

The search for knowledge on the summit of Mauna Kea is a sacred mission

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I would like to extend my appreciation for Jim Makaala's letter, "Our ancestors can speak for themselves," but offer a different perspective.

He asks for replies from chiefs and warriors, that of which I am neither, I am only a humble native of the land.

I am Chad Kalepa Baybayan. I have served as captain and navigator of the Hawaiian deep-sea voyaging canoes Hokulea, Hawaiiloa, and Hokualakai. I am a graduate of UH Hilo's Ka Haka Ula O Keelikolani College of Hawaiian Language, and I hold a masters degree in Education from Heritage College. I have worked with students and educators sharing the powerful story of the mariner explorers and astronomer navigators who settled these islands. Along with four other Hawaiian men, I was granted the rank of Pwo and inducted into a society of noninstrument master navigators by Master Navigator Pious Mau Piailug in the Satawalese tradition and extended the privilege to teach and pass on the skills, techniques, and values of the oceanic wayfinder.

My relationship with Mauna Kea is grounded in the many occasions this sacred mountain has led me back to my home and my family as a navigator aboard Hawaii's deep-sea voyaging canoes. At night, as you approach the Big Island, Mauna Kea rises out of the sea, its summit framed and warmed by a blanket of stars. At sea, on a cloudless night, when peering at the awesome sight of Mauna Kea, the stars reach down out of the sky and touch the skin of the mountain and you recognize they are all the same, Mauna Kea and the sky. Mauna Kea is the celestial portal into the universe.

The wayfinding techniques used on deep-sea canoes relies upon traditional methods of observing the stars, sensitizing one's body to the motion of the sea, and observing all the natural clues that surround you. Seafaring is but one of many examples that illustrate my ancestors' wisdom to adapt and use their knowledge and resources to survive; it

manifests that body of knowledge into the culture we know today.

As explorers, Hawaiians utilized island resources to sustain their communities. The slopes of Mauna Kea contain a record of how, for generations, a very adaptive and intelligent people used the mountain as a vital resource. They excavated the thin-aired slopes of Mauna Kea for high-quality, durable stone to produce the best neolithic tools in the Pacific. The Mauna Kea adze quarry, the largest in the world, offers conclusive evidence the ancients recognized the importance of Mauna Kea's rich resources and its ability to serve its community by producing the tools to sustain daily life. They ventured to Mauna Kea, reshaped the environment by quarrying rock, left behind evidence of their work, and took materials off the mountain to serve their communities, with the full consent and in the presence of their gods.

Using the resources on Mauna Kea as a tool to serve and benefit the community through astronomy is consistent with the example of the adze quarry. To value astronomy and its work on Mauna Kea, you have to value the importance of "Ike," knowledge, and its quest for a greater understanding of the universe we live in. Our ancestors were no different; they sought knowledge from their environment, including the stars, to guide them and to give them a greater understanding of the universe that surrounded them. The science of astronomy helps us to advance human knowledge to the benefit of the community. It teaches us where we have come from, and where we are going. Its impact has been positive, introducing the young to the process of modern exploration and discovery, a process consistent with past traditional practices.

My perspective of Mauna Kea is based on the tradition of the oceanic explorers from whom I descend, a people who left the safety of their coasts, sailed away, and in so doing discovered the stars. As a Hawaiian, I recognize I am a descendant of some of the best naked-eye astronomers the world has known. It is culturally consistent to advocate for Hawaiian participation in a field of science that continues to enable that tradition and a field in which we ought to lead. I firmly believe the highest level of desecration rests in actions that remove the opportunity and choices from the kind of future our youth can own.

At times, the knowledge revealed from astronomical discoveries is frightening: of galaxies colliding, and black holes consuming all that comes close to them. However, the fearfulness of these discoveries should be viewed with an islander's perspective by recognizing our remoteness and vulnerability. As islanders, we are isolated, surrounded by a sea on all our horizons and only an ocean of stars overhead as companions, through careful stewardship and a willingness to adapt and learn, we continue to survive. I recognize our planet is part of the greater natural cycle of the larger universe and there is

little we can do to influence a future set amid a dynamic universe.

The ultimate job of humanity must be to insure our planet lives a full and fruitful life. It is not science fiction to recognize our future lies in the darkness of space somewhere among the stars that gave us life. Astronomy must provide the answers to where our future will be and the challenges we will have to overcome to arrive there. In order for humanity to survive, we will have to travel light years, but each of us has only a lifetime to contribute to that effort.

When it is completed, the Thirty Meter Telescope on Mauna Kea will with greater accuracy and speed, vastly increase the capacity for the kind of scientific research vital to the quest for mankind's future. It takes place on a sacred mountain; remains consistent with the work of our ancestral forebears; and is done to the benefit of tomorrow's generations, here in Hawaii, and across the globe.

Mauna Kea, like life, is sacred, and we need to proceed with the important work of insuring our future.

Let's look to Mauna Kea and continue a synergy of mountain, exploration, and the stars.

Chad Kalepa Baybayan is a Kona resident.