

# Denali: People and the Land

National Park Service

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Denali National Park and Preserve



**Alaska Natives** have lived on and used the land that is currently known as Denali National Park and Preserve for thousands of years. Denali is at the intersection of the traditional lands of five different native groups: the Ahtna, Dena'ina, Koyukon, Upper Kuskokwim, and Tanana peoples. Each group has their own language and traditions, but are part of a larger language group called Athabascan or Dené.

Alaska Natives continue to live on and near their traditional lands and to practice cultural traditions. *Where is your family from? What is your culture and heritage?*

**Stories and History:** An important part of continuing tradition is remembering the past. Alaska Native groups have strong oral traditions and stories. Many stories include wildlife such as raven, bear, and salmon. *Ask a relative to tell you a story that was passed down from their parents. You are now part of your family's oral tradition!*



Doris and Phillip of Nikolai recall stories



**Archeologists** are scientists who study human history by looking for physical clues from the past.

Archeologists at Denali have found items from humans that are dated to 12,600 years old. This means that people lived here when woolly mammoths roamed the Earth!

Archeologists can tell a lot about early people by what they left behind.

*What can we learn from how people lived in the past? What would an archeologist in the future learn from the tools you use every day?*



Beaded moccasins

**Clothing:** Some Alaska Natives have special traditional clothing. Pieces may be made of materials from nature like moose or caribou hide, have lynx or beaver fur trim, or be beaded by someone important to them. These items remind the wearer of their home, their culture, and their family. *Do you have a piece of clothing that is special to you?*

**Activities:** Getting outside in summer to hike, bike, fish, or hunt is part of everyday life for many Alaskans. Alaskans also do winter activities like ice fishing, riding snow machines (snow mobiles), skiing, snowshoeing, sledding, and sled dog mushing. *What activities do you do outside in the winter? In summer?*



Nick and Verdresia of Nikolai with a homemade snowshoe



A moment of reflection

**Connection to Place:** Connections to place are often strengthened by time and family. Alaska Native people are connected to Denali through ancestors who have lived here for countless generations. *How are you connected to your home and people where you live?*

# Subsistence in Denali National Park and Preserve

**Imagine** that you live in a place where you travel by river and snow machine instead of roads, where the forest, river, and tundra are your grocery stores, and where your home is in the same “neighborhood” as where your ancestors have lived for thousands of years. That’s what subsistence in Alaska is like.

**Subsistence** is the traditional use of wild, renewable resources for food, shelter, fuel, clothing, tools, art, and transportation.



Grandpa Nick teaches Josh how to use a net to fish. Fish are a big part of many Alaska Native diets and also help connect people with their culture. In summer, many kids like Josh go to fish camp or spend weekends fishing. While fishing, they spend time with family and learn traditional skills.

*What have you learned from elders in your life?*

Denali, a landscape often thought of as untouched wilderness, has been home to people for thousands of years. Alaskan Natives moved seasonally to harvest resources from the land in order to survive and thrive. Hundreds of archeological sites across Denali, and a continuing oral tradition from Native people, tell us stories from the land. These practices continue today as rural Alaskans hunt, fish, and harvest to survive and uphold their cultural traditions. *Does your family have a tradition that you follow at a certain time of year? Is there a food that helps remind you of your home or heritage?*

## Subsistence Activities



Josh harvests dandelion heads, which can be eaten raw or used in jam.



An ulu, a type of traditional knife, is used to cut up caribou meat.



Park employee Chloe collects blueberries to make jam and pie.



Bryce does a happy dance after finding two huge edible hawkswing mushrooms.

*This publication illuminates some of the traditions and cultures of the Denali area, but does not comprehensively represent Athabascans nor any group therein. It will continue to be updated with input and direction from Alaska Native communities.*