

KODIAK ARCHAEOLOGY FACTS

Native people have lived in the Kodiak archipelago for at least 7,500 years, yet the written record of their history extends back just 250 years, to the time of Russian contact. Archaeological sites offer the opportunity to study the remaining 7,250 years of Alutiiq history. They are an Alutiiq library.

- There are more than 12,200 prehistoric archaeological sites in Alaska. Over 900 of these are in the Kodiak Archipelago. Although Kodiak comprises only 0.5% of Alaska's landmass, it holds roughly 7.5% of the state's known prehistoric settlements.

- Kodiak's high density of archaeological sites reflects 7,500 years of human occupation and large prehistoric populations. Before Russian traders arrived, archaeologists believe that there may have been as many as 13,000 Alutiiqs on Kodiak – about the size of the region's modern population.

- Kodiak's large number of sites also reflects the intensity of archaeological research. Scientists have been studying Kodiak prehistory since 1930. Kodiak is one of the more intensely researched regions of Alaska from an archaeological perspective.

- Many of Kodiak's archaeological sites are

remarkably well preserved. A number contain bone, ivory, and antler tools, and some hold wooden artifacts. These unique finds reflect the archipelago's consistently cool, wet climate, which helps to preserve organic materials.

- Archaeologists recognize a variety of different sites from large coastal villages dotted with the remains of sod houses, to stream side fish camps, fort sites on precipitous cliffs, stone quarries, fish weirs, trails, cairns, petroglyphs, and secluded mountain caves where whalers prepared for the hunt.

- Archaeologists recognize five distinctive cultural traditions (see facing page), each representing a different way of life. Despite changes in the organization of ancient societies, archaeologists believe that modern Alutiiq people are descended from Kodiak's earliest residents.



PROTECT THE PAST

Archaeological sites are a non-renewable resource. There is a limited amount of information available about the past. Yet, each year sites are damaged by vandalism. Recreational digging and artifact collecting are illegal and destroy our ability to interpret the archaeological record.

YOU CAN HELP

- Never dig in a site or collect artifacts from the beach.
- If you find an artifact, enjoy it but leave it. Take a photograph but not the object.
- Teach your family and friends to respect artifacts. Most people do not know that it is illegal, destructive, and disrespectful to collect artifacts.
- Report illegal collecting to the National Park Service (1-800-478-2724). Rewards of up to \$500 are available for information on illegal collecting.



CULTURES THROUGH TIME

A multitude of archaeological sites preserve the history of Kodiak's Alutiiq people. Dense prehistoric populations left large accumulations of cultural debris that have resisted decay in the region's persistently cool, wet environment. In addition to the stone tools commonly found in Alaskan archaeological sites, many of Kodiak's ancient settlements contain shell, bone, antler, and ivory objects. A few hold spectacular assemblages of wood and fiber artifacts. This rich archaeological record documents at least 7,500 years of continuous human occupation and chronicles the adaptation of Native people to the region's productive marine environments. Archaeologists divide Kodiak history into five cultural traditions, each reflecting a distinct way of life.



Ocean Bay tradition projectile points from Zaimka Mound, Leisnoi, Inc. Collection.

LEARN MORE:

Cummillallret – Our Ancestors, 2001, by Amy Steffian. In Looking Both Ways: Heritage and Identity of the Alutiiq People, edited by A. Crowell, A. Steffian and G. Pullar, Pp. 189-121. University of Alaska Press, Fairbanks.

OCEAN BAY TRADITION - The first occupants of the Kodiak archipelago arrived at least 7,500 years ago, colonizing an environment warmer and drier than today. Archaeologists believe these people came from southwestern Alaska and were well adapted to life along the coast. Like their descendants, they used barbed harpoons, chipped stone points, and ground slate lances to hunt sea mammals, delicate bone hooks to jig for cod, and large bone picks to dig for clams. Some early residents probably lived in skin-covered tents, although oval, single-roomed houses with piled sod walls were in use by about 7,000 years ago.

KACHEMAK TRADITION - About 4,000 years ago, Kodiak people began to focus more intensely on fishing, harvesting quantities of both cod and salmon. They developed nets to harvest large quantities of salmon, and slate ulus and smoke houses to process these larger catches for storage. Over time, villages grew suggesting that the island's population was also growing and filling up the landscape. By the end of the Kachemak tradition, people were trading for large quantities of raw materials from the Alaskan mainland. Antler, ivory, coal, and exotic stones were manufactured into tools and jewelry. Labrets, decorative plugs inserted in the face, became popular at this time, perhaps to signal the social ties of the person wearing the labret in a landscape where there was increasing competition for resources. The first signs of warfare appear in the Late Kachemak.

KONIAG TRADITION - About 800 years ago, Kodiak's climate began to change dramatically. Temperatures cooled, the weather worsened, and small sea mammals became more difficult to catch. Alutiiq people responded by relocating their villages to the banks of productive salmon streams and hunting more whales. Fishing grew even more important as people harvested even greater quantities of salmon to feed their families and trade with neighbors. Related families began living together in large, multiple-roomed sod houses pooling resources and labor. Chiefs emerged, perhaps to organize labor. They led war and trading parties, and hosted elaborate winter ceremonies to display their wealth and power, honor ancestors, and ensure future prosperity.

RUSSIAN - By the 1780s, Russian fur traders worked their way into the central Gulf of Alaska and colonized the Alutiiq Nation. Alutiiqs were quickly forced to adopt new social and economic practices and many people died from starvation and infectious diseases like influenza. During the Russian period, Native people were forced to work in arrels - camps dedicated to sea otter hunting, salmon fishing, and whaling. Russian clergy introduced the Orthodox faith, a religion that remains strong in many communities.

AMERICAN - With the sale of Alaska to the United States in 1867, life on Kodiak changed again. The American period saw the development of the modern fishing industry, where many Alutiiq people worked for wages in canneries. Alutiiqs moved gradually from a subsistence lifestyle into the Western market economy. At the turn of the 20th century, wood framed houses began to replace sod structures. Educators suppressed Alutiiq speech, punishing children for using the language and halting its transmission. Efforts to reawaken cultural traditions began in the 1980s.

5500 BC to 2000 BC

2000 BC to AD 1200

AD 1200 to AD 1763

AD 1763 to AD 1867

AD 1876 to Now