Document, Describe, Don’t Disturb!

Archaeological sites are a common part of the Kodiak landscape. For at least 7,500 years Alutiiq people created camps, villages, food butchering and smoking areas, quarries, weirs, trails, cairns, and rock art leaving traces of their activities. Many of the places that ancient islanders visited are the same spots modern residents enjoy. This means that today’s picnickers, hikers, campers, and wild food harvesters often encounter evidence of the past.

Archaeological sites are a non-renewable resource. The sites preserved today represent all the sites available for all time. Once damaged, they lose information and the ability to inform researchers about the distant past. Many people know that it is illegal and harmful to dig in an archaeological site or collect from it contents (see page 2). However, finding an ancient settlement is exciting and people often want to explore further. But how can you learn more without harming a site? What should you do if you come across a deposit?

First, leave no trace. The old camping motto is a great way to think about interacting with archaeological sites. Recognize sites and do not camp or light a fire on them, remove brush, or leave bear-attracting garbage behind. Digging bears are a common source of site disturbance. Moreover, be careful not to worsen erosion. Many of Kodiak’s ancient settlements are sloughing, eroding into an adjacent stream or the ocean. Climbing this bank or digging into it can enhance the damage. It also destroys plants that maybe starting to stabilize the loose deposits.

Second, record what you see. Help the museum track the location and condition of Kodiak sites by sharing notes and photographs with us. Note the site’s location, describe what you see, and take lots of photographs If you have the ability to take a short video, record a site tour. The second page of this newsletter provides more ideas for documenting sites. The Alutiiq Museum can also provide you with a short recording form for your observations.

Finally, teach your friends and family members to respect sites. Kodiak’s archaeological record is a unique source of information on the deep history of the Alutiiq people. Show respect for the Alutiiq community by helping to preserve this unwritten record of cultural traditions. If you are interest in learning more, don’t vandalize sites. Join the Alutiiq Museum’s Community Archaeology or Site Stewardship programs and become a partner in preservation. Who knows what you might find!
Who should I notify if I find a site?

- Sites and their contents belong to the owner of the land on which they occur. Contact the landowner or land manager to report or find. If you don’t know who that is, the Alutiiq Museum can help you connect with the right person. Call us at 907-486-7004.

How can I record the site’s location?

- Take photographs that show the site and its location in relation to surrounding terrain – the shoreline, streams, mountains, terraces, etc.
- Put a dot on a map! Estimate where you are and mark it on any type of map, or sketch your own map.
- Take a GPS coordinate.
- Write some notes. Describe where the site is located in a way that would help others find it – note the names of geographic features, cardinal directions, and local topography.

What should I note about the site?

- How big is the site? Estimate the horizontal area it covers by pacing.
- What plants are growing on the site and in what quantities?
- What does the site hold? Do you see animal remains, charcoal, artifacts, or house depressions? If there are depressions can you count them?
- What is the condition of the site? Is it eroding? How badly? Has it been impacted by human or animal activity? Are their signs of vandalism? Is there evidence of recent use – for example camping on the site?

What do you think people did at the site?

- This is your chance to think like an archaeologist. Why did people use this particular spot? How old do you think the site is?