

# Smithsonian Institution

*Of all governmental agencies, the Smithsonian has the longest record of involvement in Arctic research, which started in the 1850s. Today, most of the Smithsonian Arctic activities are focused on studies of northern cultural heritage and environments and on the use of the institution's unique national collections for research, public outreach, and educational programs.*

Since the mid-1800s, Smithsonian scientists have produced an outstanding array of research in all regions of the Arctic. They also amassed unique national collections of northern natural and cultural specimens. Today, Smithsonian scientists maintain their strong interest in many fields of northern research, including botany, zoology, marine ecosystem, and socio-cultural studies.

The institution's current research activities are being carried primarily via the Arctic Studies Center (ASC) of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History (NMNH). Established in 1988, the ASC is the only active long-term Federal program that has a special mission in Arctic cultural research, education, and outreach, with programs developed in partnership with other Federal agencies (such as NOAA, NSF, DOI, and others), as well as with universities, museums, and local indigenous communities across the Arctic. ASC scientists, fellows, and associates have conducted studies throughout the entire circumpolar zone, including Alaska, Canada, Greenland, Scandinavia, and northern Russia. The ASC publishes an annual *Arctic Studies Center Newsletter* (with a current print run of about 2,000 copies) and maintains a web site at [www.mnh.si.edu/arctic](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic). The ASC also supports its own publication series, *Contributions to Circumpolar Anthropology*; six volumes and four off-series collections have been produced in 2001–2005.

In fulfilling the institution's stated mission in "the increase and dissemination of knowledge," the Smithsonian and the Arctic Studies Center promote research, collections development, and public programs that are driven by the growing public interest in the Arctic environment, history, cultures, and heritage of northern people. Interdisciplinary scholarship, heritage documentation, museum and educational training programs for northern residents, traveling exhibits reaching out to the most distant northern communities, and cooperative research are the trademark features of

	Funding (thousands)	
	FY 04	FY 05
Anthropology	450	500
Arctic Biology	50	50
Public Programs	0	50
Total	500	600

the Smithsonian approach. Under a cooperative agreement with the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, the Smithsonian also operates its Alaskan regional office in Anchorage (since 1995), advancing Smithsonian research and its strong public focus to local scholars, residents of Anchorage, and rural Alaskan communities.

The Smithsonian internal funding for its Arctic-focused research has remained fairly steady over the last several years, at an annual level of \$0.5–0.6 million. Substantial additional funds are generated each year through outside grants and inter-agency partnerships. In recent years the total amount of Smithsonian Arctic funding has significantly increased, thanks to many successful ventures, primarily in publications, exhibits, and public programs.

## Research and Public Outreach Initiatives

Smithsonian scholars are engaged in several research, collection, and outreach projects across the Arctic region. The efforts described below illustrate the Smithsonian research approach and its strong focus on collaboration with other agencies and northern communities.

### *International Polar Year, 2007–2008*

Smithsonian has a long record of association with IPY activities because of its role in the first U.S. IPY field expeditions of 1881–1884. The Smithsonian houses voluminous natural history, ethnological, and archival collections returned by the U.S. teams from the first IPY missions to Alaska

and Canada. Thanks to the preparation for the IPY 2007–2008, those collections have been recently inventoried and brought to public attention for the first time since the 1880s.

Over the last three years, Smithsonian scientists have been instrumental in promoting IPY 2007–2008 at numerous meetings, interagency sessions, and workshops and via its newsletter and web site. The Smithsonian has emerged as one of the critical hubs for the prospective IPY socio-cultural studies and public outreach activities. Smithsonian scholars are also active in other fields of Arctic and Antarctic research, particularly in biology, paleontology, ocean, astrophysics, and the history of polar science, that will be included in the Smithsonian IPY program.

