Another Kind of Petroglyph

In 1964, archaeologists working on Afognak Island found an unusual boulder. Resting beside the Afognak River was a large slate slab covered with small pits and fine lines, designs purposefully pecked and cut into the rock’s surface, but in no recognizable pattern. Although petroglyphs are well known in the Alutiiq world, these marking were not like any others. Other examples featured much larger designs with carefully grouped images of people, faces, animals, and designs like spirals.

For decades, researchers thought the Afognak River boulder was unique. Now, recent research by the Alutiiq Museum suggests that these smaller, more abstract carvings may be common and tied to salmon fishing. To date, museum archaeologists have found seven locations with pit and line style petroglyphs, most beside salmon streams. Patrick Saltonstall explains.

“A couple of years ago we documented sites on Afognak Native Corporation lands. During this work we found some additional sets of petroglyphs. They aren’t large or obvious, but once we knew what to look for, we started to find examples. This summer, support from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Native Village of Afognak, and land owners, allowed us to go back and draw the glyphs. In the process we found even more examples! Now there are eight known locales that have at least thirteen boulders with these designs.”

Not all the rock carvings are easy to see or clearly made by people. Rain and tides have worn down many of the features and Saltonstall believes that some of the rocks include a mix of natural and manmade holes. “Sometimes people expanded an existing hole or added to a rock with a natural depression,” he said.

Why did people peck holes and cut lines in boulders? Saltonstall and his colleagues have some ideas. The size and placement of petroglyphs provide clues. Carvings showing people and animals are typically large and on rock faces that can be seen from a distance. In contrast, the pit and line petroglyphs are small and covered daily by the tides. These petroglyphs were made to be viewed close up. They may have been part of a ritual that ensured strong salmon runs. In the Alutiiq world, circles are holes through which the souls of animals can pass into the spirit world so they may be reborn. Perhaps submerged pits were such a portal for salmon.

Interestingly, this type of petroglyph is not confined to the Alutiiq world. Archaeologists have recorded similar petroglyphs in northern Alaska. Perhaps this shared form of expression reflects the deep ancestral ties and shared spiritual beliefs found across Alaska Native societies.
Cama’i Friends,

This summer has been amazing! The salmon are jumping, berries are ripening, and we are enjoying unprecedented sunshine in Alaska’s emerald isle. Our staff members have been taking advantage of the great weather to share Alutiiq heritage at picnics, camps, and anywhere they can work outdoors (ps). On the other hand, we’ve spotted locals cooling off in the airconditioned museum! They have been joined by visitors from around the world. This has been our busiest cruise ship season ever.

Behind this flurry of activity, we are looking to the future. Our strategic plan calls for the museum to enhance its role as an industry leader while deepening collaborations with Alutiiq people and the institutions that hold our ancestors’ objects. This is a big and exciting vision and we are moving forward with a commitment to maintaining excellence in our professional work, without losing sight of the cultural heritage and values which make our organization unique.

To determine the best path forward, our Board of Directors asked the museum to conduct a community survey to review our programs and facilities. What are we doing well? Where can we improve? What are the greatest needs we can address in our community? The survey ends this week and we are excited to dig into the results. More than 500 people of all ages and heritages shared their ideas. We are humbled by all the enthusiasm for our work and promise to listen very carefully to your recommendations.

We will be sharing initial results of our survey on August 31st, at our Culture Fest and Annual Meeting. Join us for an afternoon celebration from 1:00–4:00 pm. There will be performances from dance groups representing a range of Kodiak cultures, a display of newly acquired artwork, reports from staff, refreshments, and prizes. Utaqalirciqamken.—We will wait for you.

Warm Regards and Quyanaa,
April Isiik Counceller
Executive Director
Memorial Dedicated

A joyful gathering on an overcast June afternoon marked the completion of the Alutiiq Ancestors’ Memorial and celebrated the partnership between the City of Kodiak and the Alutiiq Museum to complete a public park honoring Alutiiq heritage.

Despite the drizzle, seventy people turned out to participate in the park dedication. Father Innocent Dresdow opened the event with a blessing. He solemnly honored the lives of Alutiiq people across the generations, acknowledging those from the past and those who will visit the park in the future. His blessing was followed by a ribbon cutting hosted by the Kodiak’s Chamber of Commerce.

