

Sitkalidak Archaeological Youth Camp 2023

Final Report on Spring 2023 QRC grant to Ben Fitzhugh and Hollis Miller

Ben Fitzhugh & Hollis Miller

May 4, 2024

We write to report on the Summer 2023 Sitkalidak Archaeological Youth project supported by a grant from Quaternary Research Center. In July 2023, Drs. Ben Fitzhugh and Hollis Miller, four UW undergrads and two SUNY Cortland undergrads travelled to Old Harbor, Alaska for four weeks. The focus of the expedition was to conduct archaeological field research and help host Nuniaq Camp, a community-driven youth camp hosted by the Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor (ATOH) since 2000. We spent two weeks setting up camp and the archaeological dig, one week hosting Nuniaq Camp and one week closing the dig and stowing gear for future use.

Suspended in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nuniaq Camp was revived in 2023 with our team's ongoing archaeological work providing an expansion of camp educational activities. Nuniaq Camp was moved to the location of our field camp, 10 miles from Old Harbor and within walking distance of the Ing'yuyq archaeological site. In partnership with ATOH and the non-profit community service entity Old Harbor Alliance (OHA), we created opportunities for Nuniaq Campers (predominantly middle and high school age) to participate in excavations at the Ing'yuyq site during the 5-day youth camp from July 17-21. In so doing we added youth education in archaeology, Indigenous history, and interdisciplinary science. ATOH, OHA, and the land owner, the Old Harbor Native Corporation (OHNC), were excited to add this component to the camp's established focus on education around cultural revitalization and resilience through instruction in Sugt'stun language, subsistence, plant use, Alutiiq/Sugpiaq dance, arts, and crafting.

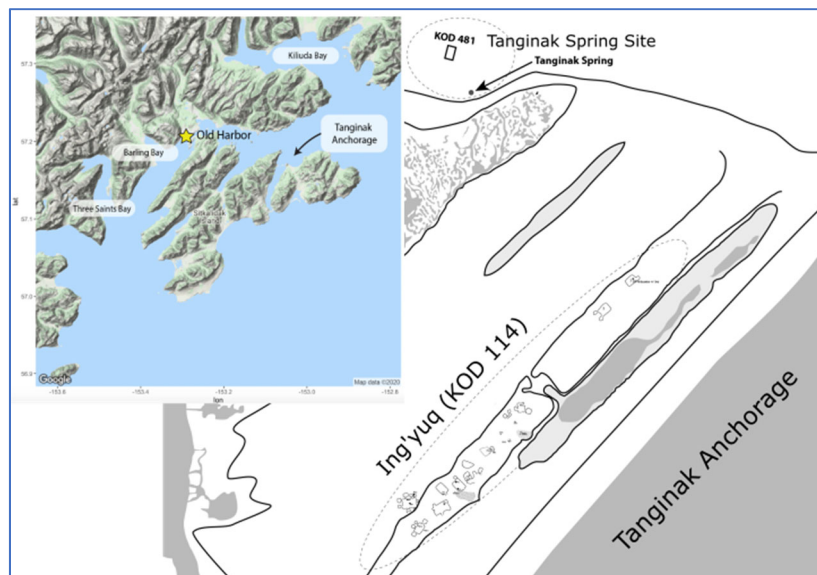


Figure 1: Map of Ing'yuyq site in Tanginak Anchorage with inset of Sitkalidak Is. with Tanginak and Old Harbor (10 miles apart, for scale).

Background, Rationale and Logistics of the 2024 Old Harbor Youth Camp:

The Ing'yuyq site (KOD 114) is an archaeological village on Sitkalidak Island in the southeast portion of the Kodiak Archipelago (Figure 1). The site was occupied at least semi-permanently since the 17th century, more than 100 years before Russian fur traders and colonists moved into the region in the late 18th century (Miller 2023).

