

# RE-COVERING IT: THE ANAKTUVUK PASS KAYAK PROJECT

Angela Linn

University of Alaska Museum of the North, 907 Yukon Drive, Fairbanks, AK 99775-6960. fnajl@uaf.edu

**Abstract:** This paper describes a co-operative project undertaken by the University of Alaska Museum of the North (UAMN) in Fairbanks, the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum in Anaktuvuk Pass, and the community of Anaktuvuk Pass. The aim is to re-cover a Nunamiut kayak (*qayaq*) in the UAMN collection. Here, I describe the history of the kayak and that of the current project, the individuals involved, and the project goals. As a collections manager, I also consider some of the ethical issues of “fixing” ethnographic museum objects.

**Keywords:** Conservation, Material culture, Nunamiut

## THE HISTORY

The UAMN kayak re-covering project took place in the village of Anaktuvuk Pass, which is located at 68° 08' N, 151° 45' W, ca. 400 km northwest of Fairbanks, in the Brooks Range (Orth 1971 [1967]:74). Anaktuvuk Pass is a Nunamiut Eskimo village, with a current population of approximately 300 people. Villagers are descendants of small bands of families who occupied the central Brooks Range for the better part of three centuries. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, a precipitous decline in the caribou population forced most of them to move to the Arctic coast where they became involved in the whaling industry, reindeer herding, and later the fur trade. By the late 1930's many had moved back inland; there three small bands established themselves in the upper Killik, Chandler, and Ulu-Sagavanirktok River drainages (Spearman et al. 1982:2). One of these groups disbanded in 1942, scattering to Wiseman and Fairbanks, and the other two joined at Tulugak Lake in the Anaktuvuk valley in 1949, later settling 26 km south at the newly established village of Anaktuvuk Pass.<sup>1</sup>

The language that many people in Anaktuvuk Pass still speak is a dialect of Iñupiaq, though their cultural traditions diverge from their coastal relatives, partly because of the differences in environment and available resources. In earlier times, land mammals, fish and to a much lesser degree, local vegetation made up the Nunamiut diet, and hunting techniques included the stan-

dard snaring techniques common to many Alaska Native groups, as well as a specialized caribou hunting tradition that included corralling caribou on land and hunting them in lakes from kayaks. The Nunamiut of Anaktuvuk Pass have always relied heavily on caribou, the most abundant animal in this area of the Brooks Range (Amsden 1977; Campbell 1970; Gubser 1965). Caribou have served many purposes to the Nunamiut, from raw materials for clothing and dwelling covers to the main source of food.

The roots of the Nunamiut kayak project can be traced back to 1944, when six Nunamiut families gathered together to conduct the last known kayak-based caribou hunt at Little Chandler Lake northwest of Anaktuvuk Pass in the Brooks Range. The Nunamiut had used firearms for decades by this time, but because of American involvement in World War two they feared that cartridges and reloading supplies might be rationed. As a result, the families were concerned about their ability to sustain themselves over the winter. They concluded that building a small fleet of kayaks to revive a hunting technique that several of the elders in the group had either observed or participated in as youngsters seemed the most viable way to harvest the needed caribou (Spearman n.d.:23-24).

Hunting caribou with the aid of a kayak is certainly not unique to the Nunamiut, and appears to have been widely practiced in the Arctic. Many Canadian Inuit popu-

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<sup>1</sup>For the history of the Nunamiut, cf. Amsden 1977, Campbell 1998, Gubser 1965, Hall, Gerlach and Blackman 1985, Spearman et al. 1982.

