

Historic Preservation, A Community Linked To Its Past



To read about history is fascinating, but to have made history, is something else again. This is the legacy of the Nunamiut people of Anaktuvuk Pass. Their history is unique - they are virtually the very last of North America's once nomadic people to settle down, less than 50 years ago. The elders of today, who grew up and came of age as a highly mobile caribou hunting people, are a direct link to a way of life that stretches back thousands of years to the Paleolithic hunters of an ice age past.

Thousands of Nunamiut sites, large and small, complex and ephemeral, are broadly, yet systematically, distributed across the landscape of the north central Brooks Range and its foothills. They represent the visible expression of a complex and sophisticated settlement pattern and set of subsistence strategies which, when carefully

examined, can be used to help tell the history of these resourceful people.

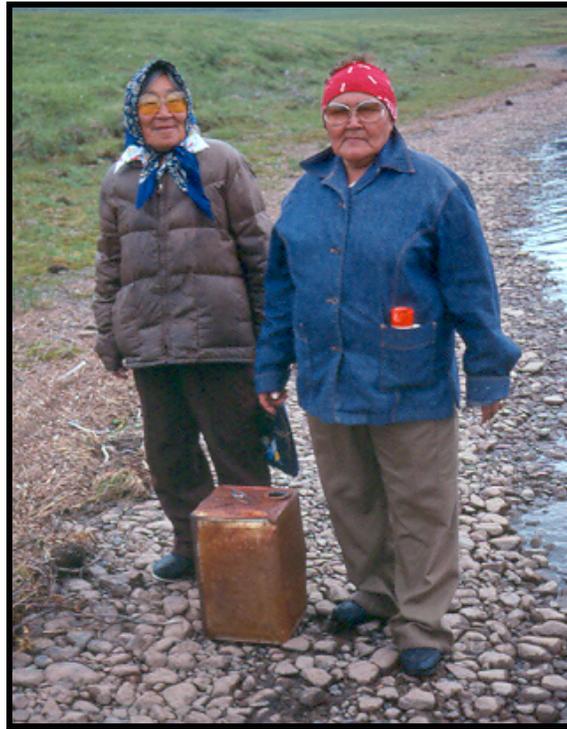


large stone cache-pits, known as uyagagsivik
are a testament to Nunamiut logistical
planning and strategies

Since its establishment in 1986, the Simon Paneak Memorial Museum has worked closely with Nunamiut elders to record the locations of these sites, to map and photo-document their physical remains and to conduct interviews in order to preserve the social, cultural and personal contexts of the sites, their history, use, and significance. These accounts will be used to develop a "Living History Site" series for use in the schools.

Among the most rewarding efforts to date is the documentation of "The Last Great Hunt" when Nunamiut hunters drove herds of caribou into a lake and speared them from kayaks, This remarkable event took place in the summer of 1944, when war-related ammunition

shortages prompted a group of families to resort to this ancient method of hunting which had not been used since shortly before 1900.



Susie Paneak and Ellen Hugo stand on the beach where 45 years before they had driven caribou into the lake and then later skinned and butchered them for food.

Closer to home, the museum staff has initiated projects to document the earliest stages of the village history. Working with archaeologists, elders, and students, one project involved locating, mapping and recording oral histories of the earliest camping localities at what would become the present village site.

Many of these sites have since been destroyed in an airport runway realignment

project. A second effort brought a team of historic architects from the National Park Service to do architectural drawings of a series of significant structures dating from the early years of the village. These included the original log chapel, several sod houses, an early sod post office and the cabin residence of the first resident trader. All structures date to the mid to late 1950s,



N.P.S. Historical Architect works with local student Brian Gordon to document one of the few sod structures still standing.

We have also been active contributors to both local and North Slope-wide historic preservation efforts through the development of a handbook for researchers working with elders in recording oral histories and documenting historic sites as part of a

computerized Arc-View based GIS Traditional Land Use Inventory. This system will allow North Slope Borough planners and permittees to merge three disparate databases pertaining to historic and prehistoric sites into one comprehensive compendium allowing for systematic reference, protection, and mitigation procedures,

The museum has played an active leading or supporting role in North Slope archaeological and ethnographic efforts, and have been advocates within the community for the documentation of people, places, and events which help illuminate the history of this relatively recent community. But much remains to be done while elders remain available to contribute what they know, The museum continues to be an involved and driving force behind these efforts.