

## THESIS AND DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS

**Monty Rogers, editor**

Stephen R. Braund & Associates, 308 G Street #323, Anchorage, AK 99501; monty.rogers@gmail.com

The thesis and dissertation abstracts below describe recent research on the revival of Northwest Alaska Iñupiaq oral traditions and culture, Kodiak Alutiiq language, applying optimal foraging theory to prehistoric hunter-gatherers on the Seward Peninsula, Kachemak fish exploitation on Little Takli Island on the Alaska Peninsula, a zooarchaeological analysis of a late prehistoric Iñupiaq site in the central Brooks Range, documenting stone fish traps on the northwest coast of British Columbia, and an assessment of efforts to include indigenous traditional knowledge in projects and activities of the Arctic Council. These abstracts describe research carried out by students of Lewis and Clark College, University of Alaska Anchorage, University of Alaska Fairbanks, University of British Columbia, University of Edinburgh, and the University of Leicester.

Contact Monty Rogers to submit an abstract of a recently completed thesis or dissertation that deals with topics of interest to *AJA* readers.

### ORAL TRADITION AND CULTURAL REVIVAL IN NORTHWEST ALASKA

**Hannah Atkinson**

B.A. thesis, 2014, Department of Sociology/Anthropology,  
Lewis and Clark College

#### ABSTRACT

This thesis follows the story of three Iñupiat Eskimo communities in Northwest Alaska and their efforts to revive oral traditions using recorded media. In Northwest Alaska, the impacts of the Quakers' systematic inhibition of oral culture and the assimilationist practices of Alaska Native education have lasted generations. As the oldest of the community elders pass away, a century of cultural suppression has resulted in the loss of some Iñupiaq stories and dances.

Growing up in the region, I recognized the importance of oral tradition to the Iñupiaq way of life. I began my research with a selective process of interviewing with community specialists and activists in the field of oral tradition. Those interviews led me to conversations with community elders and youth as well as participant observation as a storyteller, a dancer, and as a part of the audience. Themes of new technology and cultural revival rose

to the forefront of my research into oral tradition. This thesis focuses on three projects that used technology to record stories and dances to preserve the tradition for future generations.

However, secondary orality, defined by Walter J. Ong as the characteristic of being recorded from a single act of orality, is formed in the tension between traditional and modern. Recorded media attempts to recreate the person-to-person interaction that is characteristic of oral tradition, but requires storytellers and listeners to interact in a new way. Acquiring funding, disseminating published materials, and storing recorded media are now necessary parts of practicing oral tradition.

While Northwest Alaska communities struggle with the infrastructure required of secondary orality, in some cases recorded media is teaching young generations the traditional practices and culture. It is providing youth the opportunity to become the teachers. Revival of oral tradition is not only valuable to the Iñupiat but also demonstrates the value of localized history, culture, and ways of knowing to modern society. My hope is that this will begin a conversation about the role of oral tradition in cultural revival and what reproduction of Iñupiaq culture means for those inside and outside of the community.

**COMMUNITY SPACE FOR DECOLONIZATION  
AND RESISTANCE:  
KODIAK ALUTIIQ LANGUAGE CLUB  
PARTICIPANT PERSPECTIVES**

**Michael J. Bach**

M.A. thesis, 2014, Department of Northern Studies,  
University of Alaska Fairbanks

Online at [https://migobach.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/  
bach-thesis-2014.pdf](https://migobach.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/bach-thesis-2014.pdf)

**ABSTRACT**

Language Club is one of many language revitalization initiatives currently being used to reclaim space for Alutiiq, a highly endangered Alaska Native language. Since 2003, Language Club has been a site of learning and sharing for both Alutiiq language learners and elders. The study draws upon eight semistructured interviews, numerous post-data discussions, field notes, and observations in order to understand Language Club participants' spoken and unspoken goals. Data were analyzed using constructivist grounded theory. Themes and subthemes identified include community, family-like structure, culture and tradition, and healing. Using tribal critical race theory (TribalCrit) to better understand these themes, we find that Language Club functions as carved out space within the broader community where participants are able to engage in decolonization and resist hegemonic domination by the broader community.