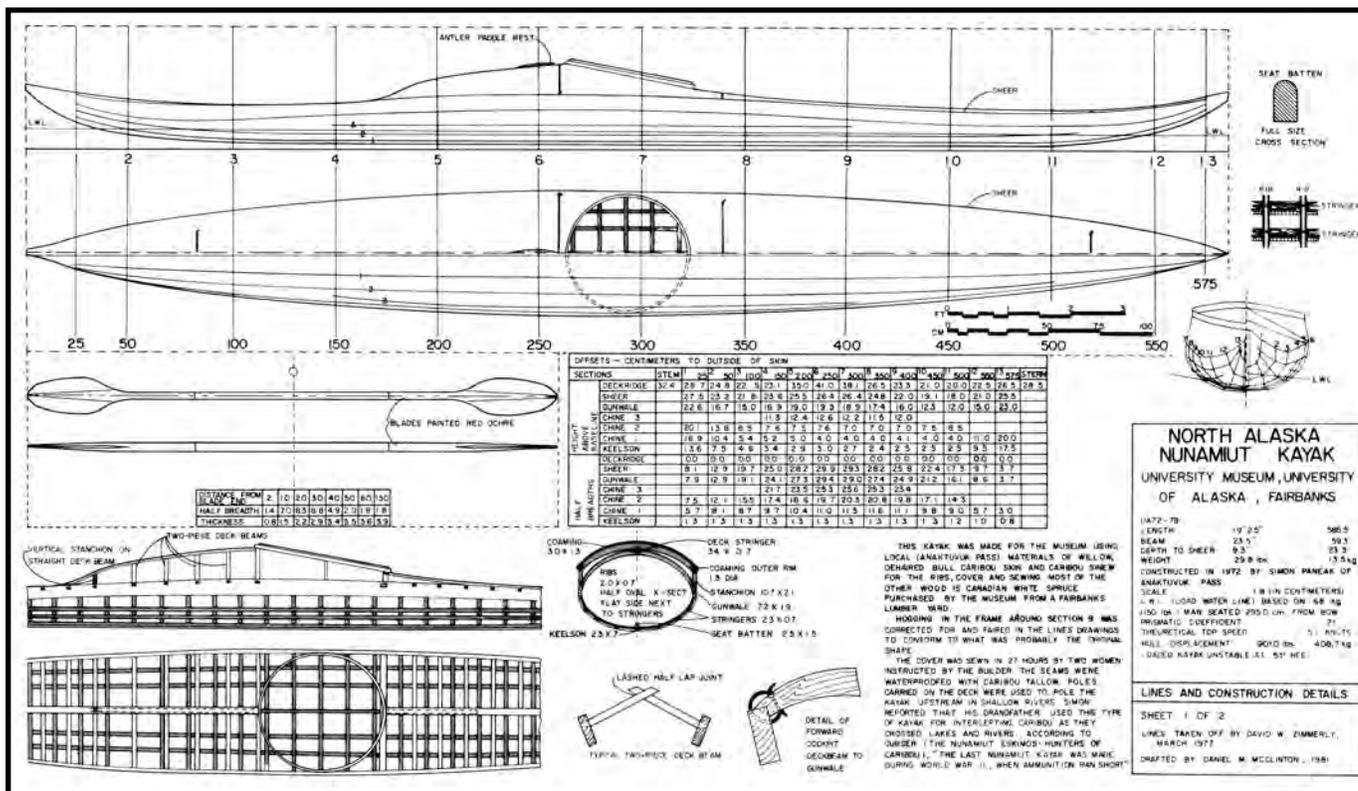


Figure 1: Schematic drawing of Nunamiut kayak. © Canadian Museum of Civilization, David Zimmerly Collection, catalogue no. IV-D-28M.

lations used this same technique at water crossings, utilizing *inuksuk* (cairns, “like a man”) and/or human drivers to maneuver caribou herds into the desired position (Adney 1964; Arima 1975; Jenness 1970 [1922]; Turner 2001 [1894]). In Alaska, too, the tradition of hunting caribou in this way was not uncommon and in pre-gun times was widely practiced by the Nunamiut among the many lakes that dot the north face of the central Brooks Range (Spearman n.d.:18).

When spring arrived in 1944, twenty-two Nunamiut from several families set up camp along the southern edge of Ikagiak Creek, which drains into nearby Little Chandler Lake. There the families worked together to construct a small fleet of three kayaks and their associated tools and equipment. In addition to the kayaks, *inuksuks* were set up in a pattern (a “drive line”) (Spearman n.d.:34) to direct the caribou into the lake. As the caribou entered the Chandler valley from the foothills to the north, the hunters allowed the early and lead herds to pass, as is their custom,<sup>2</sup> then all participants took action. Young children were quieted as the teens and the remaining adults took positions along the *inuksuk* line, while the hunters

took to their boats. The people along the driveline acted as a “human wall,” forcing the caribou toward the water. The line slowly moved and pivoted toward the water, forcing the caribou in the same direction. The final phase of driving the herd consisted of individual drivers waving strips of dried grizzly bear intestine above their heads, which made popping and crackling noises. Combining this with the noise and arm waving of the other participants, the herd moved steadily and quickly into the water, where the men in the kayaks waited (Spearman n.d.:43). Over the next hour or so, the kayakers thrust their spears at the swimming animals, following them to the far shore of the lake. Despite repeated questioning of those who participated<sup>3</sup> there is no good estimate of the number of caribou taken during this hunt. “Lots” was the term most frequently used (Spearman n.d.:46-47).

On the second day of the hunt, one young and inexperienced kayaker capsized and nearly drowned, had it not been for Simon Paneak and another hunter’s assistance. Only a few caribou were taken that day. On the third day of the hunt, the caribou seemed to have been spooked and never made their way to the lake.<sup>4</sup> Despite

<sup>2</sup>Nunamiut oral traditions emphasize this practice. There are many stories that tell of over-eager hunters who prematurely intercepted the lead herds and neutralized the migration. They tell of an “alarm scent” that caribou have between their hooves that, in the event of being frightened, will mark the ground and warn following animals to find a safer route (Spearman n.d.:38).