The site was occupied at the time of Russian conquest and was one of the closest villages to the infamous massacre of Sugpiaq

people on the Awa'uq defensive site in 1784 C.E. (Black 1992, Knecht et al. 2002). Residents of Ing'yuyq would have been among those seeking refuge on Awa'uq, with many casualties borne by Ing'yuyq residents and relatives. Ing'yuyq village continued to be occupied into the 19th century, until the residents

were compelled to abandon the site as part of Russian-enforced village consolidation that followed a deadly smallpox epidemic in the late 1830s. Before that relocation, Ing'yuyq residency was affected by Russian colonial policies that forced Sugpiaq men to hunt for sea otters as far away as the Kuril Islands in the Northwest Pacific and the Channel Islands off central California. Women left behind to manage community wellbeing were further conscripted to produce food and clothing for colonial enterprises, and sometimes relocated to Russian settlements as laborers and wives for colonial operators and settlers. We have been investigating this site since 2019 to better understand how those remaining in the village – predominantly, women, children and elderly – managed through these colonial disruptions (Miller & Fitzhugh 2020, 2023). The results of this work to date are featured in Hollis Miller's Spring 2023 PhD thesis. Dr. Miller is now an Assistant Professor in Anthropology at SUNY Cortland.

Our ongoing research at Ing'yuyq is part of a larger program we call the Old Harbor Archaeological History Project (OHAHP). A fundamental core of this project is community-engagement with the goal of recognizing Sugpiaq resilience, "survivance," or even "thrivance" in the face of Russian and American colonial control, disenfranchisement, abuse and neglect. A cornerstone of survivance-based research is connecting the past to the present with the goal of empowering local and Indigenous descendants to mobilize heritage research to strengthen community resilience and empower a vibrant future (Acebo 2021; Acebo & Martinez 2018). A major part of our community engagement involves youth internships and educational programming. To date we have hired local youth interns to assist in survey and excavation in 2018, 2019, and 2021 field seasons. In the 2023 season, we partnered with OHNC and ATOH to host the Nuniaq camp.

Results

During the 2023 field season, our primary goals were to 1) continue excavation of House 2 and Midden 1 at Ing'yuyq with campers from Nuniaq Camp and 2) have our field team participate and assist in other Nuniaq Camp activities. During the brief excavation season, we opened five new 1x1 meter excavation units in House 2 and deepened our excavation of a shell midden with the ultimate goal of examining changes in subsistence harvesting with the onset of Russian disruption. Nuniaq campers participated in excavation each full day of camp, rotating in and out of the excavation allowing them to engage in the other activities and ensuring all kids had an opportunity to dig and experience the process of archaeological fieldwork. The new excavations generated 91 samples, including artifacts/ancestral belongings, wood charcoal and seeds, animal bones and shell. These samples were all sent to SUNY Cortland, where they have joined earlier collections from the site and are under systematic analysis.

The 2023 field season provided new information on household activities at Ing'yuyq. Excavations continued to document and recover ancestral belongings, features, and faunal material from Ing'yuyq House 2, expanding on initial excavations in 2019 and 2021. We uncovered charcoal features suggesting that the residents of Ing'yuyq used smoke processing to preserve foods, possibly using House 2 as a fish smoker following its use as a place of residence. We have now identified two likely hearth features within House 2 in the same occupation surface, which may indicate that multiple families were using the house at the same time or that different hearths served unique purposes within the house. The newly recovered belongings/artifacts will similarly add to our understanding of activities within House 2. With Nuniaq campers, we recovered numerous earthenware ceramic sherds, glass beads, ground slate points and fragments, an ulu preform, two hammerstones, worked wood, a chert scraper, a bird hyoid pendant, and several flakes. With these features and belongings along with those uncovered in future excavations, we hope to be able to provide a clearer picture of the distribution of activities in House 2.