**KUZITRIN LAKE/TWIN CALDERAS: AN  
EXAMPLE OF OPTIMAL LAND USES  
DURING THE LATE HOLOCENE IN SEWARD  
PENINSULA, ALASKA**

**Michael J. Holt**

M.A. thesis, 2013, Department of Archaeology and Heritage,  
University of Leicester, UK

**ABSTRACT**

In the northern latitudes of the Western Hemisphere, a region dominated by tundra environments and limited resource variability, human foragers adapted their hunting and settlement strategies to gain advantage over an abundant and highly predictable terrestrial resource (caribou).

The study area's unique landscape character and abundant resources attracted the region's prehistoric inhabitants far from the power centers of their affiliated socioterritories.

This research has applied evolutionary theory to a geospatial analysis of prehistoric hunting features in an effort to identify a link between feature clustering and the proximities of ice/snow patches at Kuzitrin Lake and Twin Calderas, and in doing so, illustrate an undocumented intercept game drive tactic used in the summer when caribou are broadly dispersed. This thesis sought to clarify the spatial distribution patterns of hunting features in the study area and settlements of Seward Peninsula, determine if features and settlements cluster on the landscape consistent with the expectations derived from optimal foraging theory, and explain how their spatial patterns can reveal prehistoric hunter-gatherer lands use in the study area. The hypothesis offered at the beginning of this study was that collective hunting tactics employed by prehistoric foraging groups were shaped by a drive to achieve net energy optimality, and that hunting groups would maximize energy and time expenditures to exploit the highest-ranking prey resources within their limits of available travel modes.

The expectations presented in this research have been statistically validated and are premised on optimal foraging. Thus, it is reasonable to deduce that prehistoric foraging groups maximized caribou exploitation by engaging in a unique collective hunting tactic associated with the ice/snow patches at Kuzitrin Lake and Twin Calderas, and that socioterritorial dominion over the area was dictated by available modes of travel and the time and energy costs required to complete a journey.

I offer an alternative model of late Holocene hunter-gatherer land use based on the findings of this research. The static model presented at the conclusion is provided as a heuristic device for future investigation into Late Holocene caribou hunting and settlement in Seward Peninsula.

**KACHEMAK FISH EXPLOITATION AT LITTLE  
TAKLI ISLAND, AMALIK BAY, ALASKA:  
SIZE ESTIMATES AND TAXONOMIC  
DISTRIBUTION**

**Rhea E. Hood**

M.A. thesis, 2014, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Alaska Anchorage

**ABSTRACT**

Two main aspects of fish remains from the Takli Birch phase/Early Kachemak tradition component of the Little Takli Island site (XMK-031) were examined: (1) taxonom-

ic frequencies, based on numbers of identified specimens; and (2) fish sizes derived from linear regressions applied to dimensions of selected skeletal elements. Taxonomic distributions revealed that Gadidae comprised 77% of the family-level NISP. Size estimates demonstrated that mature *Gadus macrocephalus* (caught with hook-and-line methods and offshore strategy) were the primary target.

Additional tests compared the XMK-031 fish remains to those from Ocean Bay tradition sites and Kachemak tradition sites, primarily the %NISP of Mink Island (XMK-030), Rice Ridge (KOD-363), and Horseshoe Cove sites (KOD-415). These provided a view of fish selection at different locations and insight into the effects of environmental change during the transitional period between the Ocean Bay and Early Kachemak traditions.

### **CARIBOU HUNTING AT THE HUNGRY FOX SITE (KIR-289): A ZOOARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION OF A LATE PREHISTORIC INTERIOR IÑUPIAT SITE IN THE CENTRAL BROOKS RANGE, ALASKA**

**Kristin Scheidt**

M.A. thesis, 2013, Department of Anthropology,  
University of Alaska Anchorage

#### **ABSTRACT**

The Hungry Fox site is a late prehistoric interior Iñupiat site along the Killik River within the boundaries of Gates of the Arctic National Park dating to approximately 480–550 BP. This thesis describes the analysis of faunal material collected from the 2004 excavation of the site. The purpose of the thesis is to determine site function by identifying taxonomic richness and diversity, season of site occupation, and caribou age and sex demographics. The results of the analysis indicate that the faunal assemblage consists primarily of caribou, ptarmigan, Dall sheep, and ground squirrel, the site was occupied during the winter and spring, and caribou hunting focused on female caribou two to five years of age. I interpret these results to mean that the site was occupied after interior Iñupiat groups split once they had exhausted caribou stores from the fall cooperative hunt and before they congregated to cooperatively hunt caribou during the spring migration.