<sup>3</sup>Grant Spearman took a group of people back to the site of the 1944 hunt and conducted interviews in both 1985 and 1990 to document this event.

<sup>4</sup>According to tradition, the caribou know if a hunter has been involved in an accident, or killed, and will avoid that area (Spearman n.d.:53).

this disappointing end to the three-day event, the people were elated with their overall success. At the end of the last recorded kayak-based caribou hunt the Nunamiut had ample meat and skins, and, just as important, everyone had saved their precious ammunition (Spearman n.d.:53).

### THE IDEA

In 1971, UAMN, recognizing that many traditional Alaska Native skills were threatened with extinction, commissioned a Nunamiut-style kayak from Simon Paneak of Anaktuvuk Pass.<sup>5</sup> After consultation with Paneak, the museum purchased Canadian white spruce from a local lumber mill and had it delivered to Anaktuvuk Pass in October of that year.<sup>6</sup> It was too cold to begin construction by then, so in the spring, once it was warm enough, Paneak began assembling the wooden frame (University of Alaska Museum of the North 1972). Using local willow to supplement the spruce, Simon constructed the frame by lashing the wooden ribs and stringers together with babiche (rawhide; *quniguq*), using wooden pegs and splints for fine-tuning (Figure 1). The kayak measures 5.85 m and has forty-five ribs (twelve of which Simon chose to make from local willow, positioned visibly inside the cockpit) and seven stringers made from the milled spruce (Figure 2). The craft weighs only 13 kg.<sup>7</sup> The two women who made the caribou skin cover used the hides of approximately four fall bull caribou. It took Susie Paneak, Simon's wife, and Ellen Hugo about twenty-seven hours to sew the cover (Zimmerly 1986:70). The specialized double waterproof seams were coated in caribou tallow to further waterproof them (Figure 3).<sup>8</sup>

On November 13, 1972, after several months of coordination carried out through letters and telephone calls, the finished kayak was crated in Anaktuvuk Pass and delivered to Fairbanks by a Naval Arctic Research Laboratory plane (University of Alaska Museum of the North 1972).



Figure 2: Simon Paneak and kayak frame in 1972. Credit: Lewis Binford.

### THE PROBLEM

Once added to the collection, the Nunamiut kayak almost immediately developed problems. In 1972 the Museum was located in Signers' Hall, an academic building on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. Constructed in the mid-1930s, Signers' Hall's original heating system had never been updated. As a result, when the kayak arrived in Fairbanks in November, it was placed in a steam-heated building with low relative humidity.<sup>9</sup> The caribou skins of the kayak cover were "green" (freshly taken and prepared) (University of Alaska Museum of the North 1972) and almost immediately, the tightly sewn cover began to dry out and shrink on the wooden frame.

In an attempt to slow this process, museum personnel removed the kayak to the recently constructed Elmer Rasmuson Library, where it was placed in a room with some environmental controls, known thereafter as the "Kayak Room." The kayak appears to have remained there until 1986, when it traveled to the Alaska State Museum in Juneau for a two-year loan. On returning to Fairbanks, it was installed in the permanent gallery of the newly constructed University of Alaska Museum building on the West Ridge of the campus, where it has been housed until its temporary return to Anaktuvuk Pass for repair in May 2003.<sup>10</sup>

Although the new museum building was equipped with environmental controls, by the time the kayak was moved there, no amount of environmental control could rectify the damage. The skin covering was ripped over the majority of its surface (Figure 4). Several seams had been deliberately cut in an attempt to lessen the tension. Many of the bent spruce ribs had cracked and two of them protruded through the skin covering. Furthermore, the skin covering itself was dry and extremely brittle overall. It was this poor condition of the kayak that led Simon Paneak Memorial Museum (SPMM) curator Grant Spearman to develop the idea of re-covering the boat.

<sup>5</sup>Simon Paneak (born, 1900, died, 1975) was a leader who served as a guide, collaborator and informant to a generation of arctic researchers, including Laurence Irving, Helge Ingstad, Robert Rausch, Jack Campbell, and Edwin Hall. He also constructed numerous items of Nunamiut material culture for the ethnology department at the UAMN. (cf. Irving 1976).

<sup>6</sup>Traditionally local willow and spruce would have been used for construction of the frame.

<sup>7</sup>In overall appearance, the Nunamiut kayak most closely resembles others from Northern Alaska, specifically the Kotzebue Sound/Point Barrow style (Zimmerly 1986:64). The Anaktuvuk Pass style is a bit longer and slightly narrower than the Kotzebue/Barrow boats. Both have a reverse sheer (the frame becomes slightly concave, reversing the typical convex line of the profile) at the cockpit and a ridged deck just to the front of the cockpit. The major difference is that the Nunamiut boat curves upward at both the bow and stern.

