

The magic of Hawai‘i is not a mirage. It’s there for you to discover today, especially in the tales that reach back in time to when gods and goddesses mingled with mortals. Long before the Hawaiians had a written language, storytellers recounted the exploits of these supernatural beings in legends spiked with drama, romance and adventure. These myths continue to enthrall both Island residents and newcomers, whose visits are always enriched by the touch of mystical Hawai‘i.

MOLOKA'I



oloka'i residents like to tell the tale of 'Umiamaka, a young man from the western side of the island who excelled in

wrestling, boxing and other sports. Word of his prowess spread quickly, and one day a runner came from a nearby district, bringing a challenge from a man who claimed he could beat 'Umiamaka at any game.

'Umiamaka accepted the challenge and asked a priest to teach him the prayers needed for him to win the contest. The priest told him that no prayers would guarantee victory since the challenger was strong and skilled, and powerful gods protected him. "The people from that district have only one weakness," said the priest. "They will run from the squeal of a pig." And he told 'Umiamaka

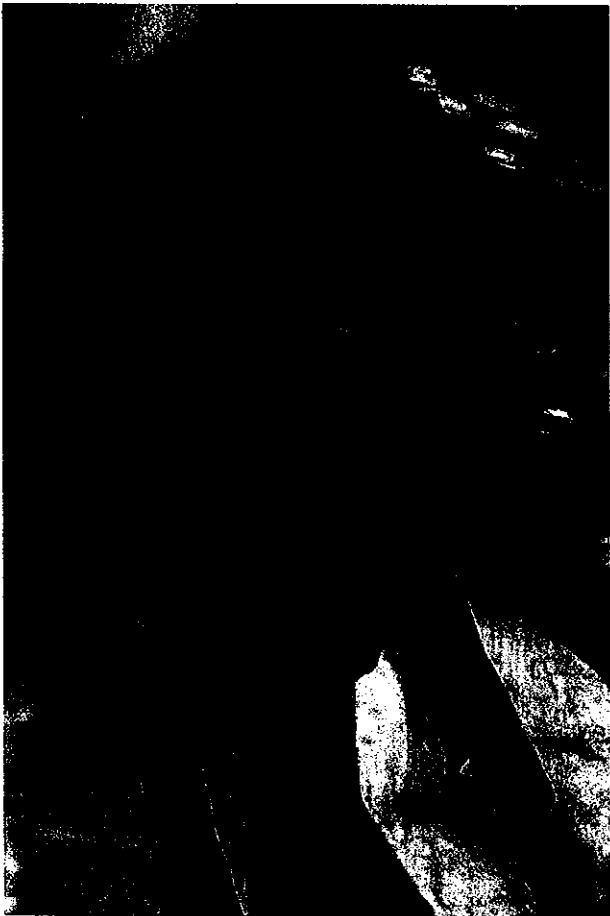
what he must do.

The day before the competition, 'Umiamaka walked up the mountain called Mauna Loa with a small black pig under his arm. He hid in the bushes and waited. Soon he heard the challenger and his friends approaching. As the group passed, 'Umiamaka pinched the pig until it squealed. Startled, the challenger and his gods fled. The gods of the forest transformed the rest of the group into a grove of *kauila* trees.

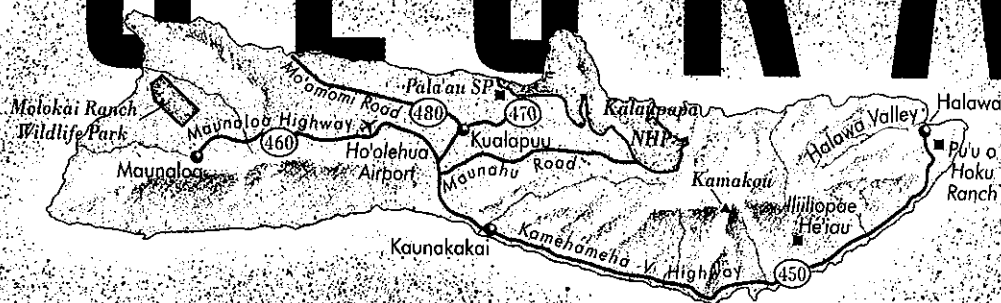
According to legend, Laka, the goddess of hula, taught the Hawaiians how to dance on Ka'ana, a hill on Mauna Loa. Each year in May, the Moloka'i Ka Hula Piko Festival (800-800-6367) at Papohaku Beach Park celebrates Moloka'i's distinction as the birthplace of the hula with lectures, religious ceremonies, excursions to sacred sites and inspiring presentations of the ancient Hawaiian dance.