The 2023 youth camp brought interested tweens and teens out to Ing'yuyq for a week. They camped in nearby Fox Lagoon at our long-standing field base camp (in use intermittently since 1998), which we expanded to support over 50 people for the five-days of Nuniaq Camp. Elders, community volunteers,

interns, and our archaeology team coordinated the program. Using archaeological discoveries and reference to documentary and oral testimonies, we helped kids expand their understanding of the significance of the Ing'yuk site in the history of Sugpiaq encounters with Russian colonists and the vibrant Sugpiaq lifestyles that preceded and persisted through the Russian occupation. Elders brought Sugt'stun language and local and Indigenous knowledge into the educational mix, sharing wisdom on local plants, subsistence harvesting and processing, what it would have been like to live from the land, and why connection to the past is important.



Figure 2: UW students Lucy Katzman-Tranah (center in tan and blue cap) and Brian Cox (standing) and SUNY-Cortland student Darren Heigel (top left in black cap) work with Nuniaq Campers and chaperones at Ing'yuk. July 18, 2023.

During the week-long camp, our UW and SUNY students volunteered to join other Nuniaq interns chaperoning groups of campers to and from activities including subsistence hunting and fishing, native plant use, beading, Alutiiq dancing and singing, petroglyph painting, and of course archaeological excavation. Our students learned archaeological methods and gained appreciation for community-based participatory research, Sugpiaq cultural traditions, values, and community priorities. They were so inspired by the process that they organized and drafted poster abstracts for the Spring 2024 Society for American Archaeology (SAA) Meetings before even leaving Kodiak. The abstracts were accepted, they traveled to New Orleans and presented the posters on the community archaeology project to one of the largest of professional archaeology meetings in the world (Appendix A).

In August 2023, Hollis, Ben, and the Alutiiq Museum participated in an international Belmont Forum grant proposal bid to facilitate and study how storytelling provides coastal fishing communities in Alaska, Ireland and Wales access to historical information valuable for resilience in the face of change. Within the effort, we sought funding to add oral history storytelling by Sugpiaq elders as a component of Nuniaq Camp and to explore existing archives for previously recorded stories and bring them back into circulation as part of youth education. In early 2024, we learned that the grant had been approved for funding. The US National Science Foundation is the national agency covering the US portion of the award and we expect to use the funding to bring two Sugpiaq storytellers to camp in July 2024 and to fund an Old Harbor coordinator. Old Harbor kids will document those stories at Nuniaq Camp and build archives of traditional stories to be preserved at the Alutiiq Museum and used in community education around the archipelago. This is just one way we hope to give Sugpiaq youth an investment in learning and preserving cultural knowledge for the future. We have another NSF proposal currently under review that will expand on the archaeology, paleoecology, and youth education in additional ways by using records of the past to inform about Indigenous stewardship/management of fisheries resources from pre-colonial times, bringing experts in Alaskan Indigenous knowledge around fisheries conservation to Nuniaq Camp. We hope that over time, our archaeological, paleoecological, and paleoclimate research can help connect successful practices of the past to contemporary challenges of food security and sovereignty and empower the next generation to become more involved in advocating for and engaging in local fisheries co-management.

QRC support was instrumental in the success of our initial collaborations with Old Harbor partners at Nuniaq Camp and in the ability to raise funds for the Belmont Forum storytelling project and other efforts currently under development. QRC funds filled a critical gap in our 2023 budget for needs that were otherwise unmet with existing support. Those other sources included remaining funds from Miller's NSF DDRIG award that had been designated for community engagement, a UW Center for American Indian and Indigenous Studies (CAIIS) award to Miller (both delayed by the Covid pandemic), and logistical/food support from the Old Harbor Native Corporation. QRC funds covered Dr. Fitzhugh's airfare from Seattle, transportation and lodging for the crew in Kodiak town at the start and end of the summer, charter flight/boat travel between Kodiak and Old Harbor with crew, food and gear, and supplies to replace items damaged or exhausted in prior field efforts.



Figure 23. Nuniaq Camp 2023 - Featuring Fitzhugh's better side!

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Appendix A: Student Posters presented @ SAA meetings, New Orleans, 4/18/24.

