

Reconstructions of Middle Tanana Lithic and Technological Terminology

Gerad M. Smith
Department of Anthropology, University of Alaska Fairbanks

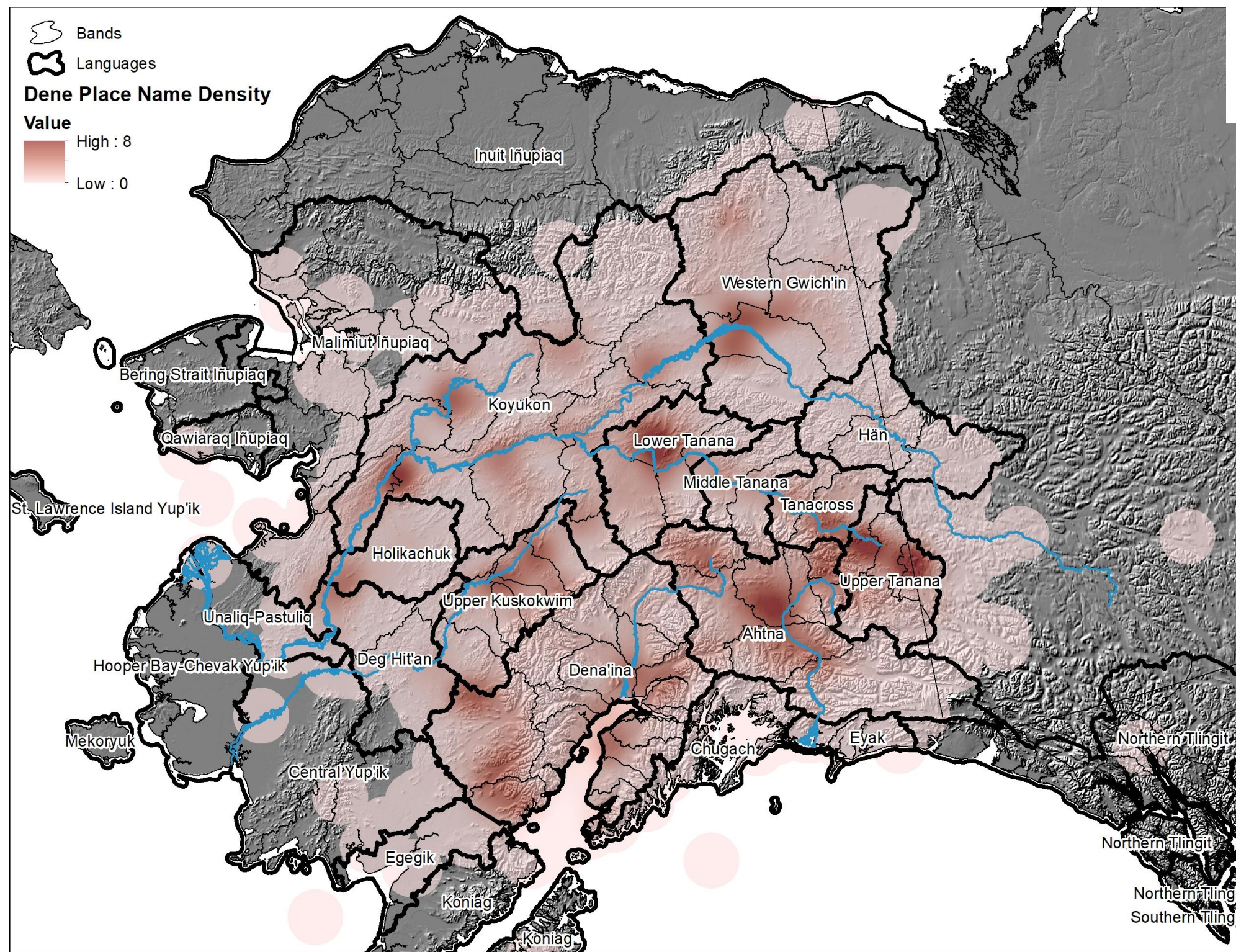
Middle Tanana color terminology. Note the emphasis on light-to-dark rather than principle hues