Alutiiq Heritage Foundation Board President Margaret Roberts presided. She stood underneath the arch amid twelve hundred silver salmon cutouts, each representing an ancestor who has been returned to the island for reburial. With cheers from the crowd, she cut the ribbon to commemorate the park’s important mission. For many years to come, this beautiful space will be a place for people to gather, reflect on their own history, learn about Alutiiq culture, and appreciate the beauty of Kodiak.

After the ribbon cutting, attendees walked through the archway and down to the museum’s warm, dry gallery. With visitors clustered among the exhibits, Roberts, Kodiak Mayor Pat Branson, and Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Counceller each shared thoughts about the importance of the park and thanked the project’s many generous contributors. The event ended with a lively performance by the Alutiiq Dancers, filling the room with the sound and movement of Alutiiq heritage.

Symbolic Salmon

Shiny metal cutouts shaped like salmon were the final addition to the Alutiiq Ancestors’ Memorial, affixed to a wooden archway spanning the park walkway. The four-inch fish, who form large schools on either side of the archway, are a reminder. Each cutout represents an Alutiiq ancestor whose remains have been returned to Kodiak. The fish all point to the center of the memorial.

“When you see over twelve hundred cut outs, you realize the enormity of the circumstance,” said Alutiiq Museum Executive Director April Laktonen Counceller. “The remains of so many of our people were taken from us and we have worked hard to return them to rest. Like fish, they have returned home. The school of fish is also a symbol of unity and persistence. The Alutiiq community is vibrant. We are united in understanding our past and working together to ensure a bright future."

Sponsored by Koniag, Inc., the archway is a work in progress. Counceller said, “Our plan is to add more fish to the archway as additional ancestors are repatriated. There are still many remains awaiting repatriation and the museum is working closely with local tribes to facilitate those returns. For example, the Native Village of Old Harbor is currently working with the Alaska State Museum and the US Fish and Wildlife Service to repatriate the remains of about a dozen people this fall.”
Oliver Octopus

Anyone who has walked Kodiak’s coastlines knows the island teems with marine life. Nobody is more aware of this abundance than biologist Stacy Studebaker. Studebaker is a naturalist with an encyclopedic knowledge of local flora and fauna, and a knack for combining scientific insights with her artistic talent.

In July, the Alutiiq Museum purchased Studebaker’s Oliver Octopus and His Treasures—a colored art pencil drawing on black paper. The piece shows a giant Pacific octopus with its tentacles curled around a variety of intertidal creatures and pieces of sea glass. Among the creatures shown in accurate, colorful detail are sea stars, snails, a chiton, limpet, purple urchin, sand dollar, scallop, and sea cucumber. Oliver the Octopus was inspired by an octopus Studebaker has enjoyed watching on the shore near her home. It is a companion piece to Olivia Octopus and Her Treasures found at the Kodiak Public Library.

This is the first piece of Studebaker’s work added to the museum’s collections. A generous grant from Museums Alaska through the Rasmuson Art Acquisition Fund made the purchase possible. Oliver the Octopus will help the museum share shoreline gathering traditions. Many of the creatures shown in Studebaker’s drawing are important sources of food, especially the amikuq—octopus.

Awakening Artifacts

Sometimes things happen and it seems like they were just meant to be. That was certainly how it felt to Fred Coyle when a chance encounter led to the return of an ancestral oil lamp. Coyle, a museum board member who lives in Palmer, was out in public when a woman overheard him mention Kodiak. After speaking with Coyle, she asked him to return an oil lamp she collected in the archipelago many years ago. This spring, Coyle carried the 500-year-old stone carving back to its home and brought the piece to the museum for care.

This story is not unusual. People often offer the Alutiiq Museum artifacts collected many years ago. They recognize that Alutiq objects deserve to be in the Alutiq world. It’s a common sentiment, and one that illustrates increasing respect for Alutiq people and their heritage.

Artifacts aren’t just relics or curios, they are pieces of a living culture. The recently recovered stone oil lamp is a great example. Today, the lamp is part of the Alutiiq Museum’s teaching collection, where it is available for use by the public. People can check out the artifact to light at gatherings. An object that spent decades far from Kodiak, is now a functioning part of the Alutiq community.

Patrons who are interested in borrowing one of the museum’s stone oil lamp can contact Collections Manager Amanda Lancaster, amanda@alutiiqmuseum.org, 844-425-8844, x22.
Living by Karluk Lake

The Karluk River is not large by Alaskan standards. This fresh water stream flows just 35 km from its outlet at Karluk Lake to the marine waters of Shelikof Strait. Yet the Karluk is a natural treasure. This modest stream is home some of the most prolific salmon runs in Alaska. Today the fish support an impressive population of brown bears, but they once drew thousands of Alutiiq ancestors to the region. Five hundred years ago there may have been as many as seven major villages in the Karluk drainage. This summer, Alutiiq Museum archaeologists sunk their trowels into one of the region’s many ancestral settlements to better understand the relationships between Alutiiq societies and salmon.

