

REVIEW

ARCHAEOLOGY ON THE ALASKA PENINSULA: THE NORTHERN SECTION, FIFTY YEARS ONWARD

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Fifty years before the publication of *Archaeology on the Alaska Peninsula* (University of Oregon Paper No. 70), Don E. Dumond began archaeological research in the Katmai National Monument, now Katmai National Park and Preserve. This publication discusses the history of excavations, updates or summarizes work done by various parties after the primary period of the University of Oregon Project that ended about 1966, discusses hypotheses posed around a Pacific coast-Bering Sea drainage differentiation, and further discusses and revises previous interpretations. On the game board, so-to-speak, are archaeological sequences together with their dating and correlation, the data of artifact types and site structures or houses, and apparent cultural relationships between separated areas of the Monument (Naknek drainage/Shelikof Strait) and with adjacent areas, especially Kodiak Island.

Diagrams of sequences, site and feature figures, maps, and date lists are provided profusely. Some recently-recovered artifacts are illustrated; however, readers should appreciate the collections upon which the archaeological sequences are based. For that, they can refer to earlier reports (e.g., G. Clark 1977; Dumond 1971, 1987, 2003 [various figures]).

An important, though brief contribution, is the recognition of Aglurmiut intrusion along the southern Bristol Bay coast, which apparently restricted the Koniag (ancestral Alutiiq) inhabitants to an inland zone of the Bering Sea drainage. Detailed fragmentary information about inland Severnovsk or Nunamiut settlement is presented.

Historic Paugvik (Pavik or Aglurmiut)-late-prehistoric Brooks River (BR) Bluffs phase continuity had been assumed, but that was found not to be the case. Viewed retrospectively, the Aglurmiut presence is seen in the change of round harpoon-dart line holes to a northern style. Recovery of Kodiak style artifacts, including incised figurine pebbles at the Cutbank site, reinforced an earlier conclusion that the Bluffs phase was influenced by the Pacific coast side of the Alaska Peninsula. Ongoing investigation of Brooks River, a tributary of Naknek Lake, found little evidence of historic occupation there, thus this area is proposed as a no-man's land between the Alutiiq and Aglurmiut.

In reviewing the events of the Thule tradition, referred to as the Naknek Period, AD 1000 to AD 1900, disjunctions are found between the three phases: historic Pavik, BR Bluffs, and BR Camp. Proposed migration southward by Camp phase people across the Peninsula, taking an Eskimo language to Kodiak, has been discussed in earlier literature. The initial migration is not a focus of this work. Instead, a possible return migration leading to establishment of the BR Bluffs phase is discussed. Considerable effort is taken here, and in earlier papers by Dumond, to reevaluate house architecture. Numerous small houses, especially those of the Bluffs phase, have been tied together as appended rooms of single Koniag-style (Kodiak Alutiiq) houses. This type of house was described more than 200 years ago, but floor plan illustrations appeared much later (see D. Clark 1956 [Fig.6]; 1974 [Fig. 15]).

Davis in particular found it at the Katmai Savonoski site (W. Davis 1954, reproduced in Oregon Paper No. 70 [Fig. 3.4]). Finally, when Knecht and Jordan published illustrations of houses with multiple appended compartments (Knecht 1995 [Figs. 23-26]; Knecht and Jordan 1985 [Fig. 6]) Dumond reevaluated his characterization of Bluffs phase houses, most of which had been incompletely uncovered in multiple stage excavations. Koniag tradition houses on Kodiak have had variable floor plans (Saltonstall and Steffian 2006); the earliest ones had only two rooms, and the preceding late Kachemak houses usually had one room, sometimes two that showed as separate surface depressions.

Part I of Paper No. 70 also updates the Norton tradition (Brooks River period) excavation record in detail, but no additional Norton phases or major revisions are proposed. The same is the case for the preceding Gomer Period (Arctic Small Tool tradition).

