



What Did We Learn?

For thousands of years people visited the mouth of Midway Bay, stopping to work and camp along its shore. The peninsula at the bay's mouth was never the location of a large village, but it was a well-used place. Here residents fished for cod, collected shellfish, hunted seals and waterfowl, and preserved their catch. Studies of their activities expand our knowledge of Alutiiq history.

First, the project revealed some of the oldest Alutiiq buildings ever studied. These structures demonstrate that Alutiiq people have been constructing houses with earth and wood for 7,000 years. Archaeologists once thought early islanders lived in

portable tents. We now know that they also constructed houses that share many elements of later buildings – excavated foundations, strong wooden frames, and insulating layers of sod.

Second, evidence of food preservation appears to be quite old. People who live in northern environments commonly preserve fresh foods for later use. Archaeological evidence of this practice on Kodiak is at least 5,000 years old. Data from Midway Bay suggest that the use of heat and smoke to transform fish and meat into food stores may be much older. Kodiak's first residents may have used this technique.

Quyanaasinaq



The State of Alaska provided funding to the City of Old Harbor for the project, with additional support from the Old Harbor Native Corporation and many generous members of the Old Harbor Community.



Collections Care

Artifacts from this research belong to the Old Harbor Native Corporation. They are cared for at the Alutiiq Museum as collection AM711, with notes, photographs, and video from the project. All of this material is available for study. Please contact the museum if you would like to research the collection.

(top) Evening view east of Midway Bay and Sitkalidak Strait from the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)

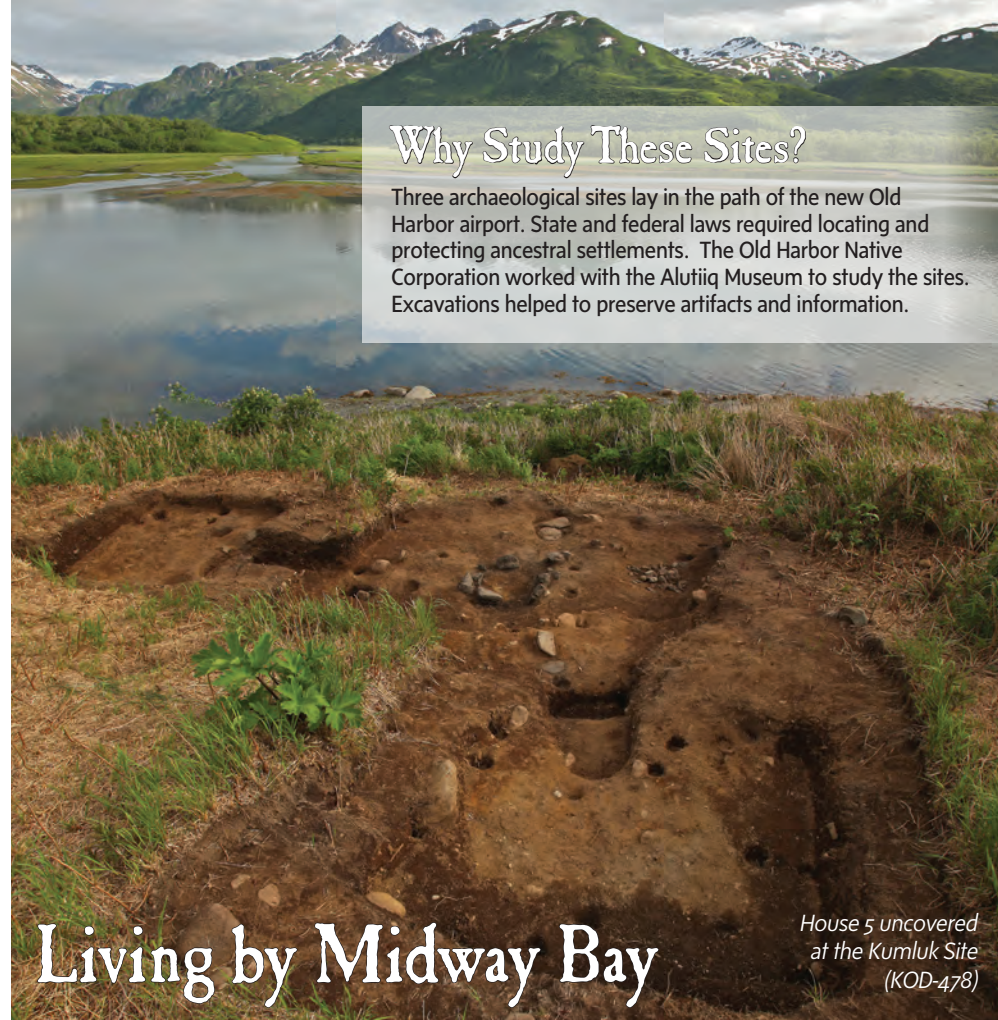
(bottom) Ulu from the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)



