Generations of Collecting
Notes on Family Artifact Collections

Visit homes around the Kodiak archipelago and you will often see artifacts displayed. Most of these objects were collected long ago, gathered in the mid-twentieth century when artifact collecting was a popular hobby. Kodiak is rich in ancient settlements, and artifacts from these sites have become a common part of Islanders’ homes.

In recent years, artifact collecting has slowed. Laws that prohibit this activity are better known and there is a growing respect for archaeological sites and their contents. As Islanders learn more about Alutiiq heritage, they are leaving artifacts on the beach where they can be better studied. For those who have old family collections, however, the situation can be confusing. What should well-meaning residents do with objects gathered a generation ago?

For more than a century it has been illegal to collect artifacts without permission from landowners, particularly on federal lands – the majority of Kodiak lands. As such, very few local collections are legally owned by those who possess them.

There are a few important things to understand about these collections. First, they are still the property of the landowner at the time they were collected, and with a little research they can often be returned. Second, it is illegal to sell these artifacts. No matter how inspiring eBay or the Antiques Road Show, you cannot sell artifacts you don’t own. It is a crime.

From a broader perspective, these artifacts are still valuable to Kodiak. They contain information on local history that can be used by researchers, educators, and artists. They are not simply curiosities, but a non-renewable resource.

Finally, Alutiiqs feel a strong connection to objects made by their ancestors. All artifacts should be treated with respect. Alutiiq objects are never appropriate doorstops or ashtrays. However you treat a family collection, show it respect.

HISTORY PRESERVED

A Collaboration between the Alutiiq Museum and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Join the Alutiiq Museum Team

Are you a set netter, a fisherman, a pilot, a guide, a lodge owner, or a rural resident? Would you like to document archaeological sites as a museum volunteer? Contact Curator Patrick Saltonstall [486-7004, patrick@alutiiqmuseum.org]. Learn to see the land like an archaeologist and help preserve Kodiak’s history.

APRIL 2009
RESULTS
11 Years of Research
45 Volunteer Families
13 Surveys
760 Site Visits
360 Sites Studied
229 Undocumented Sites Found

A Collaboration between the Alutiiq Museum and U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service
Your Questions Answered:

Do I own my artifact collection?
Since 1906 it has been illegal to collect artifacts from federal lands without a permit. Much of Kodiak is federal land. For many years it has also been illegal to collect artifacts from state and private lands without permission. Most family collections are not legally owned, unless they came from family land.

Can I sell artifacts from my collection?
It is illegal to buy, sell or trade artifacts that you do not own. Under the Archaeological Resources Protection Act, anyone who sells an artifact MUST be able to prove that they are the object’s lawful owner. Most people can’t provide this proof. Don’t sell your collection. There are serious penalties for trafficking in antiquities.

Can I return my artifact collection?
If you know when and where an artifact was collected, you can return it to the landowner. If you don’t known this information the Alutiiq Museum can help. We can assist with ownership research, and we have an agreement with Kodiak’s major landowners to care for artifacts whose origins are no longer known.

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