

Presentations



Presentations

Going Local While Working Globally: Documenting and Collaborating on Alutiiq History

PRESENTER

Sven D. Haakanson, Jr., Executive Director, Alutiiq Museum, 215 Mission Road, Kodiak, AK 99615; phone: (907)486-7004

ABSTRACT

For the past decade, the Alutiiq Museum has documented cultural sites on the southern end of Kodiak. At Cape Alitak hundreds of images of sea mammals, birds and people were pecked into granite, creating one of Alaska's largest clusters of rock art. Recent archeological investigations of the cape revealed additional village sites, petroglyphs and information on the relationships between the two.

Also during this time, we established working relationships with two major museums in Russia. The Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography (MAE) and Russian Ethnography Museum (REM) hold the largest collection of ethnographic pieces from Alaska. Such collections have been inaccessible until recently. We worked with the MAE to publish their collection and are now working with the REM. This collaboration has opened new doors for our community artists and scholars to bring information back into a living context.

Indigenous Language Learning and Documentation in the Bering Strait Region

PRESENTER

Aron L. Crowell, Alaska Director, Arctic Studies Center, Smithsonian Institution, 625 C Street, Anchorage, AK 99501; phone: (907)929-9207; email: crowella@si.edu

ABSTRACT

Indigenous languages of the Beringian region are endangered, and their recovery is an important community priority. With funding from the Shared Beringian Heritage Program, the Smithsonian Institution is working with educators and fluent elder speakers to produce linguistic documentation and teaching videos in the Iñupiaq and St. Lawrence Island/Siberian Yupik languages. Elders have been invited to discuss tools, clothing, toys, hunting weapons and ceremonial objects in the Smithsonian exhibition *Living Our Cultures, Sharing Our Heritage: The First Peoples of Alaska* (at the Anchorage Museum, 2010 – 2017).

The North Slope Borough, Bering Strait and other school districts will use short videos made from the edited recordings of these sessions. Each video includes group discussion about a heritage object, followed by individual presentations in the Native language. Transcription and translation is provided on screen, and the speakers (both male and female) represent dialect variations of the languages. The videos will be paired with teachers' guides and learning aids, such as Rosetta Stone, to bring Beringian languages and their rich cultural meanings alive for students.

Presentations

Early Humans on the Bering Land Bridge

PRESENTER

Ted Goebel, Professor of Anthropology, Center for the Study of the First Americans, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX 77843; email: goebel@tamu.edu

ABSTRACT

For more than a century archaeologists have theorized that during the late Ice Age the first Americans migrated from Asia to the Americas via the Bering Land Bridge; however, no one has found archaeological evidence of this event on the Seward or Chukotka peninsulas, the now-submerged land bridge's only remaining vestiges.

A newly discovered archaeological site near Serpentine Hot Springs (Bering Land Bridge National Preserve) is offering scientists their first glimpse into who the first occupants of the Bering Land Bridge were, where they came from, and how they made a living. In this presentation, we describe the preliminary results of archaeological excavations at Serpentine.

National Park Service archaeologists discovered the site, and since 2009 it has been the subject of international and interdisciplinary studies by a team chiefly from the Center for the Study of the First Americans, Texas A&M University.

Excavations reaching about 20 square meters in extent have revealed a buried cultural layer dating to about 12,000 years ago. Animal remains are not well preserved, but appear to be from caribou carcasses. Wood charcoal remains signal the existence of ancient hearths where humans burned willow and other woody shrubs.

Stone tools are characterized chiefly by bifacial points and knives, indicating that a small group of hunters, who may have repeatedly visited the site for short episodes, just a few days at a time, used the site.

Most exciting is a set of "fluted points," common in Paleo-Indian sites elsewhere in North America. Now being found around three different hearth features, these represent the first well-dated fluted points yet found in Alaska and suggest that the site was occupied by Paleo-Indians, perhaps closely related to Paleo-Indians from farther east and south in the Americas, not Paleo-Asians from neighboring Siberia.

The implications of this discovery are discussed, and evidence is presented supporting the hypothesis that the origins of these earliest known human occupants of the Bering Land Bridge surprisingly came from America, not Asia.



Presentations

Beringia, the Bridge—A Place of Real Learning: Hope and Friendship

PRESENTER

Mille Porsild, Founder of NOMADS Adventure & Education Inc., GoNorth! Adventure Learning, P.O. Box 768, Willow, Alaska 99688; phone: (218)370-0307; email: mporsild@polarhusky.com

ABSTRACT

The Arctic is a powerful blackboard, and Beringia in particular is a place of exceptional opportunities for real teaching and learning — be it online, via media productions, or on the land face-to-face. For everyone from pre-kindergarten to senior citizen, in Beringia and around the world, Beringia's stories, past and present, hold unique and captivating lessons to be discovered and explored. One of the most important lessons is the power of human connections and cross-cultural collaborations.

Real good happens when nations work together.

In 2011, millions of students across the 50 United States and in 38 countries on 5 continents experienced this cross-cultural collaboration through a virtual learning experience. Invited by the government of Chukotka to take part in the two greatest celebrations of western Beringia, educators, sled dogs and youth from Alaska and Greenland ran in the Nadezhda sled dog race, and paddled for friendship at the Beringia Regatta. These experiences were initiated as part of the National Park Service/Shared Beringian Heritage Program-funded GoNorth! Adventure learning series at PolarHusky.com and were provided as curriculum to millions of students across the world.

What can we learn from it?

Beringia *is* the story of a bridge in the past and, we believe, today.

Every good story has a captivating start that provides the foundation for where the story can go: Beringia was where the Arctic peoples began their journey across the circumpolar north and where we first learned that dogs were tied to sleds to pull the load from the edge of the ice where it meets open water. The first Arctic ships put into the waves were in Beringia. Some 500 years later the oldest such *umiak* in the world was found in Greenland. This summer youth from Greenland, Alaska and Chukotka truly realized their connection as their hands blistered while paddling a modern-day Chukchi *umiak* – or *baidara* – in the waters of the Bering Strait. While making friends and building hope for the future, they provided the rest of us with a living and breathing window to what is possible.

Where the story will take us next and the lessons we take from our experiences remain to be seen — but the bridge is there.