Alive with aloha, this is the

island's biggest cultural event of the year. Aloha also pervades Kalaupapa, where the heroic Belgian priest, Father Damien de Veuster, ministered to an ailing out-cast congregation in the nineteenth century. The remote settlement is accessible by air, on foot and with the Moloka'i Mule Ride (800-567-7550). Mounted on sure-footed mules, you'll traverse 1,700 feet down a narrow, winding trail to windswept Kalaupapa, whose raw beauty and noble spirit make its poignant story all the more memorable.



MOLOKAI



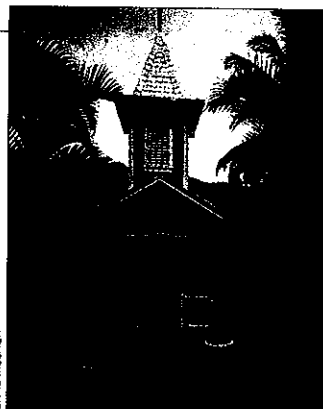
HAWAII'S HEAVENLY HOLDOUT

The ancient name of the island is Molokai Pule O'o, Molokai of the Powerful Prayer. It is the heart of Hawaii, not only geographically, but in the infinitely larger matters of the spirit.

When I've had enough of freeways, and more than enough of what passes for civilization, I indulge in Molokai daydreams. I see the island green, mist-haunted, time-warped. I see myself walking its quiet valleys, breathing its clean fragrance, trekking dunes, losing myself in the pristine cloud forest, finding myself beneath a blanket of stars. From the high-rise shores of Honolulu, I can see the hills of Molokai ghosting in the horizon haze, a mere 22 miles across the Kaiwi Channel, but a world away.

It's a small island, 38 miles from end to end and 10 miles wide. From the air, the land fades from the deep hunter greens of jungle and taro farms in the east to tawny umbers and ambers in the dry west. A fringe of ancient fish ponds scallops the shoreline. Clouds hide the mountaintops. There is a ribbon of road across the highlands—three cars are traveling it. A line of cliffs streaming with waterfalls marks the North Shore. I see a long gold beach with no one on it.

Molokai isn't for everyone. Travelers who want nightclubs, gourmet dining, orchids on the pillow, designer boutiques, computer ports, even the morning paper, will



DAVID JURENCH

This tiny church lies in Halawa Valley, the easternmost valley on Molokai and the only one accessible by car.

be disappointed. Instead, what you get is freedom.

Molokai is wild. The tallest sea cliffs in the world form a magnificent rampart against the white-haired waves of the ocean. The beaches are long and lonely; tides wash in and out, erasing nothing. Valleys with names that sing like an old litany—Waikolu, Wailau, Pelekunu—are graced with shimmering waterfalls that blow upward in the sea breezes.

I remember lazing one afternoon in the poky grass by the old R. W. Meyer Sugar Mill, now a museum, and watching sunlight gallop across the landscape, the way it does in Ireland, racing and slicing like

a saber. It caught some swooping mynah birds in flight, igniting the white feathers in their dark wings. Wind scattered the years like so much dandelion fluff.

In bygone days when mighty chiefs on larger islands warred with each other, Molokai, in the middle of the island chain, would have been a plum. Its saving grace was the powerful prayer of its kahuna (priests), who practiced a fearsome sorcery. The island's largest temple, Ililiopae, whose altars ran red with human blood, was famous throughout Hawaii. Its ruins now reside meekly, mutely in the sunshine. A grove of kukui trees, still regarded as sacred, marks the burial site of Lanikaula, the most powerful of the kahuna.

PHOTO: CONNIE COLEMAN/TONY STONE IMAGES

AMP: KAREN MINOT

MOLOKAI

According to John Kaimikaua, revered kumu hula (teacher), hula was born on Molokai. Although each island has a legend claiming it is the source of the dance, none celebrates with the enthusiasm of Molokai. The annual Ka Hula Piko festival, along the shores of Papohaku Beach Park each May, draws hula groups from around the state for a day of music, dance, arts, and eating.

