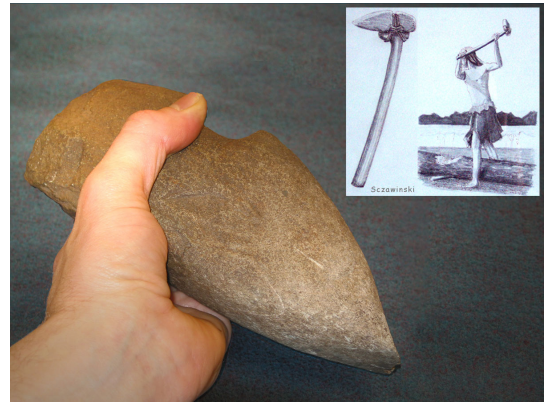


Coastal Archaeology Project

The Question: *What can we learn about the human use of Kenai Fjords by examining ancient cultural sites and by consulting living descendants of these cultures?*

Kenai Fjords National Park is often thought to be a complete wilderness, essentially unoccupied and unaltered by human presence. In fact, the Park's coastline is a cultural as well as a natural landscape. Though today there are no permanent residents on the outer coast, this area has been the scene of multiple waves of human occupation and use. What were the people like who lived on the outer coast? What attracted them to this rugged and often hostile environment? What can their culture tell us about climate and natural resource changes that are taking place now? What is the connection between these ancient cultures and Alaska Natives today?

The Project: *Explore archaeological sites in Kenai Fjords National Park and interpret findings using both academic methods and input of living descendants from nearby villages.*



Artifacts such as this stone adze head help us understand how the people of the Kenai Fjords lived hundreds of years ago.

Dr. Aron Crowell, archaeologist and Director of the Smithsonian Arctic Studies Center, in association with the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the Pratt Museum and the villages of Port Graham, Nanwalek, and Seldovia, has been conducting research in Aialik Bay to learn more about the cultural past of the Kenai Fjords. He is also interested in its connection to the modern-day Alaska Native people known as Sugpiaq or Alutiiq. In 1993, Crowell conducted a preliminary survey in Aialik and Harris Bays, and in 2002, he returned to begin a more thorough, three-year investigation of some of the sites he discovered. The connection between modern-day Alutiiq people to these sites was severed by contact with Western cultures over the last 200 years. However, stories of the outer coast persist in the nearby Alutiiq villages of Port Graham and Nanwalek. By bringing villagers and their knowledge to the archaeological sites, Crowell has gained important insight into the interpretation of these places, and the villagers have enriched their own cultural identity.



Archaeologists record information about an artifact found at an Alutiiq site during the summer of 2002.

Preliminary Results: *The outer coast has both winter village sites and summer hunting camps. Their patterns of use reflect both geological and climate change in the fjords.*

Dr. Crowell and his team have located a number of sites along the coast that indicate human use going back at least 1000 years. The sites seem to represent different parts of a complete seasonal round as Alutiiq people moved from winter villages to summer hunting camps and back again. The investigations have turned up evidence of a great earthquake, similar in magnitude to the 1964 quake, that rattled the fjords around 1170 AD. There are also indications that the advance of glaciers forced the abandonment of some sites. The archaeology of Kenai Fjords is at a very preliminary stage. Unraveling the mystery of this early culture, and its relationship to the Alutiiq traditions of nearby Prince William Sound, the Alaska Peninsula, and the people of Port Graham and Nanwalek requires much more study.