

NORTHERN WATERS: MARINE ARCHAEOLOGY IN ALASKA AND BEYOND

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A workshop on Alaska marine archaeology held in Sitka, Alaska, in 1983 had the objective of “providing Alaskan archaeologists with an opportunity to explore the potentialities and practicalities of this heretofore virtually unexplored research area” (Langdon 1983). Despite longstanding acknowledgment of Alaska’s tremendous maritime heritage, this conference was the first gathering of archaeologists and anthropologists interested in pursuing research on Alaska’s submerged cultural resources. The workshop was conceived in response to growing interest in marine archaeology around the world and the recognition that significant cultural and historical resources could be located in Alaska waters. The field of underwater archaeology was itself quite young at the time, with the first substantive investigations having taken place only in the 1950s and 1960s. At about the same time that the conference took place, researchers were compiling a preliminary inventory of historically known shipwrecks in Alaska waters, based on literature and documentary sources (Tornfelt 1981, 1982). Offshore oil and gas exploration in Alaska had also prompted several studies focusing on the potential for cultural resources on Alaska’s continental shelves (Dixon et al. 1976, 1977, 1978, 1979), including literature reviews and site location modeling—but no underwater archaeology had been conducted. The workshop’s conclusions regarding the future are worth quoting in full:

Alaskan marine archaeology is in its embryonic state. The gestation period for the emergence of full-blown marine archaeological investigations along the Alaskan coast may be quite long. A number of factors would appear to contribute to this state of affairs. First, the amount of territory to cover is vast, the environment is rugged, the efforts to locate resources—both archival and on the ground—have been minimal to date, and personnel with the specific technical skills for such ef-

forts have not been present. Second, the resources needed for such investigations—monetary, technical equipment, facilities—are presently unavailable and are likely to be so for some time without a major effort to obtain them. Third, there are at present only limited threats to the presently submerged marine archaeological resource base (Langdon 1983:xx).

In the more than three decades since that workshop, a variety of significant projects focusing on marine and submerged cultural resources have occurred in Alaska. As predicted, it took some time to accumulate resources, interest, and skills, and it was not until 2004 that the first substantive underwater archaeology was conducted. This was the investigation of the Russian-American Company vessel *Kad’yak*, which sank off Kodiak in 1860 (Anichtchenko and Rogers 2007; Cantelas et al. 2005). Further underwater work focusing on shipwrecks was undertaken in 2005 in Unalaska (the *Eliza Anderson*, wrecked in 1898 [Rogers 2009]), in 2006 in Southeast Alaska (the *Clara Nevada*, wrecked in 1897 [McMahan et al. 2007]), and in 2008 in Cook Inlet (the *Torrent*, wrecked in 1868 [Lloyd 2008]). Research objectives were varied and included site mapping and documentation, investigation of cold-water deterioration rates, and site formation processes. The *Kad’yak* remains the oldest identified shipwreck in Alaska waters.

Researchers have also expanded into wider studies of maritime heritage, including investigations of shipwrecks that are now located on dry land or in the intertidal zone (Anichtchenko et al. 2013; McMahan 2007), ethnographic and archaeological studies of traditional watercraft (Anichtchenko 2012, 2016), and theoretical exploration of the effects of climate change on submerged sites (Rogers 2016). A regional review of maritime archaeology in the Arctic was published in 2014 (Rogers and Anichtchenko 2014), and increasingly sophisticated studies focusing

on sea level history and effects of glacial isostatic adjustment have important implications for theories of initial or early human migrations to North America (Carlson and Baichtal 2015; Clark et al. 2014; Dixon and Monteleone 2014; Shugar et al. 2014). Tornfelt's Alaska shipwreck inventory eventually grew into the main management tool used by state and federal agencies and other professionals for cultural resource management purposes (Tornfelt and Burwell 1992). While researchers acknowledge the potential for submerged prehistoric sites, the focus of underwater archaeology in Alaska is still largely on shipwrecks.

At least three organizations focusing on local maritime heritage are now active in Alaska: the Kodiak Maritime Museum (www.kodiakmaritimemuseum.org), the Kachemak Bay Wooden Boat Society (www.kbwbs.org), and the Sitka Maritime Heritage Society (www.sitkamaritime.org). Annual conferences of the Alaska Anthropological Association have regularly featured maritime-focused presentations or sessions, and since 2002 the "Paths Across the Pacific" conference has met to present research on mobility and migration along and across Pacific coasts.

Although progress has clearly been made since the 1983 Sitka workshop, there are still significant obstacles and shortcomings with Alaska marine archaeology. Alaska, with more shoreline than the rest of the United States combined, has no dedicated management plan for submerged sites. This was pointed out a decade ago by then-State Archaeologist J. David McMahan (2007), and unfortunately this is still the case. While federal agencies issue regular technical requirements and guidelines for marine geophysical and remote-sensing surveys (e.g., BOEM 2015; USDOI MMS 2005), there are no equivalent protocols at the state level. To date there has been no underwater excavation of a prehistoric site in Alaska waters.

It is in this context that the *Alaska Journal of Anthropology* presents a special thematic issue focusing on the maritime archaeology and anthropology of Alaska and other northern waters. Contributions—several of which were developed from papers given in a special session at the 2016 Alaska Anthropological Association annual conference in Sitka—address a range of topics broadly relating to the human-aquatic relationship. Theoretical approaches to studies of prehistoric mariculture are examined by Moss and Wellman, who report on the first identified clam garden in Alaska. Precontact and indigenous watercraft are addressed in two articles—Bernick's examination of archaeological boat remains on the

Northwest Coast and Anichtchenko's consideration of the St. Lawrence Island kayak. Shipwreck investigations are reported by three authors: Scott Williams describes Oregon's "Beeswax Wreck" and the probable identity of this mysterious vessel. J. David McMahan reports on efforts to locate the historic Russian vessel *Neva* near Sitka as well as terrestrial excavations of the survivors' camp. Finally, Jacques Marc reports on the remarkable *Brigadier General M. G. Zalinski*, a World War II-period vessel that likely contained a shipment of artifacts from the seminal Ipiutak site in Northwest Alaska. We hope that this presentation of current research on northern waters will provide useful and interesting case studies and topics of investigation, encourage researchers, and prompt new inquiries.

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