From ancient times, the island names of this archipelago were remembered in the stories and creation chants, and for some of the islands, their names were remembered but their locations were forgotten by man.

To bring back this once commonplace knowledge, the following is a compilation of the island chain. This name is used in many Hawaiian Islands whose waves wrap around the island and come together to intensify each rise and fall within the bay.

Manawai, Holoikauaua (Pearl and Hermes Atoll)

Manawai, which means “warped, depressed or bent in,” provides the imagery of the spiritual process of bending inward to reveal the unchanging nature of one’s true undying spirit. It can also be defined as “branching water.” Waikouloha directly relates to the word ‘iulohioloha, which literally translates to “the quadruped running in the rough seas.”

Kapou, Papa’apo (Lisianski Island)

Kapou, meaning “post, pillar, pole or shaft,” refers to the priests who specialized in the construction planning of heiau. The name also refers to Adams Bay, the only major bay in the Northwestern Hawaiian National Marine Monument Boundary.

Kamole, Kau‘i (Laywan Island)

Kamole means “ancestral root, foundation, source or cause,” such as a root that runs through the earth and traces one’s ancestry back to the source. Kamole also describes the location of Laywan Island, the first major landfall following French Frigate Shools moving toward the northwest. Kau‘i, meaning “egg,” describes both the island’s shape and the abundance of seabirds that nest here.

Kamokuakamohalii, Ko’analako’a, Nalukakalu (Moré Reef)

Kamokuakamohalii’s name is the island of Kamokuakamohalii, the shark deity. The name signifies the extremely high number of sharks prevalent at Moré Reef, more than any other location in the Monument. Ko’analako’a literally means “the settlement of coral,” referring to Moré’s expansive coral reefs.

Kapou, Papa’, Moku Manu (Liloa Island)

In Hawaiian, Nihoa means “jagged” or “toothed,” likely referring to the island’s many craggy cliffs creating a profile that resembles a tooth. Kuhikuhipu’uone was sometimes added in chants, referring to the person who specialized in the construction planning of houses. Moku Manu means “33 shrines along its kua (spine) and the Hawaiian axes of life and death that cross directly over it.”

Kuaihelani, Holoikauaua (Kure Atoll)

Holoikauaua, meaning “bringing forth heavens,” is a single name that stands alone, corresponding to the location of Kure Atoll at the very end of the island chain. This name is used in many different contexts to describe the homeland of gods such as Kāne and Kamokuakamohalii’s, and Wānui’s. Moku manua literally means “flat island,” which was ascribed to Kure Atoll by Hawaiian Kingdom officials in the 19th century, when King David Kalākaua sent a survey to the atoll to take “formal possession” of it.

Lalo, Kāne’milo’hii, Moku pāpapa (French Frigate Shoals)

The word lalo means “down, downward, low, under, below, depth, west or leeeward.” Lalo is closely associated with the direction of pit (darkness) or ancestral lands “where dwelt the souls of gods.”

Lalo depicts low-lying islands partially submerged below the surface, which apply describes the atoll. Recorded in chants, the name Moku pāpapa refers to an island, or islands, northwest of Niihau. The nearest should-like place is French Frigate Shoals, an atoll of reefs, low sand islets, and the 120-foot-high Lā Pūrie Pinnacle. Moku (islet) combined with pāpapa (low, flat, expansive reef) means “islets with low-laying reefs.” It is said that on this low, flat sand island, Pele (the volcano goddess) left one of her brothers, Kānemilo’hii, as a guardian during her first journey to Hawai‘i from Tahiti.

Mokumanamana, Kamokumanamana, Hā‘ena (Neeper Island)

Mokumanamana is often translated as “branching” or “pinnacled,” which is a suitable description of the island. But many people who have studied its religious and cultural sites suggest that the repetition of the word moku (island) relates to the spiritual significance of the island, given the 33 passes along its kua (spine) and the Hawaiian axes of life and death that cross directly over it. The name Hā‘ena, defined as “red-hot burning heat,” possibly refers to the intensity of a specific kapu (restriction) or sacredness of the island. Hānakekeumoe, “late night bay,” refers to Shark’s Bay. Hana means “bay” while an refers to a type of movement from one period of time and space to another, and moe implies “to put to rest” or pass on to the afterlife. Together they reference Kea Alo Pāhehē a Kāne or “The Dark Shining Path of Kāne,” often used as a metaphor for the path to the afterlife.

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