

Choosing a New OPIHI Intertidal Site

As of Spring 2006, 11 intertidal sites on Oahu, 2 sites on Molokai, and one site on Maui have been monitored by OPIHI (see Sites Surveyed by OPIHI). If your school isn't located near these sites, or you think other sites are better, please scope out new areas!

Some general criteria for choosing an OPIHI intertidal site:

- Is the site safe? A steep drop-off close to shore, big waves year round, etc. all aren't good. However, a site that is inappropriate in the winter due to high waves may calm and placid by spring.
- A site that is nearby will likely be more engaging to the students, since it is part of their local environment. However, many OPIHI teachers have monitored sites up to an hour away from their school with success.
- The site should be easily accessible – no long arduous steep treks from the bus to the intertidal (and bathrooms nearby are always nice!). Remember that some of the most popular sites are also the most degraded, and may have a low diversity of organisms, in addition to being overstressed.
- Site should be a rocky intertidal area (can have some sand patches, but sandy beaches don't work well as the sand shifts around so not much can grow there). However...
- Site should not be composed to huge boulders either. The maximum size rocks should average about head size - or large enough for the kids to flip over and look under without pulling their back muscles.
- The site should be wide enough to accommodate 4 or 5 transect groups spaced approximately 2m apart. Most sites can only handle a small amount of visitors at a time; smaller group of students are easier on both the site and the instructor(s).
- Sites should be at least 10m long. Thus, a transect should extend at least 10m into the water starting at the intertidal high tide mark. The 10m mark should end in a still-shallow area (no deeper than knee-deep water). Of course, the shallow water can go on for much further than this.
- Look around - are there different types of algae? Are there hiding places for critters? A yes to both of these questions means the site will be interesting. We don't want the kids just checking off "rock, sand, rock, sand, etc." on their data sheets - they'll get bored.

It is very important to check out the site on a similar low tide level as your field trips. Some great locations will be covered by water and disregarded at high tide. Get familiar with the area - take some pictures and look for organisms. Determine exactly where the transects will be laid and how long they should be, and anticipate how you can minimize any potential site issues. For instance, where might you place student clothing and/or lunches during a light drizzle?