Sponsored by Koniag, Inc., the dig focused on the lake outlet, where Karluk River meets Karluk Lake. Occupied only a few hundred years ago, this spot was once home to large village, bustling with activity. Here Alutiiq families lived in large sod houses—ciqlluat—with rooms for cooking, sleeping, steam bathing, and storing food. By studying one of the site’s houses, and sampling the garbage people left behind, archaeologists hoped to understand what seasons people lived on the lake and what resources they were using. Did people live on the lake in winter? Did they import foods from the coast?

“There is a general assumption that Alutiiq people only lived along rivers in the summer, during the prime fishing season,” said Alutiiq Museum archaeologist Patrick Saltonstall, “but, that may not be the case. Some of the river bank villages are enormous, as large as any coastal village. Moreover, we know that fish are available in Kodiak’s major rivers into winter. Maybe people moved to places like Karluk Lake in August, fished intensively, and then stayed till late winter living off their stores.”

The excavation finds were both expected—salmon bones and numerous ulu for processing salmon, and unexpected—remains of marine fish and shellfish. In the trash mound they found the shells of saltwater clams, mussels, chiton, whelks, and sea urchins, as well as cod and porpoise bones. Zooarchaeologists, who specialize in studying animal remains, will study the finds over the coming year to look for clues about the season of harvest.

Another unexpected find was a tiny bone fishhook, small enough to catch a trout or char. Alutiiq people weren’t just coming to Karluk Lake to catch salmon, they were bringing foods from the coast and probably fishing for trout or char before the red run arrived, or after it had tapered off.

More evidence that Alutiiq people spent significant amounts of time at Karluk Lake came from inside the house. The hearth, a fireplace made from a ring of large stones, had been re-built over time. Below and a little off-set from the most recent hearth, archaeologists found an older one. Overtime, people reused the house, building at this important spot. •

Center: rock-ringed hearth in the middle of a house depression. Upper right: trash mound. Photograph courtesy Peter Olsen, Koniag, Inc. Hollis Miller holds a slate ulu recovered from the site.
Shellfish Project Focuses on Safe Subsistence

by Andi Wall, KANA

The Kodiak Area Native Association (KANA) is working on a new project to protect shellfish harvesters from paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP)—a potentially lethal condition acquired by eating contaminated clams, mussels, and other filter feeders. The project, which is titled Collective Monitoring of Harmful Algal Blooms and Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning on Kodiak Archipelago: Advancing Tribal Resilience and Subsistence Food Security, seeks to develop baseline data on PSP levels and establish long-term sites on Kodiak Island where harmful algal bloom (HAB) species can be monitored. Of particular concern is the presence of Alexandrium, a phytoplankton that can produce the toxin responsible for PSP.

Research started in March at four shellfish monitoring sites along the Kodiak Road system. The hope is to expand monitoring to sites near Kodiak’s villages for those that wish to become involved. Monitoring consists of collecting weekly phytoplankton samples as well as biweekly tissue samples from butter clams and blue mussels. The samples are sent to KANA’s tribal partner, the Sitka Tribe of Alaska Environmental Research Lab (STAERL), where they are analyzed for PSP.

This project is a part of larger statewide monitoring efforts. Tribes, state authorities, local and national databases are compiling information to examine toxicity levels and presence of HABs, their link to environmental changes, and the ways tribes can manage harmful blooms and toxic shellfish.

KANA is collaborating with local and state entities to publish community advisories when PSP levels are above the Food and Drug Administration regulatory limit (80 µg/100 g) especially when they reach lethal levels. KANA is sending out weekly updates for the Kodiak region that highlight the presence of HAB species and PSP levels. If you would like to receive these updates or learn more about the project: follow us on twitter @KodiakPSP, go to www.seator.org or contact KANA’s Environmental team, Andie Wall andie.wall@kodiakhealthcare.org and/or Stephanie Mason at Stephanie.mason@kodiakhealthcare.org.

This project is supported with grant funds provided by the Environmental Protection Agency Indian General Assistance Program and the Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Resilience program.

