

THE BATTLE FOR MAUNNA KEA

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With an uninterrupted view of the clouds floating above the volcanic land and the deep blue Pacific Ocean, the mountain stands firm. Its name is Mauna Kea, which means *white mountain*. Native Hawaiians gave the dormant volcano its descriptive name for the beauty found in its snow-capped peaks. Reaching high above the Big Island of Hawaii, Mauna Kea stands at an astonishing 33,500 feet tall when measured from its base in the ocean depths to its tallest peak. This measurement from base to peak makes Mauna Kea the tallest mountain in the world.

To understand the battle for the mountain, one must understand two main ideas that encompass Mauna Kea. The first is that Mauna Kea is the premier site in the world to study astronomy. The latter is the ideal among native Hawaiians that Mauna Kea is an extremely sacred and cultural site. Why is Mauna Kea so valuable to these two groups of people? Furthermore, why is there an ongoing battle between these two groups for the rights to Mauna Kea?

Many factors contribute to Mauna Kea's distinction as an ideal location for astronomical research. The mountain's high elevation raises the telescopes' views above the murky clouds, giving researchers an uninterrupted view of the night sky. The darkness that surrounds Mauna Kea's peaks eradicates research complications brought on by light pollution. Furthermore, the mountain's location in the middle of the Pacific Ocean ensures clear weather nearly 300 days a year. Together these qualities certify the belief that Mauna Kea is "one of the best places on Earth to study the stars" (Selingo 1). It is no surprise then that Mauna Kea is already home to thirteen telescopes, located within 11,288 acres of the Mauna Kea Science Reserve, which is managed by the University of Hawai'i (Callis 1). These telescopes contribute to the