STEWARDSHIP

Pot Luck Chirikof Style

Jack Withrow with fragments of a prehistoric ceramic pot.

Each spring, Kodiak physician Mark Withrow takes a break from his busy medical practice for some quality, wilderness camping. The archipelago’s remote places offer relaxation, exploration, and sleep beyond the reach of cell phone coverage!

In 2007, Mark picked Chirikof Island, the most isolated spot in the archipelago, for his annual retreat. Tiny, exposed Chirikof lies 80 miles south of Kodiak Island, surrounded only by the North Pacific Ocean. When Alutiiq Museum curator Patrick Saltonstall learned of the trip, he inducted Mark into the museum’s site stewardship program, a volunteer effort to document and report the conditions of archaeological sites. The museum had recently completed a survey of Chirikof sites and Saltonstall was eager to track their conditions. Mark agreed to help.

Mark has been to Chirikof three times now, hiking, beach combing, and visiting archaeological sites with his son Jack and their cameras. The Withrows’ reconnaissance has helped the museum to track patterns of erosion, document deposits we didn’t have a chance to visit, and preserve some valuable objects. What do you do when you find an amazing artifact in the wilderness? Mark’s story is a great example.

In 2008, Mark and Jack discovered a nearly complete prehistoric, ceramic pot eroding from a site. They photographed the rare and delicate object, but left it in place, carefully noting its location. As site stewards they knew they couldn’t collect the pot without permission of the landowner, in this case the US Fish & Wildlife Service. When they returned to Kodiak, Mark told Patrick about the find and shared his photos. Patrick in turn contacted the US Fish & Wildlife Service archaeologist Debbie Corbett, who gave permission for the Withrows to collect the pot on their next trip. So, this spring, notes in hand, Mark and Jack returned to Chirikof, relocated the site, found the pot, and carefully recovered it for preservation at the museum.

Mark’s documentation allowed both the pot and information on its location to be preserved, helping archaeologists to understand more about the object and the site it came from. Pots like these were made after about AD 1500, providing a general date for the site. They were also used for melting and storing sea mammal fat, indicating a likely site activity.

April 2010

RESULTS
12 Years of Research
46 Volunteer Families
14 Surveys
805 Site Visits
407 Sites Studied
256 Undocumented Sites Found

HISTORY PRESERVED

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, x23 patrick@alutiiqmuseum.org]. Learn to see the land like an archaeologist and help preserve Kodiak’s history.

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

Why is it important to know the location of an artifact?
Artifacts can tell much fuller stories when their origins are known. Archaeologists want to know not only the site an object came from, but the depth and location of that object in the site. Each piece of information helps to illustrate the activities that took place in the past.

What should I do if I find an artifact?
Document the object as best you can. If the object is still partially buried – don’t move it! It may be fragile and moving it could break it, or disturb other materials. Remember, it is illegal to dig in a site without a permit. Take photographs, write a description of the object that notes its size, shape, color, and condition, and record its location. Note your location on a map, or draw a map that shows where you are and where the artifact lies in the site.

How do I report an artifact find?
Call, email, or visit the Alutiiq Museum and ask to speak to one of our archaeologists. We will take a description of the object, get information from you on its location, and identify its owner. All artifacts belong to the owner of the land on which they occur. Then we will contact the owner to tell them about the object and discuss its care.

Quyanaasinaq –
Many thanks to our 2009 Stewards
Suzanne Abraham • Bill Barker • Eva Holm • David Little & Lisa Frederic • Betsey Myrick • Adelia Myrick • Susan Payne & Don Dumm • Sid Omlid • Patrick Saltonstall • Kip & Lee Thomet • Richard Satonstall • Mark Withrow • Jack Withrow

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