



My Drift

Title: Parker Ranch

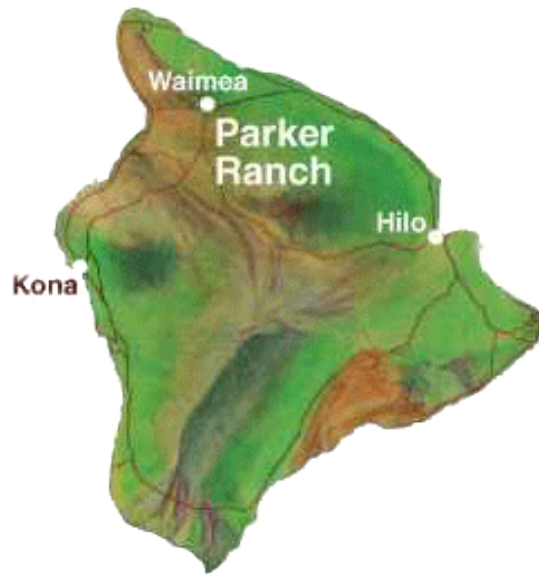
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Parker Ranch



Parker Ranch is a working cattle ranch on the Big Island of Hawaii. As the above maps show, Parker Ranch is located at the base of Mauna Kea (The tallest mountain on Earth) and goes all the way to the ocean. It currently encompasses 175,000 acres which makes it the largest ranch in Hawaii and the ninth largest cow operation in the U.S. There are approximately 27,000 head of cattle, mostly Angus and Charolais breeds, and 250 horses on the ranch.



Parker Ranch Headquarters with Mauna Kea in the Background



Parker Ranch Center in the Town of Waimea (Population 7,000)

Parker Ranch Center is where friends and visitors find everything! Located in Waimea, this shopping center is anchored by the popular tourist attraction Parker Ranch Store and the life-size, historic Ikua Purdy statue. The Center has over 30 Big Island product retailers and is known for its Fireside Food Court with 32 historic Paniolo (Hawaiian Cowboy) murals depicting the Paniolo country cowboy heritage.



Statue of famed Paniolo Ikua Purdy

Parker Ranch is famous for its Hawaiian paniolos, who trace their roots to Mexican cowboys taken to the island in the 1830s. The official definition of the Hawaiian word Paniolo is “a person who herds cattle or a cowboy”.



Hawaiian Paniolos



Some Parker Ranch Cows

Okay, we now know a little bit about the current Parker Ranch. Let's look at the long history of this famous ranch.

History of Parker Ranch

Of Cows and the King



It began with five cows—brought across the ocean by British Captain George Vancouver in 1788, just ten years after James Cook first landed in Hawai'i. Vancouver presented the cows to King Kamehameha I, who ruled the eight Hawaiian Islands as one kingdom for the first time. The King set his cows free to roam Hawai'i Island, and declared them to be *kapu* (off limits).

Over the next 20 years, the King's cows multiplied into thousands. And when Massachusetts sailor John Palmer Parker, 19, jumped ship to visit Hawai'i in 1809, maverick cattle dominated the countryside, wreaking havoc on family farms and gardens.



John Palmer Parker

Parker stayed for a time, tended fishponds for the King and went to sea again during the War of 1812—and when he returned to Hawai‘i to live, he brought a new, state-of-the-art American musket. The King gave Parker exclusive permission, not only to shoot the wild cattle, but to supply meat and hides for local and foreign consumption. The musket is still in possession of Parker Ranch.

In less than a year, a thriving salt beef industry replaced sandalwood as the Island’s chief export, and Parker quickly grew into a respected man of wealth and influence. He learned to speak Hawaiian, adopted Hawaiian ways and in 1816, married Chiefess Kipikane, granddaughter of King Kamehameha I. They were awarded two acres of land on the slopes of Mauna Kea where they built the homestead “Mana Hale,” had three children, and began the Parker dynasty that would play a prominent role in the next two centuries of Hawaiian history.