On the Pacific coast (Part II), excavations at Kukak Bay and Takli Island in 1964 and later were done to augment the 1953 and 1955 excavations by Wilbur Davis and Wendell Oswalt at Kukak and nearby Kafia Bay, respectively. This provided the Oregon program with data for comparing Naknek (mainly Brooks River) prehistory with that across the Alaska Peninsula on the Pacific coast. Oswalt (1955) recovered Ocean Bay (Takli Alder) culture material at Kafia, but did not recognize it and realize its great antiquity because he did not separate it from second millennium AD remains.

Later, at Takli Island, the Oregon program recovered the Takli Alder phase which is essentially Kodiak Island's Early Ocean Bay. An outgrowth of Takli Alder, Takli Birch also was excavated. In many aspects, Takli Birch was like the slate-working late Ocean Bay of Kodiak but it retained a flaked stone industry and showed some degree of relationship to Early Kachemak, which it overlapped temporally. After a gap of nearly 1000 years the Takli Cottonwood occupation appeared. Some Cottonwood implements are similar to those of its Kodiak and Cook Inlet Late Kachemak contemporary, a stone lamp with nipples on breasts for instance (D. Clark has seen the specimen; some people would call it "lamp with nobs in the bowl"). But most of the Cottonwood artifacts are similar to those of the Norton Culture Weir phase of the Naknek drainage. At Kukak, teams excavated house pits from which second millennium AD material was recovered. Some of it, the Kukak Mound phase, is closely related to the early half of Kodiak's Koniag phase. Kukak's historic

inhabitants were Koniags (ancestral Alutiiqs), but the last 400 years of prehistory apparently was not found in the Oregon excavations.

Dumond also discusses later work done by others in the area, collectively the "oil spill surveys" and the National Park Service (NPS) excavation at "Mink Island." Reset time spans for the five coastal phases are given from an unpublished manuscript by Crowell and Mann. The Alder phase, based on a single date from "Mink Island" begins at the same time as Early Ocean Bay on Kodiak Island, though, judging from the strength of its microblade industry and presence of prismatic blades, Kodiak may be earlier.

The "Mink Island" site was discovered in 1965 when Mike Nowak and one assistant daringly rowed out there across more than a mile of open water from Takli Island in a tiny rubber dinghy. They would have perished had their craft sunk. The site was being eroded then, and later it attracted looters. While he was in Kodiak about 1998, this reviewer visited the site when excavation was in progress, courtesy of the NPS and project director Jeanne Schaaf. The work and recording was very meticulous, but slow, with an objective of microanalysis. But the reason for the dig was to salvage the site from erosion and potting. It seemed to me that the project had conflicting goals. Dumond devotes three pages of brief Part II to detailed discussion of this. Its main relevance to this publication is that Mink Island shows an occupational gap corresponding to the gaps found elsewhere, as discussed in Part III. Dumond also refers to Fitzhugh finding an Early Kachemak hiatus on Sitkalidak Island, Kodiak Archipelago. I believe, however, that Fitzhugh's gap can be attributed to site loss due to erosion, as is discussed later in this review.

Dumond's third and concluding part, entitled "Towards Resolution," could be read as a stand-alone essay. The matter for resolution is an apparent occupational hiatus in both the Naknek River drainage and on the Pacific coast at Shelikof Strait, plus a lesser gap on the Pacific shores that occurred during the last centuries of prehistory in Koniag tradition (upgraded from phase) times. Volcanic eruptions are explored as a possible cause. The difficulty of correlating ash or tephra layers from site to site, of correlating them from Naknek to the Pacific coast area, the task of determining constraining dates for the ash falls, and linking to the eruptive history of Aniakchak volcano, are all discussed in detail that would not awaken a sleepy reader. Dumond hedges his conclusions. These are that volcanism, three substantial ash falls in particular, is a

possible cause of disjunction or “destabilization of human occupation” resulting in depopulation.

