THE SACREDNESS OF MAUNA KEA EXPLAINED

BY: CHRISTINE HITT

“Mauna Kea is considered to be kupuna (elder), the first born, and is held in high esteem. In native traditions, Mauna Kea is identified as ‘Ka Mauna a Wākea’ (The Mountain of Wākea — traditional god and father of Hawai‘i—who’s name is also written as Kea),” described Pualani Kanaka‘ole Kanahele in a 1999 oral history study by Kumu Pono Associates. Because Mauna Kea was the firstborn child of Papa and Wākea, the mauna is considered the piko (navel) of Hawai‘i Island. In the uppermost zones of Mauna Kea, one pu‘u, or cinder cone, has been confirmed to contain burials—Pu‘u Mākanaka, which literally means “hill crowded with people.” Four other pu‘u are also considered likely to contain burials. Oral histories passed down through families have also shared that there are burials on the slopes of Mauna Kea. Alexander Kanani‘alika Lancaster in the 1999 oral history report by Kumu Pono Associates mentions that he went up the mountain “for ceremonial. They go up there bless the whole mountain for all our ancestors who’s buried up there… the old folks always said, ‘Our family is up there.’”

Piko deposition also occurs in the form of a burial on Mauna Kea, and it’s become a practice for some people to scatter the cremated remains of loved ones on the mountain.