Root	Color	Example
kon'	Clear	Fire, or sunlight reflecting off a water ripple
tth'uy	Transparent	ID no. 24923
ts'el	Bright/White	Bright light
k'utl; giy	White	FS 2017: 56
baa, bee; giyh	Gray/Off-White	ID no. 24967
beets	Tan	ID no. 13919
dzaq	Murky	Silty river water
tthox, tthuuk	Yellow/Brown	ID no. 24192
tsiik, tsiyh	Yellow/Orange	Tip of ID no. 24736
k'il	Red/Pink	Middle of ID no. 24736
t'el	Dark Red, Blood	Blood; ID no. 24984
	Red	
deldiat (UT)	Blue/Green	Blueberry, leaves
deldlêdz (TC)		
tl'its	Blue/Black	Evening sky
zen	Dark/Black	ID no. 05459
t'uuts; tl'ets,	Black	FS 2017: 80
tl'its		

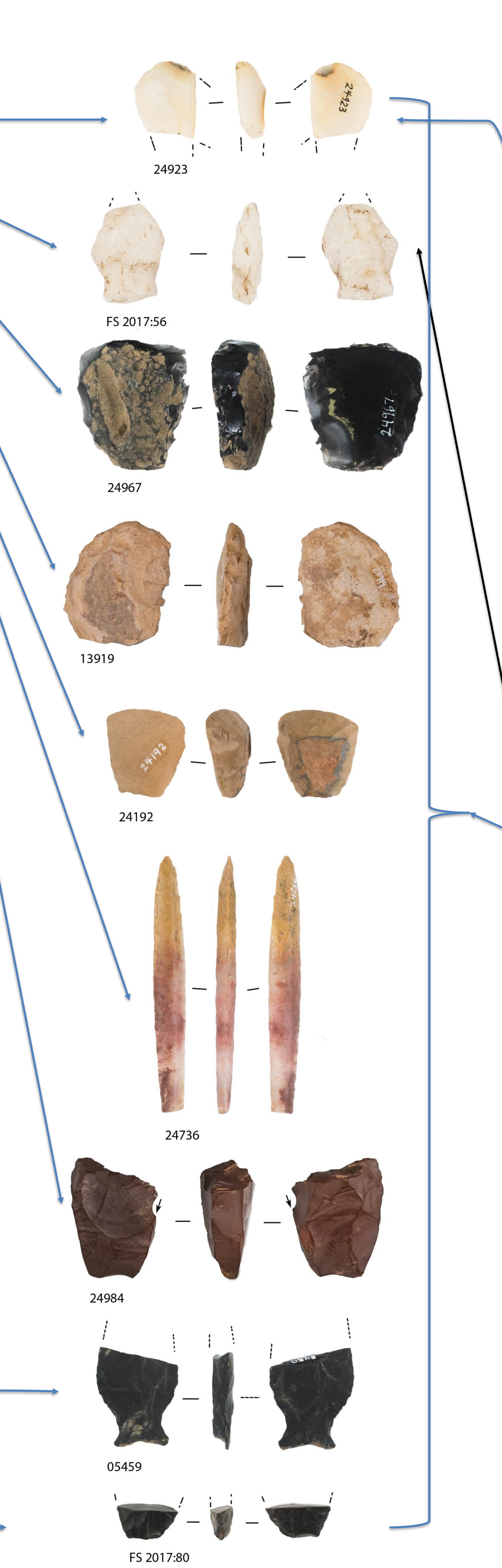
Stone terminology themes appear to have reflected gendered preference, natural appearance analogs, color, intended function, and continued utility.



Try conceptualizing this winter spruce according to the MT color spectrum



Traditional Dene language territories as defined by place names and oral history



Alaska Dene traditional languages and abbreviations	
Common Abbreviations	Language
AT	Ahtna
DH	Deg Hit'an
DN	Dena'ina
GW, Gw	Gwich'in
HN	Hän
HO, Ho	Holikachuk
KY, Koy	Koyukon
LT	Lower Tanana
MT	Middle Tanana
PD, *	Proto-Dene (*reconstructed)
TC, Tc	Tanacross
UK	Upper Kuskokwim
UT	Upper Tanana

Middle Tanana lithic terminology, including Lower Tanana, Ahtna, and additional language comparative roots

