

EXTENDING THE TIMELINE

Settlement Data from the *Alagnaruartuliq* Site on Kodiak Island

by

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Karluk Lake, in the interior of Kodiak Island's southwest side, has been an important part of the Kodiak Alutiiq/Sugpiaq homeland for millennia. Although Kodiak's Native people are known as expert coastal harvesters, hundreds of archaeological sites from large villages to small camps document their use of Karluk Lake and River. Over the past 17 years, the Alutiiq Museum has been studying inland settlement through both surveys and excavations at Karluk Lake to understand how Alutiiq ancestors used this unique part of the Kodiak region. In 2024, one of these excavations led to the unexpected discovery of the oldest documented ancestral site in the Kodiak region.

DATING THE SETTLEMENT OF KODIAK

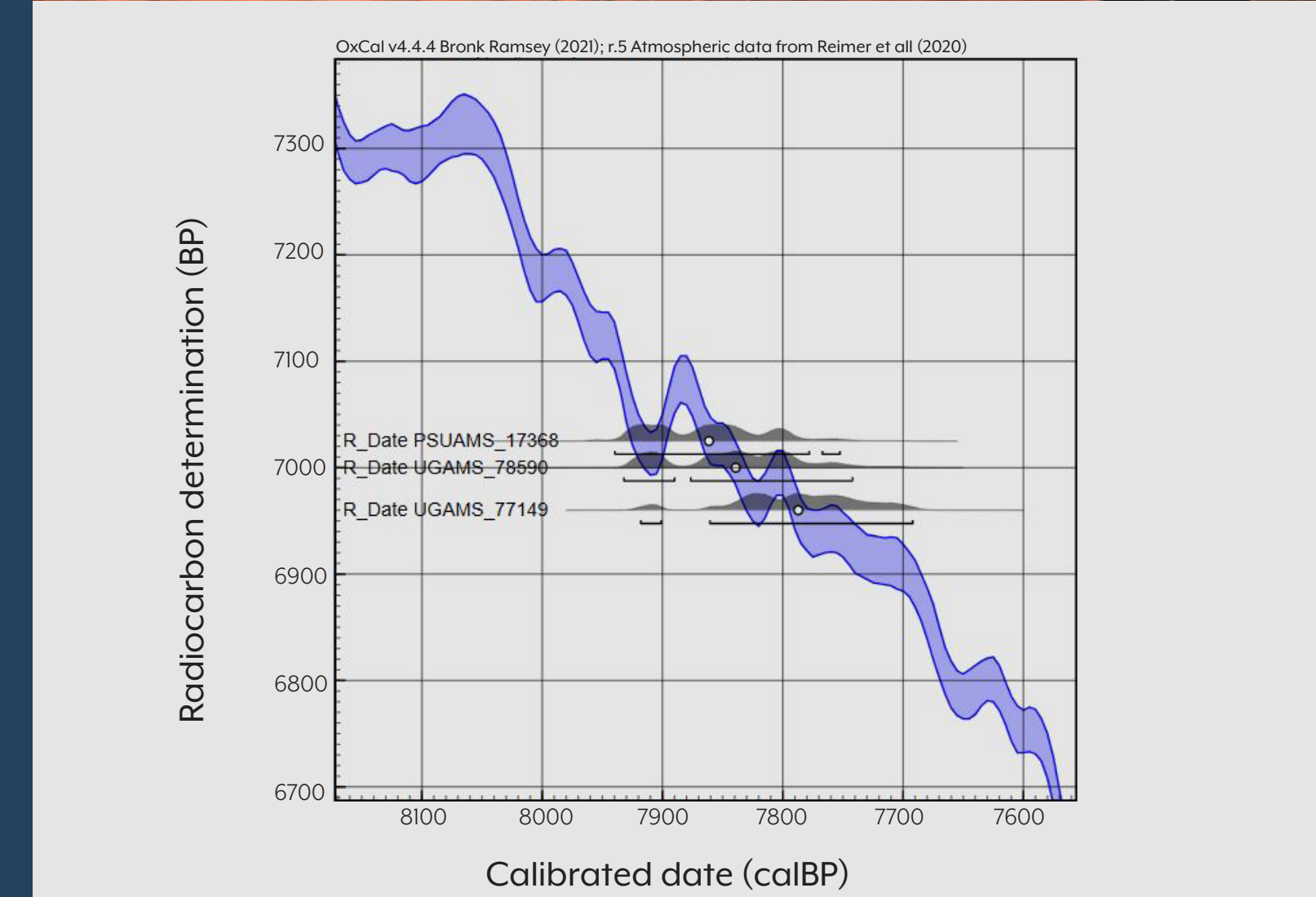
For decades, archaeological research into Kodiak's earliest settlers found the oldest dates to be a little less than 7500 years old. Researchers have often wondered if the widespread presence of sites across the archipelago dating to this timeframe indicate that is truly when Alutiiq ancestors first arrived on Kodiak, or if it is a result of preservation bias. Could earlier sites have been destroyed due to an unstable shoreline prior to 7500 years ago?

