Introduction

For such a small, populous island, O'ahu has a varied, extensive, and distinctive network of mountain trails. Who developed those trails, and why and how did they build them? The story starts with the birth of the island and ends with trail crews of enthusiastic volunteers.

Two volcanoes, Ko'olau and Wai'anae, created O'ahu several million years ago. Their rugged remnants remain as two parallel mountain ranges that dominate the topography and restrict human habitation to the lowlands. Early Hawaiians lived in the coastal areas and their associated watersheds. The current population of about a million is still concentrated near the shore or on the gentle upland between the two ranges.

Through the years O'ahu inhabitants developed trails into and across the mountain barriers for various reasons. Early Hawaiians blazed ridge and valley routes for travelers, plant gatherers, bird catchers, and woodcutters. Sugar plantations constructed trails to access ditches that tapped stream water for their thirsty cane. The U.S. Army built trails for training and island defense against enemy attack. The Territorial Forestry Division and the Civilian Conservation Corps constructed trails for reforestation, wild pig control, and unemployment reduction. Volunteers and hiking clubs created additional routes solely for recreation.

The result of all that varied activity is a network of just over a hundred trails, a precious and special resource on our crowded island. The people of O'ahu are fortunate indeed to be able to enjoy a relaxing or challenging outing in the wild mountains so close to home.

This volume compiles the history of fifty of those trails. Most of them still exist, and many are open to the public for hiking; others are closed, and a few are long gone. Not included are numerous trails whose written and oral history is sketchy or whose route has become a paved automobile road.

The trails included are arranged in chronological chapters by the group or organization that built them. The history thus starts with Hawaiian trails before 1800 and ends with volunteer trails of the 1990s. Each chapter has an overview section that describes the background and purpose of the
trail building during the period covered. Each trail history is self-contained, recording the major events from construction through 2010.

If you are particularly interested in O'ahu trail history, by all means read the book from cover to cover. Otherwise, use this volume as you would a guidebook. Before hiking a particular trail, look up its history and then peruse the accompanying overview section. Over the years you may eventually read the entire book.