SAA Poster by Erin Pamplin (UW), Katie Cosman (SUNY-C), and Brian Cox (UW):

Community Archaeology and the Nuniaq Culture Camp: Undergraduate Perspectives on Practicing Community-Based Archaeology in Old Harbor, Alaska

Erin Pamplin, Katie Cosman, Brian Cox Advised by: Dr. Hollis K. Miller & Dr. Ben Fitzhugh







The Project: Ing'yuuq

Ing'yuuq was a Sup'iaq/Alutiiq village on Sitkalidak Island occupied before and during Russian colonization. Last summer's excavation at Ing'yuuq was part of the broader Old Harbor Archaeological History Project (OHAHP), F1'd by Dr. Hollis Miller. OHAHP seeks to provide examples of the resilience of Sup'iaq lifeways through collaborative, community-based archaeology with the Village of Old Harbor and the Old Harbor Native Corporation. Archaeology offers insights into the ways that Sup'iaq people responded to the enormous, rapid changes wrought by colonization¹.

The 2023 excavation was completed in conjunction with the Nuniaq Culture Camp. Nuniaq/Old Harbor is the modern village in which many descendants from Ing'yuuq live. As one component of the culture camp, we acted as facilitators of archaeological investigation, helping both youth and adult community members engage directly with the archaeological record.

Community-Based Archaeology From an Outsider-Participant Perspective



Reflection & Future Plans

Going into this project, we were unsure of what to expect and what would be expected of us. Working as students learning field methods and applying our archaeological training to real applications for the first time, while also working as teachers, overseeing unit excavation, demonstrating excavation techniques, and teaching artifact identification was a new experience. We learned alongside the kids participating in the camp, allowing us to connect with them in a way that avoided making the archaeology overwhelming.

While we worked we had to ask ourselves questions both regarding our own knowledge and how we could successfully pass it on to the Nuniaq campers. Some of these questions included:


- How will we pass on our knowledge to these young minds, when we are still students ourselves?
- How can we make this information less intimidating and more enjoyable for the campers?
- What can we do foster connections in an open, accepting, and productive way?

Community archaeology was something we admired and aspired to do in a broad sense, but after getting to participate and see it in action, we gained a greater appreciation and understanding of the practice as well as its impact. This project helped us identify our ethics, motives, and the requirements for doing community-centered work, which will guide us as we move through our careers within archaeology.

The Community & The Work

The community of Old Harbor is one of six Sup'iaq/Alutiiq villages located on Kodiak. The town is only accessible by air or by boat². Over the last few decades, the Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor has been increasingly dedicated to preserving their history and culture. The Nuniaq Culture Camp is one of their primary projects.

As facilitators at the camp, we taught basic excavation skills, like how to navigate around tundra, use a trowel, wet screen, bag and label excavated belongings, and engaged the kids in ideas of interpretation. We posed questions that connected the belongings we excavated to the larger question of what life at Ing'yuuq looked like and how it changed. Our knowledge ended at artifact identification. Their lived experiences, embodied cultural knowledge, stories, lifeways, and histories could bring Ing'yuuq to life.



Scan our QR code for more information!

The Team

Katie Cosman: Bachelors of Arts in World Archaeology, with minors in Art History, French, and Asian & Middle Eastern Studies. Contact at kathryn.cosman@cornell.edu

Erin Pamplin: Bachelors of Science in Archaeology, with a minor in paleontology. Contact at ep36@uw.edu.

Brian Cox: Bachelors of Science in Archaeology, with a minor in paleontology. Contact at bcox2@uw.edu.

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We would like to thank first and foremost the Alutiiq Tribe of Old Harbor, without whose support and invitation none of this work would have been possible. We would also like to thank Drs. Hollis Miller and Ben Fitzhugh for advising and inviting us on this project, and finally, we would like to acknowledge the funding that permitted this project to take place, provided by the National Science Foundation and the UW Quaternary Research Center.

