

MANGO TREE GROVE ALONG THE OLD GOVERNMENT ROAD BETWEEN
THE 1960 KAPOHO LAVA FLOW AND WA'A WA'A

The mango tree grove along this segment of the Old Government road is exceptional culturally, historically and scenically. Towering trees line the road forming an almost unbroken cathedral-like ceiling. Old stone walls, hala, rose apple, avacado trees, hau, awapui, and other greenery add to the landscape as far as the eye can see. There are increasingly few places left on the islands that so compellingly embody the feeling of Old Hawai'i.

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File No. _____ By _____
Date 10/9/02
County Council

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL VALUE:

John Ka'iewe, Jr. who was born in 1929, was interviewed by Kepa Maly in his survey of the Old Government Road north of this segment. He reported that the mango trees that lined this road and other trails were purposely planted by Hawaiians to provide shelter and fruit for the traveler. To this day, many people collect mango, avacado, and rose apple from along the road. In fact, much of the mango pickle in Puna probably comes from these trees on a good year. The present alignment of the road and some of the adjacent walls date from the 1890's. The trees are estimated to be around the same age.

John T. Faris in his 1929 book "Paradise of the Pacific" described a dense tropical jungle of guava, coconut and mango trees along the road as he was walking north from Kapoho.

The mango tree grove along the Old Government Road passes through the ahupua'a of Kahuwai, site of the ancient village of Kahuwai, now owned by Kamehameha Schools. There is extensive archeology in this ahupua'a, and the neighboring ahupua'a as well. Kam Schools has recently put up signage along the road that says "Na Kupuna Crossing", below that, a mele, and also signs warning "Kapu, Hawaiian Burial Sites, Protected by Law" on both sides of the road. Kam Schools is running an outreach program there, giving keiki cultural experiences and teaching Hawaiian history.

SCENIC VALUE:

A person need only travel the road once to remember it forever. One woman traveler with whom I talked to said that the mango tree grove along the road and the scenic corridor that surrounds it was what she spoke of most when relating her travel experiences to friends back on the mainland. Her impression is a very common one among tourists, visitors and residents. In fact, it is designated as a "Site of Natural Beauty" in the present County General Plan.

Comm. No. 725.4
File No. HCCIGEN
Ref. To: Presented Council
Ref. Date OCT 09 2002

The road and mango tree grove is noted as a scenic area in guide books, including, "Hawai'i: The Big Island Revealed" (picture) and "Country Roads of Hawai'i". From the latter, "...the shore road enters the tropical forest through a tunnel of giant mango trees, hanging vines, bird's nest ferns, coconut palms, pandanus, and every other species that Puna has to offer. Drive slowly and savor the experience."

George Gordan Berry may have said it best in a 1960 piece he wrote for the Honolulu Star Bulletin, "Along the rugged volcanic cliffs of Puna's undulating seacoast, Nature has designed an extravagant sampling of true South-Sea Island beauty....The roads are narrow, often unpaved, but with it all delightfully rural, quaint, picturesque. Everywhere is green, damp, rank, exotic."

Testimony from:
Sherry Kelso for
Malama O Puna and
The Wa'a wa'a-Koa'e Road Action Committee