in a warrior state and fought battles according to rituals, traditions and rules. War was declared by cutting down a coconut tree in another’s territory. To invade Oahu, in a feat of organization, Kamehameha assembled 35,000 warriors transported in 800 canoes.

Trained warriors led by ali‘i fought to take over land of both living ali‘i and the recently deceased. Weapons of choice were elau ihe (short spear), pololu ihe (long spear), palau (cudgel), leiomano (club with sharks’ teeth) and later guns. War and weapons would be put aside with the unification of the islands.

A clear picture of what Kamehameha did, and how he did it, emerges by looking at his travels.

**1778, Hana** — Meets Captain Cook and discovers unique sticks that fire bullets. He has foresight to see their potential in battle.

**1783, Hawaii Island** — Starts campaign to unify islands by unsuccessfully attacking Hilo.

**1785, Hilo** — A new attack.

**1788, Kauai** — Trades land he controls for guns, including a swivel cannon. Captures sailor John Young, kidnaps Isaac Davis and names them military

advisors.

**1790, Maui** — Fights near Huelo and uses cannon for the first time in Iao Valley. Blood and bodies clog the stream, giving the fight the name “Kapaniwai” (Damming of the Water). Leaves before conquering Maui.

**1791, Hawaii Island** — Builds Pu‘ukohola Heiau to win support of the Gods for his unification effort. Uses swivel gun and cannon to win the battle and conquer the island.

**1792-94** — Period of Peace.

**1793** — Befriends Capt. George Vancouver, who was also acquainted with beautiful, Hana-born Ka‘ahumanu, a surfing partner who became his first and

favorite wife. Vancouver gives Kamehameha cattle, sheep and goats. Ka‘ahumanu along the way deserted  Kamehameha, after he flirted with another wahine. Vancouver is instrumental in bringing the two back together.

**1794** — Announces that Hawaiian people are subjects of Great Britain and under its protection. Great Britain never agreed, but Vancouver gifts Kamehameha with a sailing ship with a Union Jack sail.

**1795, Maui and Oahu** — Destroys Lahaina, then conquers Maui, Lanai and Molokai in February. Sails to Oahu and wins Battle of Nu‘uanu near Waikiki to control Oahu. Leader of Kauai eludes capture.

**1896, Kauai** — Another unsuccessful invasion.

**1797** — Takes a second wife in Keopuolani, who bears him a son, Liholiho, who succeeds Kamehameha as king. Ka‘ahumanu, though childless, would later rule

Hawaii as regent for the young Liliuko and become Hawaii’s first “feminist,” ending the kapu system that banned kane and wahine from eating together.

**1802, Maui** — Fleet lands in Maui to prepare to invade Kauai again. Epidemic hits warriors and ends expedition.

**1803, Honolulu** — Fleet sent to new harbor and headquarters there. Kamehameha believes the Oahu harbor is better for loading ships (Lahaina Harbor was too shallow to permit docking of sailing ships). Becomes a trader, taking over the lucrative Sandalwood trade and sending woods to China in exchange for worldly goods.

**1810** — Completes unification by acquiring Kauai by agreement with ali‘i without a fight.

**1812-19, Kohala, Hawaii Island** — Returns to birth island. Engages in his favorite pastimes of surfing, swimming, fishing and growing taro. Dies in 1819.

2010, Front Street, Lahaina — Kamehameha images grace annual parade. Each Kamehameha Day, pa‘u riders on the former King’s Highway pass within yards of where Kamehameha the Great once surfed, lived and enjoyed the King’s Taro Patch.

Kamehameha, in a sense, was a man before his time. He recognized immediately the merits of technology (guns, for example, which he rarely used). He lived in three geographic areas like modern day corporate types, learned a foreign language (English) and created what would become one of the world’s most progressive monarchies.

Add everything up, and no wonder he is called great.

*Columnist’s Notebook:* The book “Voices of Maui” based on this column is now available for purchase in downtown Lahaina at Paradise Found Creperie in Lahaina Square Center, as well as the Baldwin Home and the MauiGrown Coffee Company Store near the smokestack.