Summer Education

It’s not easy to reach Chignik Lagoon. The small Alutiiq village on the southern Alaska Peninsula is hundreds of miles from Kodiak. But distance did not deter the Native Village of Chignik Lagoon from reaching out to the museum for help with cultural education. The tribe hired the museum to lead a three-day workshop as part of its summer youth program. Amanda Lancaster and Dehrich Chya took a long charter flight to the village, where they worked with middle and high school students. The class learned to identify and care for artifacts, built a cultural display, and took breaks for Alutiiq dance lessons.

This experience was just one of many recent outreach activities. Summer programs, camps, and gatherings of many kinds provide great opportunities to share Alutiiq traditions and our team has been busy on the road and at home—from Olympia, Washington Pacific Northwest Alutiiq Culture Camp to Dig Afognak.

If your organization is interested in adding cultural activities to a program or event, please contact Djuna Davidson, djuna@alutiiqmuseum.org, 844-425-8844, x20. We have ideas!
Donor Spotlight—Tom Panamaroff

Tom Panamaroff lives in Anchorage but he was born in Kodiak and his hometown roots run deep. Kodiak is his favorite place in Alaska, even among all the other beautiful parts of the state. Over his career, Tom spent many years as a staff member serving elected officials in the Alaska State Legislature. Now he is the Regional & Legislative Affairs Executive for Koniag, Inc. In 2015, Tom became a sustaining member of the Alutiiq Museum. This means he makes a regular monthly donation to the organization. Why did he choose to make this generous commitment? Djuna Davidson asked him during a recent interview.

Tom feels that the museum plays an important role in the Kodiak community. Through his experience in politics, he is aware that nonprofits work very hard to secure the funding that keep programs going and support the many expenses that can’t be funded through grant. He knows that private donations are essential to operations. He donates partially to give back to the Native community that has supported him and to provide financial support for the good work of the museum. Tom also gives because he values the resources the Alutiiq Museum offers.

He said, “… for the museum, I just think it is really awesome. It is there for the community, the exhibits and programs and collections. As a kid growing up in the 60s and 70s, I don’t remember any of that stuff—dance, language, educational programs, archaeological digs—growing up in Kodiak there was virtually no exposure to Alutiiq culture other than knowing I was Native. To have that available now, I think it is pretty special. Our young Native population growing up now have the accessibility—seeing other young people involved with dancing and language and having the opportunity to connect to their culture and heritage. Having the museum is a special resource that keeps Alutiiq culture alive and accessible.”

Asked about his favorite aspects of the museum, Tom quickly mentioned exhibits and archaeological research. He appreciates the opportunity to learn about the objects found during the museum’s digs and how they were used. This information has not only helped him learn, but it has help him connect his daughter with Alutiiq culture. It was a special moment for Tom when he was able to explain objects in the Anchorage Museum to his daughter based on knowledge he gained through the Alutiiq Museum.

The Alutiiq Museum has a lot of roles in the community—it is an educational facility, a visitor attraction, a place to store collections, and a resource for historical knowledge. For Tom, however, the museum is much more. It is a source of cultural pride. “It has helped me discover who I am in a much greater way than I had before,” he said.
Events

Calendar

August 20 | Debut of Alutiiq Landscapes exhibit
Featuring contemporary paintings by Linda Infante Lyons, Bruce Nelson, and Cheryl Lacy

August 31, 1:00–4:00 pm | Alutiiq Museum Annual Meeting & Culture fest.
Featuring dance performances, reports, prizes, and refreshments

September 6, 5:00–7:00 pm | First Friday, Alutiiq Dance performance

September 14, Noon–3:00 pm | Craft Alutiiq dance rattles

October 4, 5:00–7:00 pm | First Friday

October 26, Noon–3:00 pm | Craft Saturday, Alutiiq Petroglyph pumpkin carving

November 5–8 | Pinguat Project Workshop

November 8, 5:00–7:00 pm | Films by Joshua Branstetter
Meet the filmmaker and view a selection of his short documentaries

November 9, 10:00-1:00 | Beading Event for adults and children

CONNECT WITH US

All memberships include a year of museum admission, store discounts, and invitations to members-only events. At the ilat level and above, members receive a free copy of the Alutiiq Wild Foods Cookbook.
Looking for something to do with your friends and family this holiday season? If you're a current member, you already enjoy free admission to the Alutiiq Museum. Now, thanks to the generous support of KeyBank, everyone gets in for free between November 25 and December 23! Add a little local culture to your holidays with a visit to the Alutiiq Museum, a gift to our community from KeyBank.

**November 25 – December 23**
**FREE ADMISSION**

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