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Participants gathered around Hawaiian historian Waianu Ah Quin last month in a free tour of Waikiki. The tours are held twice a day, Monday through Saturday, with the Queen's tour starting at Kalakaua and Kapahulu avenues, and the Kalia tour starting at Kalia Tower in the Hilton Hawaiian Village.

Waikiki Historic Trail is a vision of the past to illuminate the future

By Rosemarie Bernardo
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When beach goers left their towels on four large boulders next to the Waikiki Police Station, little did they know that they were covering sacred stones reputed to have healing powers.

Legend describes four Tahitian healers transferred their mana (power) into the stones, each weighing eight tons, enabling laborers to easily carry them on their backs from Kaimuki to Waikiki in the 1400s, said Hawaiian historian Waiyanu Ah Quin.

A fence and medicinal plants now surround the stones -- they were reported to heal ailments if someone lay on the stones -- as part of the trail, which was intended to "restore Hawaiian-ness back to Waikiki," Ah Quin said.

The legend of the sacred stones is part of the recently completed Waikiki Historic Trail, created to promote the islands' rich history and culture.

"It's fantastic ... I just learned so much," said Australian native Frances Campbell.



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Waikiki Trail historian Waiyanu Ah Quin last month explained the background of King's Alley, which once was King Kalakaua's residence.

Last month, the last surfboard-shaped marker was installed at Kalakaua Avenue and Beach Walk. The trail goes to 23 sites -- 19 of which are designated with markers.

Members of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association run two tours daily, Monday through Saturday: the Kalia tour that covers grounds at Fort DeRussy and the Hilton Hawaiian Village; and the queen's tour that covers sites from Kapiolani Park to the Moana Surfrider Hotel.

Historian George Kanahale, who promoted Hawaiian cultural values and wanted to bring

aloha back to the islands, envisioned a historic trail, restoring "mana (power) in Waikiki," said architect Charlie Palumbo.

Palumbo carried out Kanahele's vision after he died in September 2000. □ Palumbo helped garner support from city officials, hotels and agencies to help fund the trail project that cost an estimated \$250,000.

Palumbo also laid the foundation for each marker with craftsman Lars Erickson. During their work on the project, Palumbo said, "I felt a spiritual connection with Kanahele, like we did it. He would be very proud. It's his legacy."

Peter Apo, director of the Hawaii Institute of Hospitality, said, "Recovering Waikiki's history is probably the most important to raise the commercial value of the destination."

Dorien McClellan, program director of the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association, described Waikiki as "one of the most sacred areas in Hawaii's history."

"We have had some of our seniors that become teary-eyed because they feel people have forgot the history. There's a lot of pride," McClellan said.

Ah Quin ended the tour with a closing chant under a banyan tree at the International Marketplace -- a site where King William Kana'ina Lunalilo had a summer residence.

For some who attended the tour, it left a lasting impression of the islands' well-known tourist spot.

As a child, Hawaii Kai resident Russ Saito used to body surf at Waikiki Beach and never learned the history of Waikiki.

Saito said he is glad tours of the Waikiki Historic Trail are available to preserve its history. Those involved in the historic trail hope teachers at Hawaii's schools will bring their students on the tour to carry on Waikiki's history.

"It's a story that needs to be told," Palumbo said.

Wearing a yellow kihei, or sash, Ah Quin opened the tour with a welcoming chant and led 11 people through a portion of Waikiki, where royalty once lived and played.

At the tour's meeting site, Ah Quin described a memorial to honor hundreds of ancestral remains found in Waikiki during development projects. The torch placed above the burial mound is only to be lit when Hawaiian remains are discovered, said Ah Quin.

Curious onlookers briefly joined the tour as Ah Quin explained the legend behind the four healing stones:

The four Tahitian priests arrived in Hawaii to teach their medicinal practices to the islanders. As they planned their return to their native homeland, the healers chose the stones to remind Hawaiians that they will be taken care of.

At one time, the stones disappeared during the development of Waikiki. When workers built

the Moana Surfrider Hotel in 1901, the boulders were moved to the front of building, Hawaii's first high-rise. Unaware of the importance of the stones, workers used them as a foundation to build the Waikiki Bowling Alley, Ah Quin said. During the 1950s, the sacred stones were uncovered after workers demolished the bowling alley. Hawaiian healer Papa Henry Auwae was notified of the discovery and explained to workers the significance of the sacred stones.

Ah Quin recalled a story of a woman who complained of a migraine headache. Her friend told her to lay down on one of the stones. Thirty minutes later, her migraine disappeared, Ah Quin said.

Pure coincidence, who knows?

"If you put faith on it, things do heal," Ah Quin said.

Waikiki Historic Trail

When: 9-11 a.m. Mondays through Saturdays

Where: Trail is divided into two tours. For the queen's tour, meet the historian at the information kiosk at Kapahulu and Kalakaua avenues. For the Kalia tour, meet the historian at the information kiosk at the Bishop Museum's Kalia site on the second floor of the Kalia Tower at the Hilton Hawaiian Village.

Cost: Free

For more information on the Waikiki Historic Trail, call the Native Hawaiian Hospitality Association at 841-6442 or go to Web site www.waikikihistorictrail.com

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