The principal gap of roughly 3000 to 2200 years ago is pervasive within the northern Alaska Peninsula study area, but far to the west and on Kodiak Island (and apparently near Kachemak Bay) occupation continued. There are, in addition to volcanism, correlations with climate change, but Dumond found that human responses, southward migration for instance, sometimes were the opposite of expectations, thus the role of climate change is not resolved.

He also grapples with the possibility of destabilization without an actual break in occupation, that there was cultural change without ethnic continuity; that is, newcomers arrived and replaced their antecedents. Kodiak’s Kachemak tradition, with which Kachemak Bay and Yukon Island, Cook Inlet, can be included, is highlighted for discussion at the end of this volume (exclusive of Appendix). It pleases this reviewer that the area of his archaeological naissance and corporal adolescence is highlighted. The Early Kachemak (EK) is largely coeval with the early hiatus. I have proposed Late Ocean Bay (OB)-EK continuity but am unhappy with the weakness of the evidence, which does not provide a smooth-flowing narrative from one culture to its successor. And Dumond is unconvinced of any case for ethnic continuity. Regional studies are hindered by the loss of most coastal sites on Kodiak and the Alaska Peninsula through marine erosion. Site loss probably has been ongoing for millennia but was accelerated by shoreline subsidence in 1964. The 1964 event and aftermath also stimulated a surge in looting or so-called recreational archaeology that aggressively attacked both eroding and intact sites. Much of EK remains only as artifact-impooverished charcoal-rich layers underlying later village middens, as black streaks at the inner edge of eroded sites, and as beach finds of durable artifacts, such as grooved cobble plummets (stones grooved around one end), found where sites have been totally lost to erosion. Significantly though, as Dumond notes, EK occupation directly overlies Late OB occupation at six or more sites and abuts OB at two additional sites near the town of Kodiak. This information has been recovered primarily through the Community Archaeology Program of the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository. Did EK people move in, kill the resident men and take over their

homes and wives? That might have happened once, but not six or eight times. There remain many abrupt changes from Late OB to EK. For instance, the sudden appearance of grooved cobble plummets, and EK adze bits differ from late OB antecedents in three major attributes.

But it is not easy to move Early Kachemak in from areas located beyond Kodiak Island and outer Kachemak Bay. There are Paleo-Aleut crossties and Choris culture artifact identities that carry the aura of ancient common origins; but the Arctic Small Tool tradition, which abuts Early Kachemak temporally, is not a likely antecedent. Hidden Falls component II, located near Sitka (S. Davis 1989), is closely related to late Ocean Bay, especially in its sawn and ground slate technology. And its dating is in accord, but the succeeding Hidden Falls occupation lacks essential Early Kachemak attributes. I believe that Early Kachemak developed where it is found.

The author concludes: “This is with the sincere hope that the discussion of these somewhat varied opinions developed over the past fifty years will somehow contribute to endeavors in the same region in the fifty years to come” (p. 176).

This closely written volume is not a recreational read. Attention is given to supplementing, interpreting and, if necessary, reinterpreting previous reports on Katmai Park prehistory. The reader would have to choose between alternative interpretations, but since these usually involve minor issues of arcane information it is best to accept the author’s assessments. Nevertheless, considering the prominent position that the many Katmai Park reports and the publications of Don Dumond occupy on library shelves, *Archaeology on the Alaska Peninsula* is not one to be merely skimmed over. The major point made is that volcanism may have been more important to the upper Alaska Peninsula’s past than previously maintained. This evaluation also would apply to adjacent areas. He poses this as an issue to be addressed by the next fifty years of archaeology.

Dumond has led the way for southwest Alaska to bask in the sunrise of Eskimo prehistory (see preface to Dumond 1987). I would have liked to have seen him push the case even further to explore eastern Aleutian and southwest Alaska Choris Culture relationships before 1000 BC, and to examine possible co-development of late-prehistoric Thule culture throughout the western Eskimo region.

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