### **INSCRIBED ON THE LANDSCAPE: STORIES OF STONE TRAPS AND FISHING IN LAXYUUP GITXAALA**

**Naomi H. Smethurst**

M.A. thesis, 2014, Department of Archaeology and Heritage,  
University of British Columbia

#### **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines the nature of an indigenous fishery on the northwest coast of British Columbia, within Gitxaala Nation's territory. To investigate fishing practices, I analyze faunal assemblages from sixteen habitation sites, map and describe two intertidal stone traps, and relate the results to Gitxaala traditional ecological knowledge. I first outline the social organization of fishing in Gitxaala territory and discuss Gitxaala ontology and the connection between family and place. I then discuss the technology and function behind the two intertidal stone traps. I examine archaeological patterning of fish abundances at the habitation sites through various quantitative methods, focusing on three sites associated with the intertidal stone traps. I then argue that Gitxaala traditional ecological knowledge is paramount in understanding and interpreting the archaeological record.

The results of the study reveal a complex portrait of fishing within Gitxaala territory. Faunal analysis data are contradictory to expectations of a connection between fish abundances and site size and typology. Faunal analysis also indicates that differences in mass harvest technologies such as intertidal stone traps reflects differences in use and target species. Gitxaala scholarship on fishing, use, and occupancy acts as an interpretive guide to the archaeological record in that it provides explanations to an otherwise complex data set. The results suggest that fishing practices are not prescribed simply by resource availability. Rather, fishing practices reflect complex cultural processes and decisions of Gitxaala leaders who maintained obligations of a reciprocal relationship between the human and animal world, fish production, and management of important ecosystems.

**ASSESSING THE EFFORTS TO INCLUDE  
THE TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF  
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES INTO THE PROJECTS  
AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ARCTIC COUNCIL**

**Jessica Thornton**

M.Sc. thesis, 2014, Department of Geosciences,  
University of Edinburgh

**ABSTRACT**

The creation of the Arctic Council in 1996 represented a new chapter in Arctic cooperation, and the forum has since been instrumental in efforts to protect the Arctic environment and support sustainable development in the region. It is a unique forum consisting of eight Arctic states (Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Russia, Canada, and the United States) and six indigenous peoples' organizations (the Arctic Athabaskan Council, Aleut International Association, Gwich'in Council International, Inuit Circumpolar Council, Russian Association of Indigenous Peoples of the North, and the Saami Council) that hold the status of Permanent Participants, as well as observers from various non-Arctic states and organizations. The involvement of indigenous organizations to such a degree is unique. With current environmental and geopolitical changes in the Arctic, interest in the Arctic Council has grown in intensity, which places unprecedented pressure on the Permanent Participants. In a world that is already experiencing the effects of climate change, it is critical that the indigenous communities of the North are considered and actively involved in decision-making, policy-making,

and science in the Arctic. As a result, the main goal of this dissertation is to examine the ways in which the participation of the Permanent Participants can be strengthened within this forum. Because sustainable development remains a top priority for the council, the author also examines the way in which sustainable development has been understood by the council, which unearths a number of tensions when attempting to involve indigenous perspectives. Ultimately, this dissertation demonstrates how indigenous participation will require the equal and full inclusion of traditional knowledge into Arctic Council activities. Although this has been a long-term goal of the council, little concrete progress has been made in ensuring the inclusion of traditional knowledge, and the reasons for this are examined. By analysing the existing literature, policy documents, and interviews with experts such as indigenous leaders and representatives from the Permanent Participant organizations and anthropologists, this dissertation demonstrates the need to adopt a fuller understanding of sustainable development that seriously takes into account the perspectives of indigenous peoples in the Arctic. Furthermore, the interviews conducted demonstrate that traditional knowledge is inseparable from the people who hold this knowledge, and consequently the efforts to include traditional knowledge into the Arctic Council can be considered as a part of a much larger project: that of empowering indigenous communities in the Arctic. As a result this dissertation examines themes such as power, hegemony, and representation, all of which are central to the effort to include traditional knowledge into Arctic Council activities and projects.