

## Haiku or Ha'ikū?

By Fred, 12-01-2007

(freddyhonolulu@hotmail.com)

**Ha'ikū** is a place name for a valley, a road, a stairway in *Kāne'ōhe, O'ahu* and a town on the island of *Maui*. **Ha'ikū** is not pronounced HAI-koo like the Japanese poetry form.

*Ha'ikū* ≠ HAI-koo

**Ha'ikū** is a three syllable word, not a two syllable word; an *'okina* separates the *a* and the *i* and indicates that there is no *ai* diphthong as there are in the two words *Hawai'i* and *Waikīkī*, which both have *ai* diphthongs. Although **Ha'ikū** is often written *Haiku* without the Hawaiian consonant known as an *'okina* (‘) and the line over the *u* known as a *kahakō* or macron, it should still be pronounced correctly as if they were there.

*'okina* literally means

“cutting off, separation”

*kahakō* literally means

“long vowel sound mark”

**F**or various reasons, the *'okina* and *kahakō* are often omitted from the spelling of Hawaiian words that have them; stripped of these elements it is often difficult to determine the correct pronunciation, unless one knows better.

**A**lthough the omission of the

*'okina* and *kahakō* may make understandable a mistake in pronunciation, it is not a justification for a change in pronunciation.

**A** good comparison to **Ha'ikū** is *Lā'ie*, a town on the windward side of *O'ahu*. Like **Ha'ikū**, *Lā'ie* is often stripped of the *'okina* and *kahakō* in spelling, but to pronounce the town *Laie* (*Lā'ie*) as a two syllable word with an *ai* diphthong, like LAI-eh, would be roundly disapproved; however, **Ha'ikū** is commonly accepted when mispronounced.

**Ha'ikū** is more often than not mispronounced on television and radio, further compounding the problem and leading people to conclude that the HAI-koo pronunciation is acceptable and correct. HAI-koo can not even be considered an alternative pronunciation, it simply is incorrect and wrong.

**Ha'ikū** should be pronounced HAH-ee-KOO with stress on the capitalized syllables and the *kahakō* over the *u* indicates a long vowel sound for the last syllable.

HAH-ee-KOO

**T**he image below is from page 34 of *Place Names of Hawaii* by Pukui/Elbert. The hyphen indicates that **Ha'ikū** is composed of two words, *ha'i* and *kū*.

**Ha'i-kū.** Land division and point, Honomū qd., Hawai'i. Land section, Lihue district, Kaua'i. Quadrangle, land section, village, elementary school, park, reservoir, ditch, East Maui. Valley, Kāne'ōhe qd., O'ahu. *Lit.*, speak abruptly or sharp break.