<sup>8</sup>Files deposited in the UAM Ethnology Department mention photographs of this process, although at the time of this writing, these images have not been located.

<sup>9</sup>Although the outside relative humidity in Anaktuvuk Pass at this time of the year would have also been very low, a kayak normally would not have been made in the winter and so the initial drying and shrinkage that would have occurred would not have been so dramatic.

<sup>10</sup>The current building that houses the museum is known as the Otto W. Geist building and was completed in 1980.

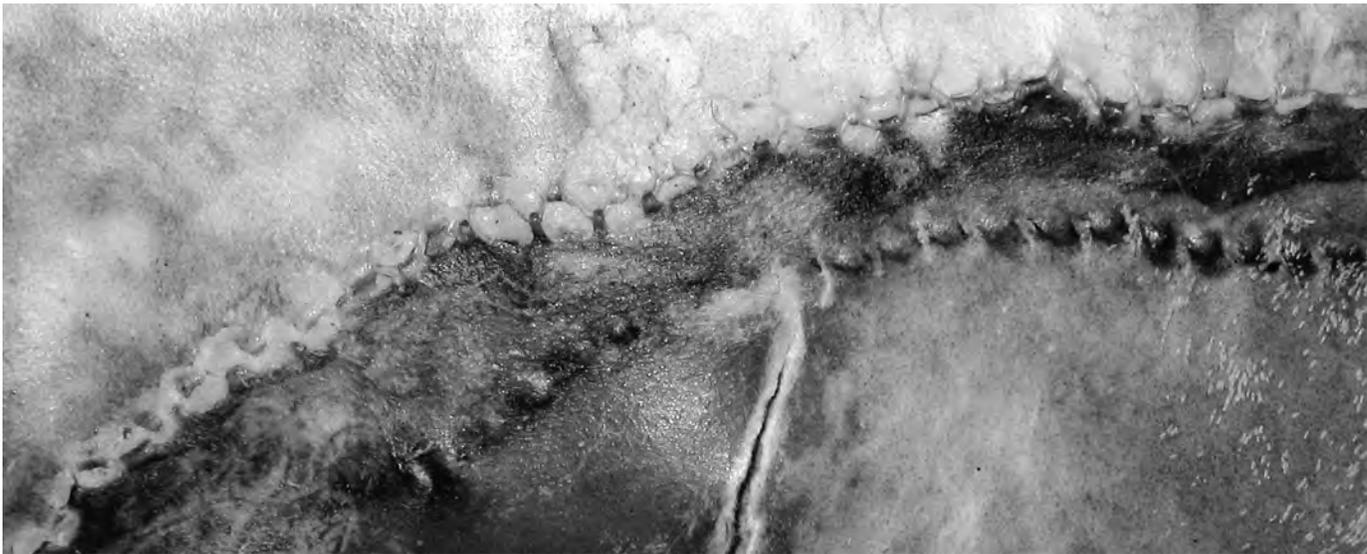


Figure 3: Seam sealed with caribou tallow on original skin covering. Credit: Angela Linn.

Spearman was also concerned that the process of Nunamiut kayak construction be documented for the future.

### THE PROJECT

About 1996, Spearman suggested a co-operative SPM and UAMN project in which the kayak would be returned to Anaktuvuk Pass temporarily for re-covering. This proposal, sidelined for more than five years, served as the basis for the current project. At the time of the original proposal, Ethnology curator Molly Lee had been newly hired (1995) and project funding sources and Nunamiut personnel had not been identified.



Figure 4: Kayak damage as seen on exhibit at the University of Alaska Museum. Credit: Angela Linn.

During the summer of 2002, Molly Lee invited Roosevelt (“Roosy”) Paneak, son of Simon and Susie, to visit UAMN to see the kayak and the associated material (two long poles and a paddle). She informed him of the Spearman proposal; conversations about the old re-covering project were revived, and we began to develop the project anew. Roosevelt Paneak’s primary concern

was timing: with each passing year Nunamiut elders with the critical knowledge of kayak-building and skin sewing skills are fewer. In fact, even when Simon Paneak made the kayak he had to instruct the skin sewers in the art of the essential double-waterproof stitching, which they had apparently forgotten. And in the intervening thirty years, there has been no revival of this specialized knowledge. This made the timing all the more critical.

With the interest and motivation of Roosevelt Paneak, and the funding and resource knowledge of Molly Lee, we went about contacting private donors, foundations and local governing bodies. Several months later we secured the necessary funds for the project.<sup>11</sup>

### THE ACTIVITIES

The kayak re-covering project has involved cooperation and collaboration with a variety of complicated activities, among museum departments and in the wider Fairbanks community as well as in Anaktuvuk Pass. First, the kayak was removed from its current location in the permanent exhibit gallery. Exhibits Preparator Steve Bouta constructed a crate to ensure safe passage of the kayak to Anaktuvuk Pass. In Fairbanks, Everts Air Cargo donated the cost of shipping the craft aboard one of its fleet of DC-6 cargo planes as well as airfare to and from Anaktuvuk Pass for project participants.

