

Kona Historical Society's
Portuguese Stone Oven



Every Thursday the Kona Historical Society practices the traditional art of baking Portuguese bread in a large wood-fired forno. Come be a part of this event where visitors and locals get together to talk story, roll dough, and bake delicious, brown loaves of bread. Participation is free. You may buy loaves of bread for \$8.

Fornos, or Portuguese ovens, were once found throughout the Hawaiian islands wherever the Portuguese congregated.

In the 1870's, Portuguese from the Azores and Madeira immigrated to Kona to help develop and manage dairies, a key phase of the ranching industry in Hawai'i. The outdoor hive-type oven, made with cemented stone, was a constant presence wherever the Portuguese dairymen and sugar plantation workers settled. They brought with them their knowledge of dairying on tropical islands and their love of freshly baked bread. Other Kona ethnic groups came to enjoy Portuguese bread and selling bread became an important supplement to Portuguese families' income. With the help of many knowledgeable and hard working volunteers, KHS was able to build a replica stone oven in the lower pasture.



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PORTUGUESE SWEET BREAD PAO DOCE (THIS IS KHS' SECRET RECIPE. SHH! DON'T TELL ANYONE.)

Makes 4 loaves

Mix together in a big bowl:

Warm water -2 cups
Dry yeast- 4 pkg.

Then stir in:

Sugar- 2 cups
Butter, melted- 2 sticks
Eggs- 4

Stir in- one cup at a time:

Bread flour
approximately 8 cups, slowly stir/knead
in up to 2 more cups.

When the dough is too difficult to stir, turn dough out on floured table and knead in the rest of the flour for about 3-5 minutes. Add more flour if needed to keep the dough from sticking to the board. Put the dough back into the bowl and cover it until it has doubled in size (about 1 hour). Punch the dough down and divide it evenly into 4 loaves of dough. Pinch off 7 equal pieces of dough from each loaf, roll and place in greased 9-inch round aluminum pie pans. Cover the dough and let rise again until doubled (about 1 hour). Brush with egg wash (1 egg mixed with 2Tbsp. water). Bake in a 400 degree oven for about 20-30 minutes or until golden brown.



Construction

of Kona Historical Society's stone oven began in May 2005. Volunteers laid out the circumference by setting a stake as the center and using string to mark

a circle of stakes 8 feet in diameter; then they began building the circular base out of volcanic rock and cement until it stood about 3 feet high. Once the base was built it was leveled with sand, and fire bricks were set on top to form the floor of the oven. A "spider web" of a dozen rebar and wire was then put on top of the base

to support the two layers of rocks and cement --14 inches thick in some places--that would form the roof of the oven. As the sides and roof went up, a metal groove for the metal door to slide into was



also installed. A rock and cement trough was built in the front to accommodate the coals that are dragged out of the oven before the bread is baked. The oven was left to dry for about a month and the rebar was taken out.

In January 2006, a volunteer came faithfully every other

day for 2 weeks to "cure" the oven. At first he built small fires for 15 minutes then gradually worked up to several hours, so that the stones and cement would heat slowly to avoid cracking.



When making bread in the stone oven, correctly timing the rising of the dough and the heating of the oven is crucial. The dough must be ready to go into the oven when the coals come out and the stones are the right temperature for baking. The weather can affect how the dough rises and the stones heat, so baking in the old style can be quite a challenge, but carrying on the tradition is so rewarding. Every time the brown, sweet smelling loaves come out of the forno- it's magic!

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