The Monarchy



King Kamehameha I

King Kamehameha I died in 1819, barely a decade after he and John Parker had met. The kingdom had already seen dramatic change: a population devastated by foreign disease, forests depleted, traditional farming and trade rapidly replaced with commercialism, and a major shift away from Polynesian values to those of Americans and Europeans.

The next King, Kamehameha's young son, essentially ended the "old ways" by having a public meal with his mother and female advisors, which rendered the *kapu* against men and women eating together meaningless. One year later, Christian missionaries sailed in and helped fill the spiritual void for many. The Hawai'i John Parker first saw in 1809 was a very different place.



Kamehameha II



Kamehameha III

After the untimely death of young Kamehameha II, his brother ruled the Kingdom for 29 years as Kamehameha III, the longest reign of any Hawaiian monarch. During this period, he enacted a new constitution that eventually led to a land distribution act called the "Great Mahele" which allowed for private land ownership for the first time.



Spanish-Mexican Vaquero (Cowboys)

John Parker purchased 1640 acres in 1850 and leased land in the Waikoloa region from Kamehameha III. This king was the person responsible for bringing the paniolo to Hawai'i, inviting Spanish-Mexican vaquero (cowboys) from California to help train Hawaiians to rope and handle cattle. Because they spoke Spanish, they were called "paniolo" and the island embraced their rich tradition of music, colorful culture, family values, and hard work, all of which lives on to this day at Parker Ranch.



King Kalakaua

John Parker’s grandson Samuel “Kamuela” Parker was a classmate of David Kalākaua, who would become Hawaii’s first elected King in 1874 (the “Merrie Monarch”). Samuel himself became involved in politics during the chaotic era near the end of the century. He was Minister of Foreign Affairs for Queen Lili‘uokalani on the day she was deposed in 1893, and he helped negotiate a surrender to avoid bloodshed. Samuel’s daughters, Helen and Eva Parker, were friends of Princess Ka‘iulani, and, sadly, riding horseback in a rainstorm on Parker Ranch led to her illness and untimely death a few months later.



Sam Parker

Modern History



Thelma with Baby Richard

About this time, Alfred Wellington Carter, a respected Honolulu businessman and judge, became guardian of Thelma Kahiluonapuaapi'ilani Parker, great-great-granddaughter of John Parker, great-niece of Samuel and fifth-generation Ranch heir. Because her father died at age 19 when Thelma was two years old, mother Elizabeth ("Aunt Tootsie") raised her daughter alone. She saw the wisdom of hiring a strong ranch manager to help protect Thelma's interests and the Ranch's future. Carter became that champion, guiding its growth with a steady hand for nearly 50 years.



Alfred Wellington Carter

Carter was an innovator, focused on improving and expanding Ranch operations, as well as raising horses, which he loved. Under his leadership, and because of his relationships with high-ranking people, Parker Ranch supplied horses to the U.S. Cavalry when it was still mounted, and to the Army, including General Patton. The ranch also sold horses to the Emperor of Japan for his Royal Riding Stable.



Parker Ranch Horses

In times of bounty, Carter shared the abundance with the ranching *‘ohana* by instituting a home ownership program. Through no-interest loans and reasonable payment schedules, it became possible for many families to own their own property. Through the auspices of Carter, Parker Ranch also shared its bounty with the Waimea community through educational resources, donations to charitable organizations and care of the elderly.



Aunt Tootsie with Richard Smart

Thelma's son Richard Smart was born in 1913, sixth-generation and final heir to Parker Ranch. Carter continued to manage the Ranch and advise Smart, and under his (and later son Hartwell Carter's) direction, Parker Ranch grew to over 500,000 acres and 30,000 head of cattle.

Waimea had hosted the U.S. military in the past, but when World War II swept the winds of change across Parker Ranch again, this time it brought in truckloads of cold, exhausted Marines after the horrific battle of Betio. Richard Smart leased acreage to the Marine Corps, who set up what was called "Camp Tarawa" to honor one of the Corps' greatest sacrifices and began training for attacks on Iwo Jima and Okinawa. Almost overnight, the paniolo town became home to 50,000 young men far from home and Waimea changed forever.