Root	Lithology	Literal	Artifact/Feature Example
thee (MT), ttha (LT), tsae (AT)	Large rock	Large stone, boulder	
ttheek'une', ttheek'on' (MT), tthak'wna' (LT)	Stone, rocks, gravel, cooking stones, steambath rock	Burning/fire stone	
bees (MT), ts'es (AT)	Stone	Stone, related to boiling (O++beets = to cook by boiling)	
niidhaayh (MT), tthak'wn' ts'ila (LT)	Gravel	Gravel (MT), tiny stone cinders (LT)	
thaayh (MT), thoyh (LT), saas (AT)	Sand	Sand	
leets (MT), lats (LT), laets (AT)	Silt, ashes	Dirt, ashes	
lech'ek, leec'ak (MT), thoyh tl'esr (LT), best'es, lic'ak (AT)	Mud, slimy substance	Mud	
ch'enaage (MT), ch'enok (LT), naak'e (AT)	Mineral lick?	Mineral lick?	
ttheenelghozi	Mineral lick medicine	Mineral lick medicine	
*be shr-tr'e? (PD), behts'eh, bests'eh (MT), bahtr'a, lezreni (LT), bests'ae (AT)	Obsidian, chert, amethystine quartz, white quartz	Female stone (PD), stone, black (MT)	ID No. 24967
besde'	Coal, jet	Jet	
tsiik, tsiyh (MT), tsiyh (LT), tsiis (AT)	Ochre	Ochre color, i.e., yellow-orange, unless a compound is added to differentiate it	
ts'eyuun k'a'tthee'	Lead/Stibnite/Galena/Molybdenum/Antimony (i.e., silver/blueish ochre)	Stick Indian's shells	
tthee k'udli, lek'wdli	Quartz	White rock, it is white	FS 2017: 56
ttheet'ox (MT), tthatal (LT), ts'estael (AT)	Shale	Rock nest (MT), chop (LT, AT)	ID No. 00128, etc. (below)
k'osr (Koy)	Schist, and other types of knappable stone	Related to edge	ID No. 03324 (below)
tsaeziil (AT)	Scree	Loose rock on mountainside, gravel	
geeluu (MT), galu (LT)	A translucent, possibly yellowish rock (e.g., chert/chalcedony/agate)	Exact + ice?	ID No. 24923