The Smithsonian offers its Arctic and Antarctic collections—ethnological, botanical, zoological, mineral, films and archival materials, etc.—to scholars for all types of IPY research. Of particular value are the early ethnological and biological collections from Barrow, Alaska (1881–1883), and Ellesmere Island (1881–1884), from the first IPY era, as well as the scientific instrument collections and records of the early IPY stations. The Smithsonian thus aims at becoming a key IPY inter-agency hub for education, outreach, and public programs during 2007–2009 through its museum, outreach, and exhibit ventures.



Early camera (around 1880) that used glass plate negatives. All photographs from the First International Polar Year, 1881–1883, were taken by such equipment.

The first Smithsonian contribution to the forthcoming IPY is a new exhibit, *Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely*, which opened in April 2006. Under development since 2003, the 1800-square-foot exhibit is the first and so far the only governmental outreach and educational venture that brings the issues of Arctic climate change and environmental research to the general public. It has been developed jointly by the ASC and the NMNH Office of Exhibits in collaboration with NOAA, NASA, and NSF, as the main Smithsonian contribution to the Study of Environmental Arctic

Opening section of the new Smithsonian exhibit, *Arctic: A Friend Acting Strangely* (April 2006).





*Iñupiaq bowl from Wales, Alaska.*

Change (SEARCH) interagency program and to the forthcoming IPY 2007–2008 outreach activities. This exhibit will be open for nine months, until November 2006.

*Alaska Collections Project*

The 30,000 Alaskan ethnological objects in the collections of the Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History and National Museum of the American Indian represent all of the Native Alaskan cultures and span 150 years. The collections are a national treasure and an unparalleled resource of cultural heritage of more than 100,000 Alaska Natives. The Smithsonian care for these collections entails responsibilities for public dissemination, scholarly study, and engagement with Alaskan communities in training, exhibits, and education. These priorities are reflected in the

*Prospective view of the new gallery at the Anchorage Museum of History and Art, which will feature Smithsonian Alaska collections.*



Alaska Collections Project (ACP), which over the past five years (since 2000) has engaged several museum curators and over 50 Alaska cultural experts (Native Elders, community leaders, artists, and educators) in the cultural and linguistic documentation of many hundreds of objects. The initial results of this project may be viewed at [arctic.si.edu](http://arctic.si.edu).

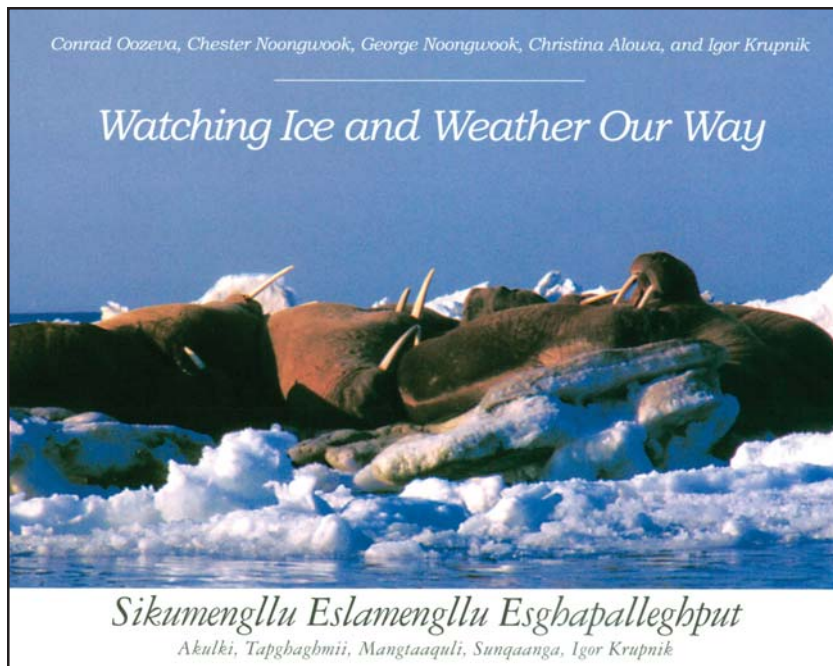
Through an ASC partnership with the Anchorage Museum of History and Art in Anchorage that began in 1994, the project will also lead to a permanent presence for the Smithsonian Alaska collections in Alaska. A new 10,000-square-foot exhibition gallery and cultural resource center will be a prominent attraction of the museum's new wing, scheduled to open in 2010. The new facility will display a collection of some 600–700 Smithsonian objects to be brought north on a rotating loan program. Sponsorship for the Alaska Collections Project has been provided by the Rasmuson Foundation, Smithsonian Institution, National Park Service, Anchorage Museum Foundation, Museum Loan Network, and Alaska Humanities Forum.