On its arrival in Anaktuvuk Pass, where photographer James Barker and filmmakers Leonard Kamerling and Takashi Sakurai were already in place, the kayak was greeted with interest and enthusiasm. Once

<sup>11</sup>Financial contributors include: Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, Dinah Larsen, The Evelyn Stefansson Nef Foundation, Everts Air Cargo, the City of Anaktuvuk Pass and Nunamiut Corporation.



Figure 5: Residents of Anaktuvuk Pass examine the kayak at the open house on May 17, 2003. Credit: Angela Linn.

off-loaded it was moved to its temporary home in the Nagragmiut Tribal Council's snowmachine shop, where it stayed in its crate for twenty-four hours to acclimate.



Figure 6: Roosevelt Paneak watches Esther Hugo scrape a caribou skin on the log while Takashi Sakurai films. Credit: Angela Linn.

Thanks to the generosity of the Nunamiut Corporation and the City of Anaktuvuk Pass, the residents of the village were invited to an open house and kayak-viewing at the snowmachine shop where the activities took place (Figure 5).

Work on the kayak began on Monday, May 19, 2003 with the removal of the old skins and an examination of the wooden frame by project participants. Three skin sewers had been hired to do the work: Ruth Rulland was the lead sewer, along with Molly and Lela Ahgook (see Blackman article this issue). The second day Rhoda Ahgook replaced Ruth, who had an appointment in

Fairbanks. At least two kayak ribs had been identified as cracked due to the stress of the drying skins. Once the skins were off, we realized that in fact, nine ribs were broken and several others showed cracks. These had to be repaired before the new skins were sewn onto the frame.

Five caribou skins were purchased from Ruth Rulland with money donated by Arctic Slope Regional Corporation. The caribou hides had been preserved in Ruth Rulland's freezer, so the women cleaned them after they had been thawed in large plastic garbage cans filled with warm water. They removed the last bits of hair that were still attached, and then scraped them clean, using their ulus (women's knives) and scissors. One particularly dirty skin had a thick membrane that was difficult to remove, and Rhoda Ahgook suggested bringing in a log to place the skin on for cleaning. The log provided a hard surface over which the women could scrape the hide with a kitchen knife held with both hands. This speeded up the process (Figure 6).

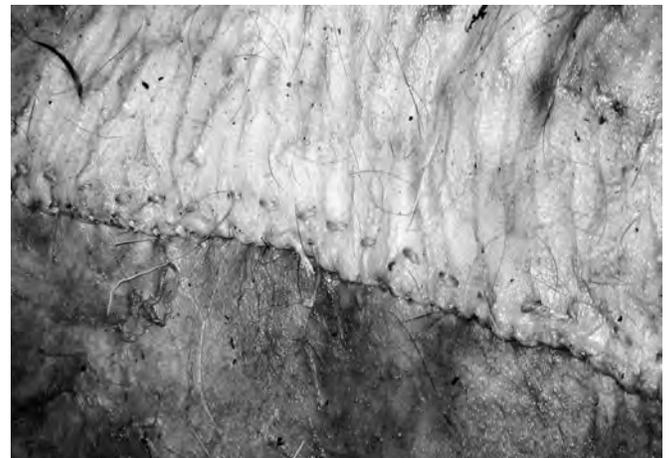


Figure 7: Double-waterproof stitch on new skin covering. Credit: Angela Linn.



Figure 8: Test fit of the new skins. Credit: Angela Linn.

Once cleaned, the women sewed the large skins together using the double-waterproof stitches (Figure 7). The best skins were placed around the cockpit of the boat and during the whole process, the old skin covering was kept within easy reach for referencing. On the third day, the new skin cover was ready to be fit loosely onto the frame to check its size and determine where patching would be necessary (Figure 8).

The seamstresses worked exclusively with caribou sinew (in this case, tendons from along the back of the neck of the caribou), which they prepared during the sewing process. To make this traditional material, they used two methods, either twisting two strands together, or preferably braiding three small strands together. The braiding technique allows for two lengths of tendon to be combined into a single longer piece.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time the women were sewing, the men began repairing the frame. On Monday afternoon Johnny Rulland visited the wooden frame and consulted with

Roosevelt Paneak, who was directing the project, to determine how to fix the nine broken ribs. Wednesday morning, Johnny returned with several wooden ribs that he had made. With the assistance of Jack Ahgook, Jr. and Roosevelt, Johnny removed the broken portions of the ribs, replaced them with new ones shaped from local, fresh willow, and lashed them in place with wax-coated twine (Figure 9). The old wooden pegs were re-used to hold the splinted ribs together and new ones were manufactured to affix the newly constructed ribs to the frame.

