Protecting Past People

In February, the daily jet from Anchorage arrived in Kodiak with an unusual shipment, the skeletal remains of 109 Alutiiq people. This was a pivotal moment for the Alutiiq community. After years of struggle, community members had succeeded in reclaiming their ancestors. Tribal leaders and Chirikof descendants gathered to greet the boxed remains, share a blessing, and store them at the Alutiiq Museum while plans for reburial proceed.

The remains were taken from remote Chirikof Island in the 1960s. Anthropologists collected them from the beach after they eroded from an historic Russian Orthodox cemetery. For decades, they were kept in a laboratory and subject to research without the knowledge or consent of the Alutiiq community. It took intervention by the US Fish & Wildlife Service to retrieve and repatriate them.

Unfortunately, this is not an unusual story. Many Kodiak sites preserve human remains and for many years researchers and beachcombers have collected them. People pick up human bones found on the beach or dig into sites and remove them. This is distressing to the Alutiiq, whose ancestors deserve the same respect as those buried in any cemetery.

To address this issue, the Alutiiq Museum is working to educate people about the respectful treatment of Native remains, to repatriate remains held by people and organizations, and to document the places around Kodiak where ancestral remains are exposed.

How can you help? It is important to understand that no one can own human remains. It is always illegal to intentionally disturb or collect human remains. If you find human remains, do not move them. Report your find to the Alaska State Troopers, so they can determine if the remains are ancient or recent. Similarly, if you possess human remains, turn them into the Troopers. If they are ancient, the repatriation process can begin and the Alutiiq Museum will help a related tribe claim the remains for reburial. Have questions? Contact the Alutiiq Museum for assistance.
Repatriation Explained

What is Repatriation?
Repatriation is the process that returns Native American remains and select cultural property to the care of tribal people. The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA), a federal law passed in 1990, guides this process.

What can be repatriated?
In addition to ancestral remains, federally recognized tribes can repatriate funerary objects, sacred objects, and objects of cultural patrimony.

Who can repatriate?
Individuals can repatriate the remains of their direct, lineal ancestors. Tribes can repatriate the remains of related ancestors.

How does it work?
Institutions who hold repatriable items, and receive federal support, must notify tribes and consult with their representatives. The institutions must also submit notices about repatriable materials to the federal register. A tribe can then claim the material and request repatriation.

How do I learn more?
• Visit the National NAGPRA website: www.nps.gov/nagpra
• Read Skull Wars: Kennewick Man, Archaeology, and the Battle for Native American Identity, by David Hurst Thomas.

Gathering of tribal leaders and descendents for the blessing of remains by Father Innocent.

YOU CAN HELP!
• Never dig in or collect artifacts from an archaeological site.
• Never collect or disturb human remains and report them to the Museum and Alaska State Troopers
• If you find a site, enjoy it, but leave it. Take photographs not objects.
• Teach your family and friends to respect archaeological sites. Most people do not know that it is illegal, destructive, and disrespectful to alter sites.
• Report illegal collecting, site vandalism, and artifact trafficking to the National Park Service (1.800.478.2724). Rewards of up to $500 are available for information.

QUYANAASINAQ
Many Thanks to our Archaeological Site Stewards

Suzanne Abraham • Joe Black • Andy Christofferson
• J. Culbertson • Brigid & Harry Dodge • Ginger Duncan • Harry Golden • Sue Jeffrey & Dan Ogg • Marnie Leist • Mike Munsey
• Susan Payne & Dan Dumm • Mark Withrow • Jeffery Woods • Mike Zweng