*Athabascan Elders (left to right) Phillip Arrow, Trimble Gilbert, Eliza Jones, and Judy Woods examining the Smithsonian's Alaska collections at the National Museum of Natural History.*

*Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge and Languages*

The Smithsonian is playing an active role in many interagency and international programs in support of endangered northern languages and in the documentation of indigenous environmental and cultural heritage knowledge. Recently, Smithsonian scientists made several critical contributions to this field, such as *Watching Ice and Weather Our Way* (2004, joint publication with the Marine Mammal Commission and the Savoonga Whaling Captains Association) and *Northern Ethnographic Landscapes: Perspectives from*



Cover page of the bilingual volume on indigenous knowledge of sea ice and weather (2004), produced jointly by the ASC, the Marine Mammal Commission, and the Savoonga Whaling Captains Association.

*Circumpolar Nations* (2004, joint publication with the Alaska Office of National Park Service). ASC scientists have been active in the production of the ACIA report *Impacts of a Warming Arctic* (2004) and in its subsequent dissemination through public hearings, lectures, and other outreach events, including a special panel on the impacts of Arctic climate change on Alaska native communities held at the NMNH in November 2005.

In 2004 the ASC collaborated with Université Laval in Québec, Canada, in co-organizing an international symposium titled *Reversing Language and Knowledge Shift in the North*, which brought together northern specialists in indigenous languages, traditional knowledge systems, and educational practices. Speakers included academic researchers, linguists, and anthropologists, but also many aboriginal and non-aboriginal specialists in Native languages and education from Alaska, Nunavut, Greenland, and Russia. The

Saami sacrificial structure on the island of Stora Fjäderägg in northern Sweden.



funding for the symposium was granted by the NSF Office of Polar Programs, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, Centre Interuniversitaire d'Études et de Recherches Autochtones, the Government of Nunavut, the Greenland Home Rule Government, and other agencies. The proceedings of the symposium were published in 2005 as a special issue of the journal *Études/Inuit/Studies* titled *Preserving Language and Knowledge of the North*.

#### *Saami Heritage in Northern Scandinavia*

The Search for a Past; The Indigenous Saami of Northern Coastal Sweden is a three-year (2004–2007) interdisciplinary project in research and documentation of the Saami prehistory in northern Sweden. The project has documented archaeological sites in three counties (Norrbotten, Västerbotten and Hälsingland), together forming a north–south transect of almost 700 kilometers. Dozens of huts have been mapped and sampled along this coast, resulting in over 40 radiocarbon dates, finds of animal bone, and evidence of animal husbandry and iron working. Saami ritual sites, including a bear grave and circular sacrificial sites, have helped establish the identity of these sites as truly Saami in origin. These results are combined with the oral history and place-name studies.

The project has made special efforts at public outreach and education. Information is disseminated online at [www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/saami/intro.html](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/features/saami/intro.html), which is accessible through the main ASC web site at [www.mnh.si.edu/arctic](http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic). An archaeology field school was carried out in the summer of 2005, with students from Harvard University, the University of Western Michigan, George Washington University, and the University of Minnesota.

Through the ASC partnership with the Smithsonian Associates and the Royal Norwegian Embassy, a Saami lecture series, several cultural programs, and a photo exhibit have been facilitated at the Smithsonian. From October 2005 until June 2006, the exhibit *Frost: Life and Culture of the Saami Reindeer People of Norway* was on display at the NMNH. This exhibit of over 50 black and white and color images by Norwegian Saami photographer Fred Ivar Utsi Klemetsen illustrates the meeting of old and new traditions in the Saami culture of today.