With the frame secured, the women began fitting on the new cover. Once the necessary adjustments were made (removing excess skin and patching open areas) it was ready to be sewn onto the frame. First, the frame was laid atop the skins, then the skins were wrapped up over it and the women sewed extra threads to the inside surface to help cinch the skins tight. These threads catch most of the thickness of the skin and help hold it tight to the wooden frame without penetrating the skin's exterior. Next, the women sewed shut the openings along the deck of the boat. Finally, on the fifth day of work, the old ochre-painted willow rim was fitted around the cockpit and secured with a roll of babiche that Simon Paneak had foresightedly stored in the cockpit. The kayak rested in the snowmachine shop to dry, and then was re-placed in the crate.



Figure 9: Johnny Rulland wraps the repaired ribs with waxed twine. Credit: Angela Linn.

Over the weekend of June 28-29, 2003, the community of Anaktuvuk Pass came out to view the inaugural floating of the renovated kayak. Before this could happen, however, the seams needed to be sealed. Traditionally, women would have chewed caribou tallow in order to obtain the proper viscosity. The saliva and warmth of

<sup>12</sup>The tendons from the back of the caribou are approximately 40 cm in length. When twisted, this makes for a very short length of thread. By braiding two lengths together, an average thread length of 75 to 80 cm could be obtained, which made the sewing process proceed more smoothly.



Figure 10: Ruth Rulland spreads caribou tallow on the skins to waterproof the covering. © James H. Barker 2003.

the women's mouths helped prepare the tallow for spreading (Roosevelt Paneak 2003, written communication). None of the skin sewers wanted to volunteer for this task. As an alternative, the tallow was put through a meat grinder, which produced small cylinders of fat that were easier to spread by hand and worked into the seams that had opened up when the skin covering dried and shrank (Figure 10).

Roosevelt received a last-minute kayaking lesson from photographer James Barker, the morning of the floating, and by afternoon a large crowd gathered to watch the newly re-covered kayak placed in water for the first time in thirty years.<sup>13</sup> Roosy took the first trip around Eleanor Lake in Anaktuvuk Pass, showing a bit of apprehension, but then settled into the comfort of the boat that

his father built (Figure 11). Members of the community were invited to take a spin around the lake, or for the more timid, just to have their pictures taken while sitting in the boat by the shore. Even the Everts Air pilot who had brought Leonard Kamerling into town that morning took advantage of this unique experience and paddled the kayak on the lake.

Finally, despite the protests of some members of the community,<sup>14</sup> the kayak was re-packed after drying out and eventually brought back to Fairbanks, where it was quickly wrapped in polyethylene sheeting in order to monitor it for potential infestation.<sup>15</sup> After the mandatory waiting period, the kayak was unwrapped and re-hung in the main gallery.

<sup>13</sup>After Simon completed the original kayak in July of 1972, he also floated the boat in Eleanor Lake (Roosevelt Paneak 2004, written communication).

<sup>14</sup>At one point before the kayak was re-packed into the crate, several residents of Anaktuvuk Pass voiced their desire to keep the boat in the village, permanently. As it often happens, once a community is reunited with unique cultural artifacts relating to their past, they want the object to stay in their village so that everyone can enjoy this part of their history. However, Roosevelt Paneak was able to remind everyone how and why the boat exists in the first place. This provided the impetus for the potential manufacturing of a new boat designed for the village, utilizing the knowledge and experience gained on this project, combined with the existing skills of village elders.

<sup>15</sup>The skins that were used to cover the kayak are un-tanned and as a result, are a prime food source for the black carpet beetle. UAMN's Integrated Pest Management (IPM) policy stipulates that all non-tanned skins must be frozen at -40 degrees for a minimum of 48 hours. The kayak, however, is much too large to fit into the fumigation chest freezer, so it was monitored for 45 days, the life-cycle of the beetle.



Figure 11: Roosevelt Paneak rests while paddling around Eleanor Lake. © James H. Barker 2003.

## THE GOALS AND PRODUCTS

Through the activities described above and the work of the participants, UAMN has a newly re-covered kayak to present to the thousands of visitors who come to the museum every year. It is currently exhibited in the main gallery of the museum; however, our future plans for the boat involve something special.