Camp Tarawa on Parker Ranch near Waimea

Waimea leapt into the twentieth century because of the technology and plenty that seemed to have followed the Marines into town. An electric generator allowed settlement houses to be lit by bulb rather than kerosene. The Waimea Elementary School and the Waimea Hotel became a 400-bed hospital with modern medical facilities. The engineers dammed the Waikoloa stream, constructed reservoirs to supply water to the division and the town. An icehouse helped Marine cooks to turn out seeming tons of ice cream for delighted town children and adults.

In a wild rodeo, Marines challenged the local paniolo to feats of cowboy skill. The results of this contest were not close but no serious injuries to the Marines resulted. Bruised contestants consumed several steers at the barbecue that the ranch threw for the competitors.



Hawaii's First Rodeo

The Ranch's first rodeo was Hawaii's first rodeo, held on the 4th of July 1944, now an annual tradition, thanks to the U.S. Marine Corps. The rodeo, horseraces, and other fun events have been held every year except one. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Parker Ranch canceled their annual 4 July rodeo in 2020.



Richard Smart

After the war, Richard Smart, a gifted actor and musician, continued his career in theater, performing on Broadway and across Europe—with stage “royalty” like Carol Channing, Charlie Chaplin, Mary Martin and more. He returned to the Ranch to stay in 1960, and resided in Puuopelu, the grand “Hawaiian Victorian” house purchased by John Parker II in 1879.

During the 60’s, as the Island’s sugar cane economy began to wane, venture capitalist Laurance S. Rockefeller visited Hawai‘i, at the invitation of the new state’s first Governor, William S. Quinn. Smart signed a 99-year lease with Rockefeller on 500 acres near the ocean, unsuitable for grazing. “It’s on land the cows don’t like but the tourists love—hot and barren,” he said in an interview with *People* magazine. Overlooking the beautiful crescent-shaped beach at Kauna‘oa, Rockefeller created his visionary Mauna Kea Beach Hotel, which catalyzed resort development on the Kohala Coast.

And, coming full circle, Rockefeller also obtained the land at Pu‘ukoholā, the site of King Kamehameha I’s great temple—built to fulfill the prophecy that he would one day unite and rule the Hawaiian Islands. He had the site renovated and donated it to the National Park Service.

Richard Smart resided in Waimea for the remainder of his life, taking on an active and forward-thinking role in the Ranch and the community, building a shopping plaza to support local businesses. He sold coastal Waikoloa lands for more luxury resort development, and mauka acreage for what is now Waikoloa Village. In 1980, he built the Kahilu Theater (named for his mother) as a home for the arts in Waimea. Smart passed away in 1992, after creating the Parker Ranch Foundation Trust to help serve the education and health needs of the community, with four beneficiaries: Queen’s North Hawaii Community Hospital, Parker School Trust Corporation, Hawai‘i Preparatory Academy and Hawai‘i Community Foundation.



The Ranch’s legacy moves forward confidently, with the strong leadership of the Trust, and its story continues to be written by the people who live and work there, and honor the vision, values, and tradition of the living Parker Ranch legacy.

As we just found out, Parker Ranch has quite a long and interesting history.

Have you ever visited the town of Waimea and Parker Ranch?

I have been there once. Here is the story:

In 1972, a couple of years after I come to Hawaii, I used to hangout at this bar on King Street near where I lived called the Lauhala Room. Yes, I was still single at the time. There were a lot of interesting people who came to this bar. One was the foreman of Parker Ranch. He came to Oahu 2 or 3 times a year for supplies and always stopped at the Lauhala Room. On one of these visits, he invited me and two other bar regulars to come to the Big Island to hunt wild pigs. We accepted and flew over on a Friday afternoon and hunted the pigs on Saturday. The ranch provided the pig hunting guide, guns, and the dogs.



Polynesian Boar

(The feral hogs (wild pigs) are running around on all Hawaii main islands and are descendants of the original pigs Polynesians brought with them to the islands as many as 800 years ago.)

Saturday night we had roasted pig and beer. We came back to Oahu on Sunday. It was a fun trip!

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