#### *Community Archaeology in Labrador*

The ASC has a long-established network of partnerships with various indigenous communities across the Arctic, particularly in Alaska and Canada.

Indicative of this long-term commitment are a pair of ongoing community research initiatives in Labrador that involve ASC scholars, Innu and Inuit community leaders, educators, and elders in developing local archaeological research and educational programs. The Central Coast of Labrador Community Archaeology Program, now in its seventh year, is undertaken jointly by the ASC, the Canadian Labrador Inuit communities of Makkovik and Hopedale (including schools, local historical societies, and community museums), the Robert S. Peabody Museum of Archaeology in Andover, MA, and Brown University. The project integrates methods of archaeological research, high school curriculum development, and local heritage training in site preservation, archaeological fieldwork, and museum development. This research has culminated with the publication of *Anguti's Amulet/Angutiup ânguanga* (2005: Eastern Woodlands Publishing, Truro, N.S.), a bilingual introduction to archaeology for grade 8 students. Prepared for and distributed to all the Inuit schools in Labrador, the booklet is the first curriculum publication in the Labrador Inuktitut dialect.

A second Labrador initiative has the ASC working cooperatively with the Tshikapisk Foundation, an Innu experiential education program based in the Innu communities of Sheshatshit and Natuashish. Tshikapisk is committed to reconnecting Innu families with the land through a variety of country-based programs that seek to enhance Innu awareness of, and pride in, Innu identity, language, and culture.

*Knut Rasmussen, a Danish–Inuit anthropologist and polar explorer, at Starvation Cove, the resting place of some members of the Franklin expedition, 1923.*

#### *Cultural Festivals: Greenland and Alaska*

In 2005 the Smithsonian hosted two northern cultural festivals at the National Museum of Natural History. Festival of Greenland: Kalallit Nunaat

was held over a weekend in late May and brought nearly fifty Greenlanders, led by Henriette Rasmussen, Greenland's Home Rule Minister of Culture, Education, and the Church, to share their history and culture with scholars and museum visitors. The programs, organized jointly by the Smithsonian, the Greenland Home Rule Government, and the Danish Royal Embassy, included exhibitions of Greenlandic traditional ethnography, art, and history; lectures and seminars; performances by dancers, musicians, and storytellers; a photo exhibit; and a Greenland film festival. The Arctic Studies Center presented exhibits of 19th century Greenland ethnography and William Bradford photography from his Greenland art expedition of 1869, as well as a display titled *Across Arctic North America*, presenting Knut Rasmussen's epic anthropological expedition from Greenland to Alaska in 1921–1924. Lectures included talks on cultural history, geology and natural history, and history and contemporary society in Greenland.

A similar event, Festival of Alaska Native Arts and Culture, took place at the NMNH in November 2005. It was organized jointly by the ASC and the Alaska Native Arts Foundation and included lectures, seminars, displays by modern Alaska Native artists; photography from early explorers and naturalists; films; and music. The festival acquainted museum-goers with Alaska Native arts and crafts and educated the public about Alaska Natives' close and continuing relationships with animals and the land that sustain their cultural values and beliefs.

#### *Interagency Collaboration*

The Smithsonian has long-established partnerships with many Federal agencies, such as NASA, NOAA, NSF, DOI (National Park Service), DOA, and others. For many decades, interagency partnership was pivotal in expanding resources and logistical support to Smithsonian scientists working in the polar regions. It also allowed the Smithsonian to advance high-quality research, public and educational programs, and management of the national collections. Recently these ties have been strengthened through several new cooperative research and public initiatives.

The Smithsonian is a member of the Interagency Arctic Research Policy Committee (IARPC) and other bodies that promote interagency collaboration. ASC members and associates represent the Smithsonian and Arctic social sciences at the Polar Research Board of the National Academies and other science policy groups.

