

Documenting Traditional Knowledge on Tlingit Seal Hunting Practices

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Introduction

This is an on-going multidisciplinary research project. This project will integrate research on indigenous language, knowledge, and oral traditions with archaeological and geological data to examine the retreat of Hubbard Glacier and establishment of harbor seal traditional hunting camps.

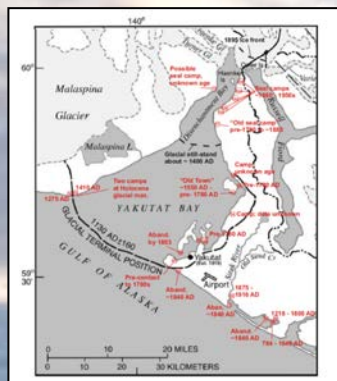
Background

Hubbard Glacier is north of Yakutat, Alaska. It filled the whole bay about C.E. 1100 and retreated twenty five miles to its present position.

Harbor Seals is an importance food and cultural resource for Alaska Natives.

Harbor seals have been designated a "species of special concern" in Alaska by the U.S Marine Mammal Commission because of their decline in some areas of Alaska.

Harbor seals were traditionally managed through a clan-based system of resource management. Seals were harvested for their meat, hide and blubber. Hunters used special hunting technology to hunt and had to be aware of wind, water current as well as different types of ice bergs.



Multidisciplinary

Archaeological and geological data will be used to construct a chronological framework for Tlingit toponyms and oral history of the seal camps and glacier recession. Here is a map of the glacier recession and archaeological sites



Methods

Key respondent interviews were conducted with fluent Tlingit elders and knowledgeable hunters. Interviews will be video taped and transcribed to document the important Tlingit and Eyak toponyms, terms, and oral history



Importance of Seals

Yakutat is among the top five harbor seal harvest communities in Alaska (Wolfe et. Al. 2009). In the 19th and 20th century the whole village moved to the spring sealing camps



Left photo, Tlingit women fleshing seal behind her is hides being stretched, as well as smoked seal flippers
Photo from Harriman Expedition 1899

Right photo, model of seal hunting canoe called Goo.diyá for hunting in the ice, the prow is used to push through the ice, The hunter turns it around and used the other end in ice-free water.



A Tlingit seal oil bowl

Research on seal oil found daily consumption of seal oil lower the risk of glucose intolerance and is a potentially modifiable risk factor for Non-insulin-dependent diabetes mellitons in Alaskan Natives.

This research will add to the understanding of the role of traditional diet vulnerabilities to contamination and unknown diseased.

Results

This research will continue for The next two years until 2014.

We will continue conducting Interviews on hunting practices and tradition, toponyms, oral traditions, and traditional management. For more information you can Watch our video on youtube The Glacier's Eternal Gift: Traditional Ice Floe Sealing at Yakutat Bay

Acknowledgments

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