Part of the \$31 million expansion and renovation that is currently underway at the museum is the creation of the *Rose Berry Alaskan Art Gallery*. One section of this gallery is labeled “Art as Process” in which we examine the process an artist undertakes in the creation of a work of art. Typical fine art objects (paintings, sculpture, photography, etc.) will be placed in juxtaposition to ethnographic works. One component of the ethnographic section will look at Yup’ik basketry and the creation of these popular items. The Anaktuvuk Pass kayak will stand

in contrast to showcase the cooperation of men and women in producing a utilitarian object that can also be looked at as a work of art. The photographs of James Barker will illustrate the various stages of construction, from hunting the caribou, the preparing of the skins and sinew, the skills needed to make the wooden frame and, finally, to the fine work of the skin sewers. Portions of the Kamerling/Sakurai film will also be shown in order to help visitors understand the process and significance of this kayak.<sup>16</sup>

Of equal importance is the educational component to this project. We hope to compile materials for the production of an educational unit focusing on the Nunamiut kayak, its traditional manufacture and use, for airing in schools and in both of the participating museums. The University of Alaska Museum of the North and the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum will jointly produce a scholarly publication about the kayak.

<sup>16</sup>It is also the author’s hope that the various parts of the boat will be labeled using Nunamiut terminology and systems of measurement for the assorted components.

A very important part of this project is this process of transmitting traditional knowledge to the younger generation. The original plan included the participation of students from the Anaktuvuk Pass School in interviewing skin sewers and wood workers, as well as possible hands-on work on the skins and wood for themselves. The lure of lucrative summer jobs proved too strong a distraction and this part of the project was not realized. There were, however, interested youngsters of varying ages who came to the shop to observe the work on an informal basis (Figure 12). They witnessed the revival of a very old skill and our hope is that their observations will help bring back interest in the construction and use of kayaks and kayak building in the future.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 12: Violet Kakinya and Lillian Weber enjoy themselves while watching the work on the kayak. Credit: Angela Linn.

## THE QUESTION

When the issue of re-covering the Nunamiut kayak first came to my attention, I was dismayed. I immediately questioned the ethics of replacing so significant a part of an ethnographic object with new materials.<sup>18</sup> As the manager of a large and valuable ethnographic collection, my job is to ensure the safety of the 14,000+ objects in my care. In large part, the safety of the collection depends on maintaining temperature, relative humidity, and light exposure, as well as reducing the potential for dam-

age though direct handling of the objects. So the idea of removing a unique and irreplaceable object from the relative safety of our climate-controlled building, and sending it to a rural village to be handled and worked over, was chilling. Doing so would rupture all the standard practices I have been trained to ensure, I protested. How could I be expected to ignore this? Once the project became a reality, I was forced to re-examine both these practices as well as the ethnographic significance of the object itself, weighing them against the costs and benefits of its repair.

Witnessing the process in Anaktuvuk Pass gave me a unique chance to develop a broader, big-picture view of artifact care and conservation. The kayak constructed by Simon Paneak is the *only* Nunamiut-style kayak in existence. It represents a hunting technique that was not commonly used in Alaska except by inland Eskimo people and is therefore of vital importance in the communication of their collective story. Simon Paneak, as mentioned above, was well known as a tradition-bearer and a much-revered member of the Anaktuvuk Pass community. Furthermore, the ethnology and history collection at UAMN includes more than fifty objects made by him, including a full-sized skin house complete with bent willow poles and a rain cover. That he was the maker of the kayak adds to its cultural significance and to the importance of maintaining it for the future. The participation of Simon's wife, Susie, an accomplished and well-known skin sewer, in the original construction complicated the matter even more. If we were to allow the kayak to deteriorate further, we would also be losing her work as well as Ellen Hugo's.<sup>19</sup>

Roosevelt Paneak added to my fears when he told us that it would soon be impossible to find anyone who knew how to do the waterproof stitching, much less anyone who could repair a traditional kayak. If any work was to be done on it, I wanted to be sure that the new cover would be an improvement over the old. However, with the guidance of Roosevelt and Grant Spearman, participants with the appropriate skin sewing and wood working skills were identified, as well as people who had memories of kayaks from their youth.

<sup>17</sup>For example, the Qajaq Club in Greenland. A kayak-making and using club was started by young Greenlandic enthusiasts in the harbor of the capital, Nuuk, after the publication of H.C. Petersen's book *Skin Boats of Greenland* (1986).

<sup>18</sup>In the world of conservation there are two categories of work that are typically done. *Restoration* asks a conservator to not only repair damage to a piece, but to bring it back to a nearly-new condition. In fact, much restoration is done not by conservators, but by "restorers" who make a profession of making things look new again. Much of the value of an ethnographic object lies in the original materials of which it is comprised. A professionally trained conservator may be asked to perform restoration, but for the most part what they do is *stabilization*. This will often include light cleaning, but primarily it is an attempt to halt (and repair) any currently active damage that has occurred and to preserve the piece in its current condition (or that in which it arrived at the museum).

<sup>19</sup>Portions of the original skin covering will be saved for the accession file on this object. Specifically, sections that show the original double waterproof stitch will be kept to document the work of Hugo and Paneak.

