

Education Programs



The elders of today at an early tent school at Tulugak Lake in the summer of 1949.

By their very nature, museums are educational as well as recreational institutions serving to both enlighten and entertain visitors. The Simon Paneak Memorial Museum is no exception, but the weighty responsibility of its educational role is more keenly felt and applied here.

The modest size of this small yet attractive museum gives little indication of the magnitude of the charge it has been asked to shoulder. Created through the hard work and determination of fore sighted elders who refused to yield to the flood-tide of increasing western influence upon their young people, the museum works closely with them to assure that valuable, time-tested and hard -won knowledge, skills, and values

are not simply documented, but are kept current among the young people.

Among the research efforts the museum has already undertaken are: place-name, resource and land use mapping, oral history accounts of traditional life and the documentation of traditional technology, hunting and subsistence practices and practical skills of survival.



A village elder demonstrates making water on river ice

From this wealth of hundreds of hours of taped interviews, its artifact collections, photographs, films and drawings, the museum has developed the outline of a proposed Nunamiut Inupiat History and Culture Curriculum with a large number of units on specific topics.

Each unit represents a highly detailed documentation of each topic, often blending western science and perspectives with traditional knowledge so as to make them applicable for use in the context of a western educational system classroom.

These units, compiled through our local research and resources are then further developed with the assistance of staff from the North Slope Borough School District and Iliisagvik College in Barrow as they are made grade appropriate and then, curriculum, meeting both state of Alaska and local standards is developed. In addition to their utility to North Slope students and schools, the University of Alaska's Alaska Native Knowledge Network has enquired about incorporating the museum's materials into their statewide curriculum initiative.

Other educational efforts, beyond curriculum development, include the students joining elders at the museum for discussions and demonstrations of traditional technologies and practices and the presentation of museum based field research findings in classroom presentations, and the public unveiling of new exhibits.



The unveiling of the Mesa Site exhibit,
designed
by curator Vera Weber, left and site
discoverer Mike Kunz

The museum has actively taken on the responsibilities envisioned for it by its founding elders and worked hard to meet their expectations and the needs of their young people. Yet for all we have accomplished there remains much left to do.