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Celebrating Heritage Through Living Culture

Old Harbor Excavations



Why Study These Sites?

Three archaeological sites lay in the path of the new Old Harbor airport. State and federal laws required locating and protecting ancestral settlements. The Old Harbor Native Corporation worked with the Alutiiq Museum to study the sites. Excavations helped to preserve artifacts and information.

Living by Midway Bay

House 5 uncovered at the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)

What was it like to live in the Old Harbor area hundreds of years ago, or even thousands of years ago?

Archaeologists studied this question in the summer of 2013 while investigating ancient settlements on a small thumb of land at the entrance to Midway Bay. Over five weeks, a team of museum researchers and Old Harbor students peeled back the

layers of three small sites. At each, they revealed ancient buildings and recovered objects that hint at past activities – camping, tool making, seal hunting, cod fishing, cooking, and preserving. Each site provided a unique view of the Alutiiq past.



Mapping at the
Puyuk Site (KOD-580)



Ochre grinder
exposed at
Nayurwik Site
(KOD-1130)



(top left) Miniature oil lamp.
(above) Slate end blade with an incised design
from the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)

Early Hunters

Puyuk "Smoke" Site (KOD-580)
7,200 years ago

Some of the first visitors to Midway Bay stopped along the shore of a protected cove by a stream. Here they made stone tools and built a round structure. This building is one of the oldest ever studied in the Alutiiq world. It had a wood frame, a sod roof, and a gravel floor. There was a pit in its center surrounded by charcoal, fire heated rocks, and burned soil. Archaeologists found few artifacts inside and think that the building may have been a smokehouse. Tools found outside show that they crafted cutting implements and hunting gear. Some of the stone they used came from the Alaska mainland.



Chipped point from the
Puyuk Site (KOD-580)

Campsite

Nayurwik "Lookout" Site (KOD-1130)
6,300 years ago

About 6,300 years ago, an Alutiiq family camped on the shore of Sitkalidak Passage. Here, they built a small, sturdy, oval house. Partially dug into the ground, this building had a wood frame and probably wooden walls. It also had a thick, insulating cover of sod. Inside the structure residents crafted stone hunting tools, using both local materials and rock from the Alaskan mainland. Just outside the structure they ground iron oxide to make a red pigment. This pigment may have been used to preserve hides. It was found all over the house floor. Perhaps people sat on hides inside the house.



Structure 1 uncovered at the
Nayurwik Site (KOD-1130)

Seal Harvesters

Kumluk "Thumb" Site (KOD-478)
500 years ago

At the tip of the Midway Bay Peninsula, Alutiiq people built a small sod house village. Four houses and a series of pits are the remains of a seasonal settlement used by several families to create food stores. Each of the houses has a large central room and one or more side rooms. In the central room, archaeologists found huge rock and charcoal filled pits and many post holes. Some of the pits were fire hearths. Others were roasting pits. Still others may have been pits filled with hot rock placed beneath racks of meat to help

the food dry. Archaeologists think residents were processing seal meat and fat. The most common artifacts in these houses were ulu knives, used for butchering, and pottery, used to melt blubber into oil. Researchers also found harpoons and lances for seal hunting.

In front of the houses there was ancient garbage. Animal remains from these piles show that residents harvested cod, salmon, shellfish, and birds. Archaeologists believe that people lived here in the fall or early winter, but not year round. The residents of this small settlement were probably members of a larger village located nearby.



Excavation at the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)



Pottery rim pieces from
the Kumluk Site (KOD-478)