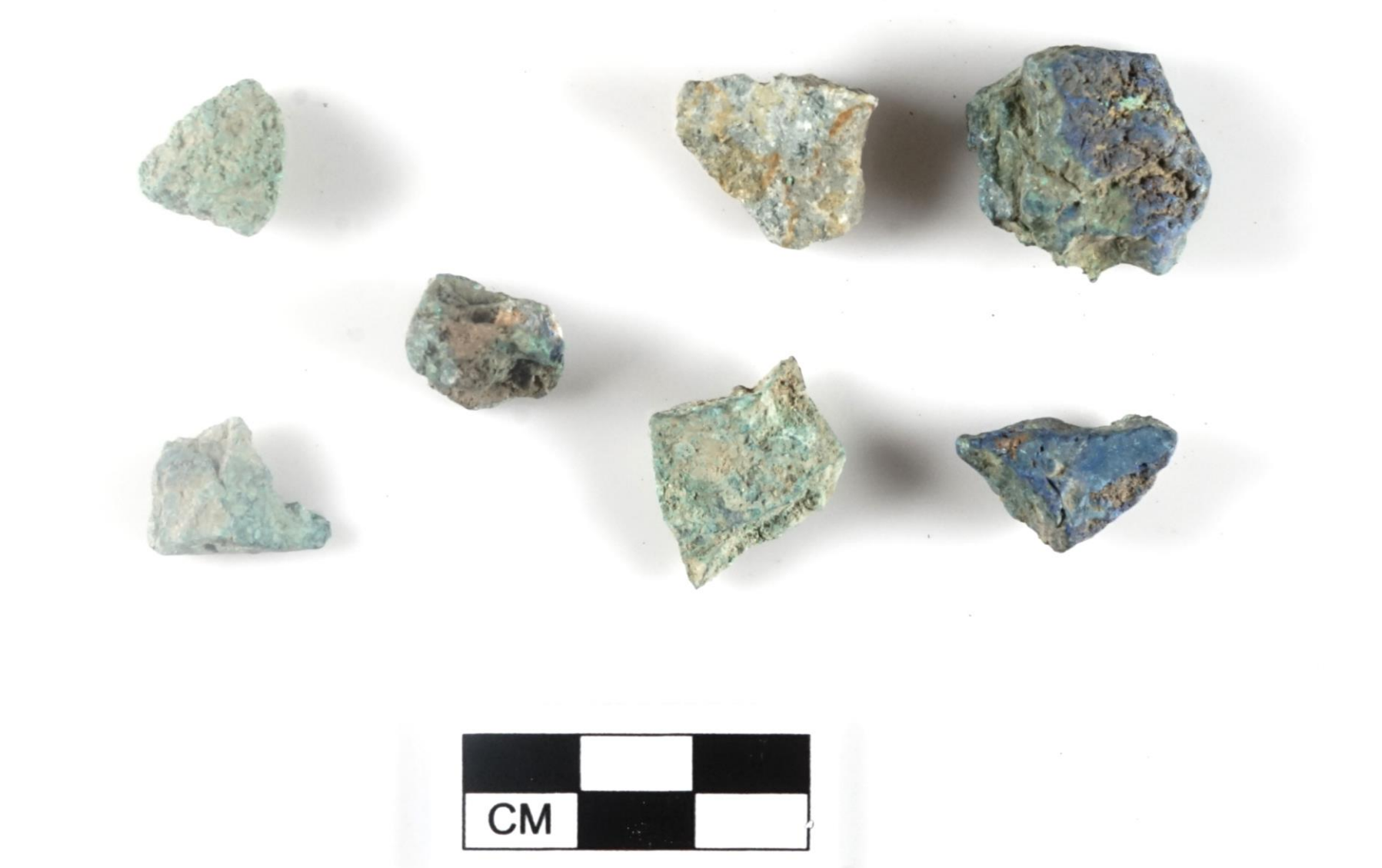
The names for quartz *tthee k'udli* (rock+white) and cooking stone *ttheek'une'* (rock+fire) provides a likely model for toolstone names.

Toolstone terminology is likely reconstructed as **Generic + Sign** (rock+ color or activity signifier)

Following this, red chert might be reconstructed as *tthee t'el* (rock+red)

Metallurgical terminology

Root	Lithology	Literal	Artifact Example
tsiy, ts'iitsiy (MT), ts'etsiyi (LT), c'itsey (AT)	Iron/Metal	*tsay =move elongated, ts'ii =related to ts'iik (whining/groaning sound)	
ttheetsaq', ts'itsiy t'eex (MT), tthatson' (LT), tsedi (AT)	Copper	Rock excrement, raw iron, that which is hammered (AT)	ID No. 26707
gool (MT), denji (LT), ts'es dicaaxi (AT)	Gold	Gold (MT), money (LT), rock money (AT)	



Chitna River region copper, ore form (above). Note the color is similar to blueberry-rich bear scat, likely inspiring the name. Native mineral bipoint and nugget (below)



Metal terminology classification appears similar to Iñupiaq, where the term for “iron” is also the basic term for “metal” although the roots do not reflect borrowing from the Iñupiat (MacLean 2011). One root for gold is an English borrowing.

Principle References

Kari, James
n.d. Middle Tanana Dictionary. Unpublished Lexware file, version 2.4. Received March 2020.
MacLean, Edna Ahgeak
2011 Inupiatun Uquluit Tanikun Sivunniigutitit: North Slope Iñupiaq to English Dictionary. Alaska Native Languages Archives, University of Alaska Fairbanks.
Smith, Gerad M.
2020 Ethnoarchaeology of the Middle Tanana Valley, Alaska. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Anthropology, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Fairbanks. DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.17882.98247

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to Jim Kari for providing the working copy of the Middle Tanana Lexware dictionary file, and Charles Holmes and the Alaska Office of History and Archaeology for providing access to the Swan Point archaeological collection. All Artifacts are from the Swan Point Holocene components and were photographed by Eleanor Bishop (Smith 2020)