Citations:

¹ Community: Old Harbor Native Corporation, *Old Harbor Native Corporation*. <https://www.oldharbornativecorp.com/community/>. Accessed April 18, 2024.

² Miller, Hollis K. *Old Harbor Archaeological History Project*. Hollis K. Miller. <https://holliskmiller.com/old-harbor-archaeological-history-project/>. Accessed April 20, 2024.

Archaeology of the Past, Present, and Future: Insights From Youth Engagement in Old Harbor, Alaska



Darren Heigel, Amanda Schmidt, Lucy Katzman-Tranah, Hollis Miller, Ben Fitzhugh


Introduction

During the summer of 2023, we participated in the Old Harbor Archaeological History Project (OHAHP) in the Kodiak Archipelago in Southern Alaska. Our research objective was to continue excavations at the Ing'yuuq Village site, analyzing how Supaiq/Alutiiq ancestors navigated Russian colonialism during the 18th and 19th centuries. Our other objective was to serve as counselors for the Nuniaq Culture Camp, to which an archaeology component was being added for the first time. This poster focuses on our experience at the camp, the essential skills necessary to conduct community-based archaeology, and the impact this work has on the quality of archaeological research and public relations.

Nuniaq Camp and Our Role

Nuniaq Camp is a yearly event, which seeks to immerse Indigenous youth in cultural practices. This past year for the first time, community and OHAHP project leaders worked to incorporate OHAHP's archaeological field season into Nuniaq Camp. Campers would hike to the Ing'yuuq site, where they actively participated in archaeological excavations. The goal of archaeology's inclusion into the camp was to foster an interest in archaeology and heritage among Supaiq youth and, to demonstrate the impact the past has on the modern day.

Nuniaq was a learning experience for us and the campers. We actively participated in group activities with our assigned teams, and learned alongside them, fostering connections we used to conduct meaningful archaeological education at the dig site. Our participation as student researchers was expected, but the opportunity to engage in learning with the campers was important for advancing the goals of both the archaeological research team and the community.



Essential Skills for Community Archaeology

Communication



By making ourselves known, being open, and engaging socially with community members at camp, we were able to build positive relationships with people of all ages. Behind this surface level willingness to communicate, lies a commitment to honesty, intellectual transparency, and a genuine care for connection. Keeping in good contact with our group members and community leaders to assess group needs and respond to the goals of leadership was vital to the success of the camp as a whole.

Interpersonal Relationships

Trust is vital when collaborating with any community, beginning with the construction of interpersonal relationships. By participating with our groups in cultural activities such as dance and crafts, we were able to learn from community members about Alutiiq heritage and cultural practices, reinforcing our interpersonal relationships with our groups. This strengthened our ability to educate our groups at the archaeological site and led to a reciprocity of interest. It is this relationship building that has the longest lasting impacts on all participants in a community-based archaeology project.

Flexibility

At Nuniaq Camp, we consistently responded to schedule changes, weather events, and assisted community leaders with many moving parts. Ultimately, flexibility is about being able to adapt to changing conditions and goals. The Ing'yuuq site was a space of active learning for campers where they participated in activities based on their preferences, whether that be water screening, sifting back dirt, and taking measurements. None of us come from backgrounds similar to life in Old Harbor. We hadn't experienced the level of intensity that came with remote village life. By engaging honestly and earnestly with community members, we were able to create a welcoming environment.



Improving the Quality of Relationships and Archaeological Research

Relationships between archaeologists and descendant communities have been historically negative and exploitative at times, and community-based work provides a platform for collaboration that begins to mend the damage. We focused on building meaningful relationships alongside our archaeological work, demonstrating that we were invested in the creation of a reciprocal partnership. To us, Ing'yuuq was not simply a site, but a place occupied by the ancestors of people whom we had come to know and care about. Community-based work is vital for securing the future of our discipline: allowing us to foster an interest in archaeology among descendant populations.

Ultimately, this results in a more diverse group of archaeologists entering the discipline in the future.