The celebration begins solemnly in the dark before dawn at the top of a mountain, Kaana. I will never forget settling down at the summit, leaning against a rock beneath the star-pierced sky. The haunting notes of the conch shell horn called us to meditation. A subtle rustling of fabric and the whiff of ferns and maile vines brought our focus back to the moment, as dancers rose and began to sway, chanting, "Aloha e, aloha e," their bodies silhouetted against the stars.

Later in the day, we saw hulas that hadn't been danced publicly in years, ones that must have struck mortal terror in the hearts of the early Christian missionaries: the howling dog dance, the dance of the evil lizard, and the hula mai, in honor of royal fertility.

Having large families was always enormously important. Barren women seeking luck in the matter would go to the cool ironwood forest of what is now Pala'au State Park, spend the night beside "fertility rocks," and return home confident of bearing children.

The park is also the lookout for Makanalua Peninsula and Kalaupapa National Historical Park. It was there that Father Damien labored among exiled victims of Hansen's disease, leprosy (see sidebar, page 54). Surrounded on three sides by a rugged black lava coastline constantly under siege by high surf and on the fourth quadrant by sheer cliffs 2,000 feet high, Kalaupapa was a magnificent natural prison. While patients are now free to leave, some choose to remain in the place they have come to consider home.

Guide Richard Marks, whose father was a patient, says, "Before Damien, there were people who came here to help. The difference was, Damien stayed. Nobody else, not even doctors, would touch the lepers. He stepped ashore and

