

Olo, Alaia and Paipo

The use of long (up to 18 feet), narrow *olo* surfboards (fashioned from *wiliwili* wood) was reserved for the hereditary chiefly *ali'i*, who also claimed exclusive use of certain surf spots. Violators of this *kapu* could be put to death in unpleasant ways.

Commoner people were restricted to the shorter, wider, and thinner *alaia* boards (6 to 8 feet long) or small *paipo* boards (ridden on the belly). The *alaia* were suited to maneuvering on the waves, whereas surfing on the *olo* boards was much more of a straight-line affair.

Varying descriptions of the techniques of the early surf-riding may be traced to these differences in the vehicles and the styles of surfing appropriate to each.



Olo, alaia, and paipo boards displayed in the Hawaiian Hall of the Bishop Museum in Honolulu. Carefully crafted and hydrodynamically sophisticated, each type of board had a function and status in pre-contact Hawaiian culture.