

# HAWAII'S UNPRONOUNCEABLE TREASURE

*By George Plohn – one of his fortés is geography*

## **Aloha! Welcome to Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument – where nature and culture are one**



Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument is the largest contiguous fully protected conservation area under the U.S. flag, and the largest marine conservation areas on Earth. It encompasses 139,797 square miles of the Pacific Ocean - an area larger than all the country's national parks combined.

The Northwestern Hawaiian Islands Marine National Monument was established by Presidential Proclamation 8031 on June 15, 2006 under the authority of the Antiquities Act. It was expressly created to protect an exceptional array of natural and cultural resources. A year later, it was given its Hawaiian name, Papahānaumokuākea.

On 26 August 2016, President Obama quadrupled the remote US monument, expanding it from 139,000 sq mi to more than 579,000 sq mi – twice the size of Texas.

Dozens of tiny islands, atolls and shoals, spanning 1,200 nautical miles of the world's largest ocean, are slowly, quietly slipping into the sea, destined to become

seamounts. Hundreds of miles north of Kaua'i, places like Nihoa, Laysan, Pearl and Hermes and Kure comprise the little known, rarely visited Northwestern Hawaiian Islands (NWHI).

If they were laid atop the continental United States, the NWHI would cover a distance equal to that between New York City and Omaha, or Boston and the Florida Everglades.

These ancient volcanic remnants with their fringes of truly wild coral reefs remind us of our past—when coral reefs and sea life across the planet thrived—a time before humans became top predator in the ocean food chain.

Beyond biological significance, the area boasts a rich cultural history. During their Trans-Pacific voyages, ancient Polynesians sailed these waters and used these islands for centuries as places of residence and worship. When Western explorers found these islands they raced to claim them for their own nations, after original Polynesian settlement. In 1778, the English explorer Captain James Cook became the first European to discover the Hawaiian Islands and named the island group the Sandwich Islands, in honor of John Montague, who was the earl of Sandwich and one his patrons. Entrepreneurs tried to make a living from natural resources found there, and later the world's first global communications network linked through these islands. During World War II the US military developed Midway into a naval air station and submarine base, and the definitive battle of the conflict (Battle of Midway/1942) occurred in adjacent waters.