WILLIAM WATERFALL/PACIFIC STOCK

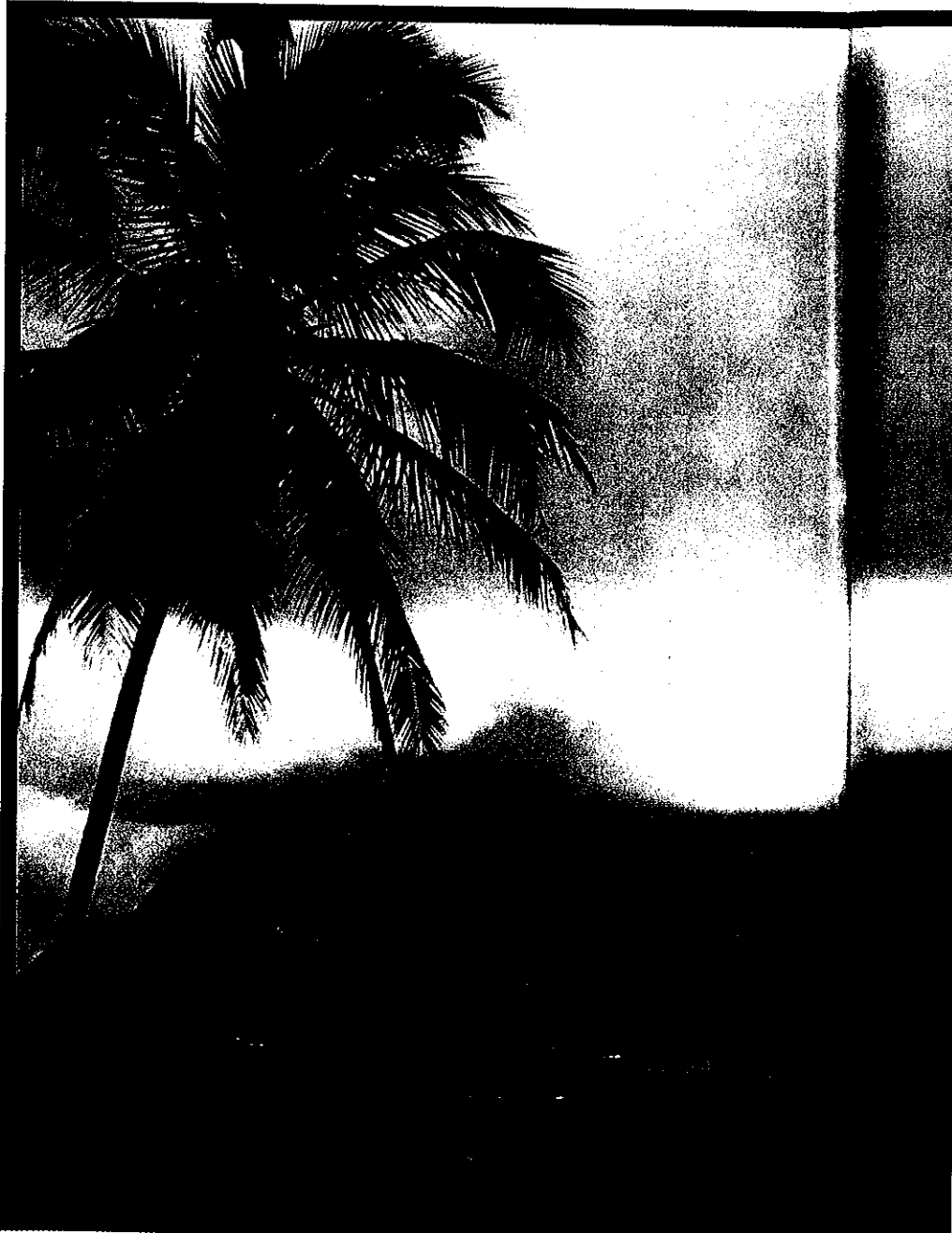


Wild Molokai

Molokai's eastern end is full of waterfall-slashed tropical forests, like this one in Halawa Valley (left). The North Shore features sea cliffs that rise 2,000 feet out of the ocean, making them some of the tallest sea cliffs in the world. At their feet lies the Kalaupapa Peninsula. The only way to reach it on land is down a steep trail by mule (right) or on foot.



JOE CARRIN/PACIFIC STOCK



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Kalaupapa then and now

With the help of his patients, Father Damien built a wharf, orphanage, hospital, and roads. He started farms and laid the pipes for a water system that is still in use.

Today, some 50 or so patients live in Kalaupapa. In 1980, the area became a national historical park. It includes a modern hospital, wooden churches, wind-worn homes (right), and sweeping views of Molokai's sea cliffs (below).



REX AMYDOR

JOE CARINI/PACIFIC STOCK

hugged them." People reach Kalaupapa by hiking, riding mules down the face of the palisades, or flying in. Patients conduct tours of the peninsula, which is one of the most beautiful sites in the world. I wonder if the beauty was any consolation to the people condemned to be there. The place has mana, spiritual power. It is baptized in suffering.

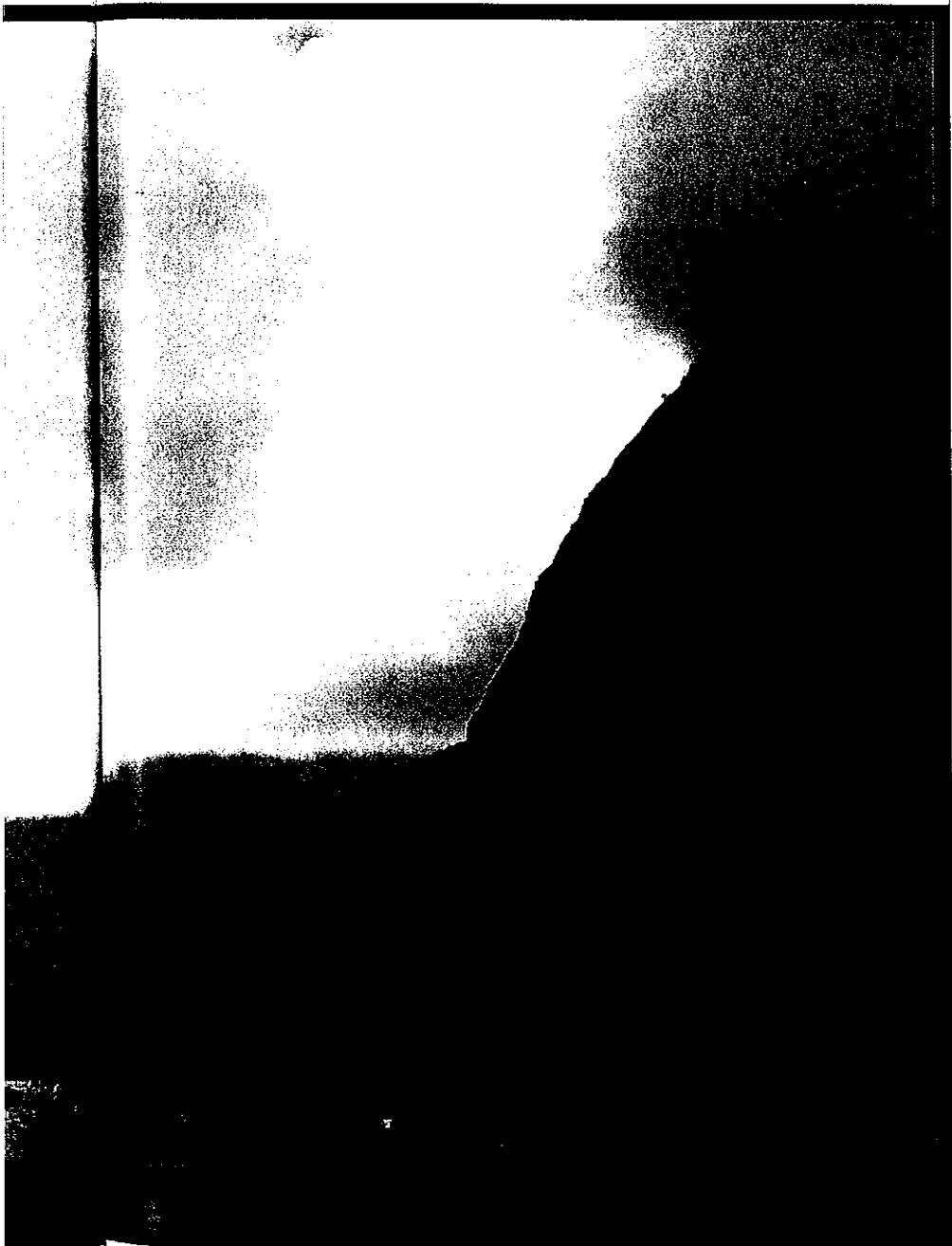
Molokai's natural splendor can be, at times, overwhelming.