The turning point in my ethical dilemma came when I realized that the boat had never actually been used in an ethnographic setting. The 1971 commission was, in fact, a replica of those used before commercially manufactured boats, snowmachines, and firearms were available. So, I concluded, the real value of the object lies in its existence as an illustration of a unique kayak style. Repairing the damage and providing additional documentation, I saw, would only heighten its value to researchers and general visitors alike. In contrast, had this kayak been the last remaining Nunamiut kayak in existence, and had it been used in the 1944 hunt, I would have done everything in my power to prevent any loss of ethnographic material. In effect, I would have refused to support this project.

Just as important, I saw, for the communities and individuals involved, the educational aspect of the proposed project helped to solidify my decision to agree to the replacement. The decreasing number of people knowledgeable enough to make the repairs combined with our intent to involve the young people of Anaktuvuk Pass in the process assured me that this was the right thing to do on several levels. While the repairs were underway, the project created a space for youngsters to interact with older people on a daily basis, with a vibrant exchange of knowledge occurring between them. The young people who came by took an active role in their learning process, by talking to the elders about it. They also had the chance to experience an old object, which helped ignite their curiosity about the past.

The pride and sense of ownership of this artifact continued after the project was completed as the kayak went for its inaugural floating in Eleanor Lake in June 2003. Upon its return to Fairbanks and installation into the art gallery, the people of Anaktuvuk Pass will know that their work will continue to be preserved for generations elsewhere and that they were part of the process that made it happen.

In short, the kayak re-covering project has been an unusual opportunity for the museum to share in the community regaining of heritage, the chance to repair something completely unique, and make it like new again. I have concluded that I am honored to have worked with everyone involved in this process. To learn how something comes from many disparate pieces and combines in

an exciting whirlwind of activity, with a final product of the beautiful kayak is something of which we can all be proud.

## THE FUTURE

Over the last few decades, there have been many projects that have either highlighted the ongoing use of skin boats (Braund 1988) or have helped Native communities re-connect with their nautical pasts by conducting extensive technological studies utilizing oral history and replications of old crafts (Robert Drozda 2004, written communication; Snaith 2001, 2004; Zimmerly 1979, 1986).<sup>20</sup> In 2000, the Alaska Native Heritage Center in Anchorage sponsored a year-long project entitled *Qayaqs & Canoes: Paddling into the Millennium*, where master craftsmen built eight traditional Alaskan watercraft in an attempt to pass along traditional boat-building knowledge and rejuvenate this skill (Steinbright 2001).

Projects such as these are of extreme value when participation is fully supported by the Native communities and the documentation of the event is deposited in the village and conducted by the people. They can bring excitement back into a community or to individuals who had forgotten their nautical traditions.

However, Native involvement with the conservation of museum objects is a topic that needs more investigation. In my research, I have found very few examples of Native American involvement in the conservation treatment or restoration of museum objects (Carrlee 2003; Marian Kaminitz 2004, written communication; Todd 2002).<sup>21</sup> In all cases, the conservation treatment was done by a professionally trained conservator under the advisement of and in consultation with, Native Americans. In contrast, the kayak project, in effect, asked the community members of Anaktuvuk Pass to act as Nunamiut conservators and restorers, performing treatment to an existing museum object so as to halt current degradation of the piece and to prevent future damage.

The collaboration between museums and aboriginal populations appears to be an increasingly important topic worldwide. In Australia, there exists legislation that mandates co-management of sacred sites and the objects associated with those sites (Mulvaney 1999). The Heritage Conservation Act of 1991 “provides a system for the iden-

<sup>20</sup>The referenced projects are in no way a comprehensive list of kayak-related projects that are occurring in Alaska, but merely serve as an example of several such endeavors by Alaskan villages.

<sup>21</sup>Collaborative work has also occurred in two of these examples. Howard Luke carved a new prow piece for the birch bark canoe conservation project at the Sheldon Jackson Museum (Carrlee 2003:2) and Kaminitz (2004, written communication) described several projects undertaken by the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI) where Native American individuals helped repair items from the museum’s collection, in collaboration with conservation department staff.

tification, assessment, recording, conservation, and protection of places and objects of prehistoric, protohistoric, historical, social, aesthetic, or scientific value” (Mulvaney 1999:42).<sup>22</sup> Under this act, the aboriginal population has the responsibility to co-curate these objects, making an investment in the future and preservation of their material culture.

Likewise, in Canada there is a desire to increase the involvement of First Nations people in the operations of museums. According to the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1992), there is hope that there will be shared authority to manage cultural property. The plan is to invite the appropriate First Nations people to assist in defining access to collections, to determine storage conditions and the use of objects, and to recognize traditional authority or individual ownership systems of the originating culture (Assembly of First Nations 1992).

It is our hope, at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, that projects such as the Anaktuvuk Pass kayak project will be a first step to help get Alaska Native communities interested in working in a more collaborative role, to develop exhibitions, collections needs, and conservation techniques.

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<sup>22</sup>See Northern Territory Government 2000 for a review of this act.

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