ALAGNARUARTULIQ MANY KINDS OF BERRIES

About 500 years ago, *Alagnaruartuliq* was a small village on the Karluk River, just downstream from the outlet of the lake. Today, the depressions from those sod houses are still visible. In 2024, the Alutiiq Museum archaeologists conducted two weeks of excavation here in partnership with Koniag, the regional Native corporation and landowner. The goals of the excavation were to learn more about inland settlement in the late pre-contact era and to test hypotheses both about season and duration of settlement and the construction and use of *qasgit* (community buildings).

OCEAN BAY I CAMPSITE

Although excavation initially focused on two late pre-contact structures and a faunal midden, the most surprising discovery came deeper in the site. Below the floor of one of the houses (Structure 4), the team uncovered a feature just above glacial till. The feature, roughly 2 m in diameter, appeared to have been a natural depression which was enhanced by both excavation and fill to create a level floor. Post holes around the outside suggest it may have had a superstructure. A small stone-ringed hearth in the center of the feature was filled with charcoal. Stone artifacts found here, as well as at the base of the midden excavation, suggested an early Ocean Bay occupation. However, in the midden and other parts of the site, the Ocean Bay I deposits appear to have been disturbed by later occupations. The hearth below Structure 4 was the only place where a charcoal sample could be obtained from a secure context.



TOOLS

A small assemblage of chipped stone artifacts from the deepest strata at Alagnaruartuliq supports an Ocean Bay I occupation on the Karluk River. Blades, microblades, and a microblade core made from exotic cherts are consistent with other early Ocean Bay assemblages from the Kodiak region. The presence of a single projectile point along with evidence of cobble reduction suggests hunting and processing tasks took place here.

DATES

While researchers expected an early Ocean Bay date based on the stratigraphic position of the hearth feature and the stone tool assemblage, they were surprised when the results were over 300 years older than any previously known date from the Kodiak region. Three dates from wood charcoal from this hearth produced ages of a little over 7800 calibrated years before present.

Lab Sample #	Material	¹⁴ C age (BP)	Calibrated mean
PSUAMS 17368	Wood charcoal	7025 ± 35	7861
UGAMS 77149	Wood charcoal	6960 ± 30	7787
UGAMS 78590	Wood charcoal (young willow twig)	7000 ± 30	7839

SUMMARY

While the discovery of such an early date on Kodiak is surprising, in other ways it is consistent with what we already know. The stone tools, which are similar to artifacts found in other early Ocean Bay assemblages, suggest cultural continuity from the earliest occupation of Kodiak over 7800 years ago through the Ocean Bay tradition (and to the present). The location of the site also demonstrates that Alutiiq ancestors used Kodiak's inland rivers and lakes from the very beginning, establishing a pattern of land use that lasted for millennia.

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