Halawa Valley, the only one of the North Shore cleavages that is

accessible with any degree of ease, is thought by some archaeologists to have been the home of the first Polynesian settlers to arrive in Hawaii. Along the jungle trails leading to towering icy waterfalls, the remnants of an ancient civilization—fortification walls, agricultural terraces, habitation sites, animal enclosures, temples, and shrines—peek out everywhere.

The Nature Conservancy manages a 2,744-acre preserve at the top of Kamakou mountain in central Molokai. Hiking in the preserve is akin to exploring another world. It evokes some of the enchantment early explorers must have felt in coming upon sights so alien to everything they had previously known.

A slatted boardwalk creaks through the preserve's rain forest to the breathtaking Pepe'opae Bog. Walking the planks gingerly, I thought of a scene from a short story, wherein the characters walked along a wooden path suspended slightly above a steamy primeval jungle. They were warned not to step off the path and disturb even one leaf or they could alter the course of the earth's history, perhaps even erase the evolutionary line that led to themselves. Step off the walkway and I might trample a plant that is the lone survivor of a rare species and alter the future, for the plant may contain in its leaves, buds, or bark the cure for a killer disease, or it may simply be the host for an insect species that feeds a particular bird that pollinates a favorite tree, and so on up the intricately woven chain of life. Within Kamakou Preserve are at least 250 kinds of plants. Of these, 219 live nowhere else except Hawaii. The unique environment



Father Damien, A Lasting Legacy

On June 4, 1995, Joseph de Veuster, known to the world as Father Damien, was beatified in Belgium by Pope John Paul II. The priest who devoted his life to serving the exiled victims of Hansen's disease on Molokai was, in his day, controversial, a scourge to authorities, an outcast. His leprosy-ravaged face was an object of morbid fascination.

Father Damien was 33 years old when he landed at Kalaupapa in 1873. At the time of his arrival, the Hawaiian kingdom was staggering under the impact of contact with the outside world. Within a hundred years of the arrival of Captain James Cook in 1778, 90 percent of the people were dead of measles, cholera, typhus, and even colds. For Hawaiians, leprosy was by far the worst of the plagues, for the idea of banishment struck right at the heart of their philosophy of aloha, a love that regards each person as holy. Hawaiians called the disease mai ho'oka'awale, the separating sickness.

"Prepare for Molokai as for the grave" was a saying of the day. Kalaupapa was a lawless society. The people—bitter, weak, and desperate—had nothing to lose. What sentence passed could be worse than the one already handed to them?

Immediately, Damien began badgering authorities for building supplies, medicine, clothing, food. He slept outside, under a pandanus tree, until every patient had shelter. He visited the sick, built coffins, and buried more than 6,000.

In the midst of the horror, Kalaupapa's little St. Philomena Church became a place of joy. There were processions, hymns, pomp, and glory. Though leprosy attacks the vocal cords, Damien assembled choirs. At times, it took two people to play the organ, so that together there would be 10 fingers to make the music.

