Qik’rtangcuk: A Kachemak Fish Camp

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Introduction
Kodiak’s Alutiiq people have inhabited the archipelago for at least 7,300 years. Recent archaeological research by the Alutiiq Museum has uncovered a series of small, specialized sites dating to the Kachemak (3800 – 1000 BP) and Ocean Bay (3700 – 3800 BP) traditions. These sites appear to have been seal hunting and fishing camps. They contain no residential features and produced few domestic artifacts.

Qik’rtangcuk (Little Island) is an example of a Kachemak period specialized site near the City of Kodiak on northeastern Kodiak Island. The site sits on a small, wooded promontory approximately four meters above sea level. A team of Alutiiq Museum archaeologists, students, and volunteers excavated 12 square meters at the site in July 2018.

Deposits
Immediately below the surface, the team uncovered typical Early Kachemak deposits—black, charcoal-stained soil and small pits filled with charcoal and fire-cracked rock. These deposits are interpreted as the result of fish processing and smoking activities. On the slope of the hill leading down to the erosion face and beach, the team uncovered 50-70 cm of rubble from these smoking pits—fire cracked rock, charcoal, and pockets of faunal midden.

Below the Kachemak component the team uncovered an ephemeral Ocean Bay occupation dating to 7106 ±63 cal BP (two-sigma range). While not the focus of this poster, the Ocean Bay use of Qik’rtangcuk is notable for its lack of features or structures, and its blade-dominated assemblage.

PRELIMINARY FAUNAL ANALYSIS

Bulk faunal samples were sent to the Boston University Zooarchaeology Laboratory and screened through ¼” mesh. These preliminary results include fish identifications based on vertebrae, and bird identifications based on specific skeletal elements (coracoid, humerus, ulna, tibiotarsus, femur, carpometacarpus, sternum, and scapula). Shellfish are present in the samples but have not been identified.

The results of the analysis suggest that people made wide use of the fish resources available near Qik’rtangcuk. These include cod (Gadidae), salmon (Salmonidae), sculpin (Cottidae), and flatfish (Pleuronectidae). While bird remains are rare and poorly preserved, the results also show a diversity of bird families. Most surprising among these are the Northern fulmars (Fulmarus glacialis; NISP = 22), which tend to live in open water environments. People also made use of small sea birds (Alcidae; NISP = 4), gull (Laridae; NISP = 1), and ducks and geese (Anatidae; NISP = 1). Mammals are almost entirely absent from this assemblage, save some fragmentary material and a single red fox (Vulpes vulpes) mandible.

Discussion
The Qik’rtangcuk site gives us a window into the settlement and subsistence strategies of Early Kachemak-phase Alutiiq foragers. The site was most likely a temporary camp used as a base for catching cod and other marine fish, which were then processed and smoked at the site. Other than expedient cobble tools, little manufacture happened here. Moreover, the site contains a variety of pits filled with evidence of fires—cracked rock and charcoal, but no evidence of domestic structures. People most likely lived elsewhere.

The season of Qik’rtangcuk settlement is difficult to determine. Marine fish can be harvested resources in open waters as well.

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