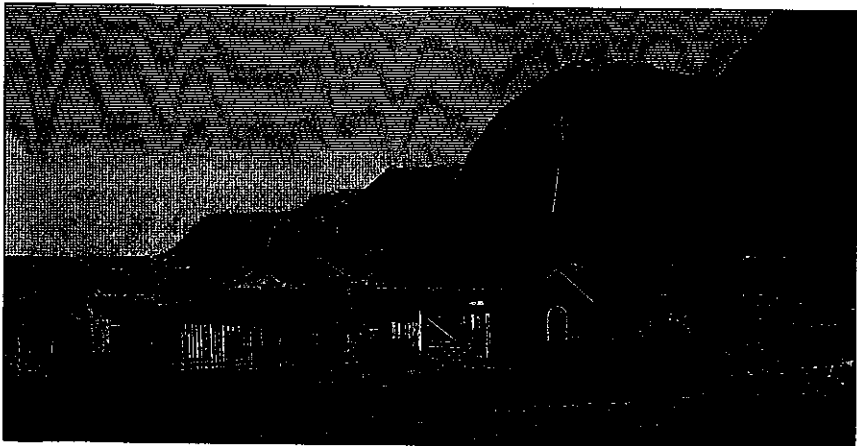
At some point, Damien contracted leprosy. He spoke of it as "a shortcut to heaven." When he died, he was buried beneath the tree where he had first slept. He was the only helper at Kalaupapa who contracted the disease—90 percent of Caucasians are immune. In 1936, amid wails and lamentations, his body was exhumed and returned to Belgium.

At the beatification ceremony in Brussels, a relic was presented to a delegation from Hawaii, some of whom were leprosy patients from Kalaupapa. It was the bones of the priest's right hand, the hand he blessed with. Catholic veneration of relics is consistent with Hawaiian belief in the spiritual power of bones. Following Hawaiian custom, the bones were wrapped in traditional kapa (bark cloth), then placed in a box of native koa wood.

The relic was welcomed in Honolulu in state ceremonies at Iolani Palace, where Hawaii's kings and queens once reigned. Finally it came home to Kalaupapa and, with great jubilation, was returned to the grave beneath the tree. More than 500 people flew in by small plane or hiked down the cliffs for the mass and a luau.

They recalled the words of the pope: "Holiness is not perfection according to human criteria; it is not reserved to a small number of exceptional beings. It is for everyone. . . . In your daily life, you are called upon to make choices which sometimes demand extraordinary sacrifices. This is the price of happiness."

Father Damien's house and church at Kalawao on the Kalaupapa Peninsula



Memorial sculpture of Father Damien at Kalaupapa.

MOLOKAI

shelters rare and endangered Hawaiian birds, such as the oloma'o (Molokai thrush) and the kakawahie (Molokai creeper), whose sole remaining habitat is Kamakou.

At the mountaintop, the rain forest ended as abruptly as it began. Before us was a vast Lilliputian garden of miniature ohia trees with scarlet blossoms as big as the plant, mounds of grasses running from russet to silver and viridian. Tended by winds, rains, mist, and sunshine, wild Pepe'opae looked as if it were lovingly nurtured by a Japanese gardener, the ultimate bonsai.

The Nature Conservancy's other Molokai preserve is completely different. "Mo'omomi Dunes is the best and also one of the last surviving strands of [Hawaiian] coastal vegetation left," says island naturalist Joan Aidem. "Condos, hotels, and houses have taken the rest. Many of the original plants have been destroyed."

The winds at Mo'omomi are relentless. They sweep in from the ocean, shaping and reshaping the miles of sand dunes, whipping the bay into white surf. Mo'omomi's appeal is in its uncompromising character, scoured, salt-sprayed, dry, and resolute. It bears the stamp of perseverance.

At Mo'omomi life is tough and low to the ground. The bones and roots of the weak are buried in the sand. A 25,000-year-old skeleton of a flightless gooselike bird was discovered in the shifting dunes. The moa nalo stood four feet high and managed to lay eggs the size of coconuts. Moa nalo shared the turf with a flightless ibis, a rail, a crow, a long-legged owl, and even an oceanic eagle, all now extinct. The area is still visited by native shorebirds, the hunakai (sanderling) and kolea (golden plover). Endangered Hawaiian monk seals haul themselves out of the ocean for sunbaths, and the green sea turtle

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