INTRODUCTION: COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY IN ALASKA

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Community-based and collaborative research is increasingly becoming the norm in North American archaeological practice. This welcome change has been spurred and guided by Indigenous communities and Indigenous archaeologists (Atalay 2012; Nicholas 2010; Nicholas and Watkins 2024), and Indigenous and community-based archaeologies are now well-theorized within the discipline (Atalay 2012, 2020; Atalay and McCleary 2022; Colwell 2016; Lyons 2013; Silliman 2008; Supernant et al. 2020; Van Alst and Shield Chief Gover 2024). At its core, community-based archaeology is about building respectful and ethical relationships between Indigenous communities and archaeologists and then mobilizing those relationships to create and carry out projects that support the needs, desires, and sovereignty of the community. Implicit in this approach is a holistic view of knowledge and epistemology that promotes braiding Indigenous and Western knowledges to create robust interpretive frames with which to understand the past (Atalay 2019, 2020; Miller et al. 2025; Wylie 2015). In addition to its impact on archaeological method and theory, community-based archaeology also invites archaeologists to rethink their ethical standards. Community-based practice puts archaeology into action in the service of Indigenous sovereignty and futurity (Laluk et al. 2022; Schaepe et al. 2017). It is no longer acceptable to simply do no harm; community-based archaeologists must also engage and support their partner communities, not merely have good intentions (Barnett, this volume; Schneider and Hayes 2020).

Within Alaskan archaeology, community-based practice has a decades-long history (Desjardins et al. 2022; Hillerdal et al. 2019; Knecht 2003; Jensen 2012; Lyons 2016; Steffian and Saltonstall 2007). This tradition has been particularly strong in building opportunities and programs for Alaska Native youth (e.g. Cropley 2019; Fitzhugh 2001; Guilfoyle et al. 2019; Hillerdal et al. 2022) and establishing local museums (Hillerdal et al. 2023; Knecht 2003; Pullar et al. 2013). Despite the successes of these prior and ongoing projects, we recognize that doing collaborative and community-based archaeology in Alaska presents some different challenges than in other parts of the United States.

On November 8 and 9, 2023, we hosted a workshop entitled Collaborative Archaeology in the Alaskan Arctic (CAAA) at the University of Washington in Seattle to assess the state of collaborative, community-based archaeology in Alaska. The attendees spanned generations and roles, including archaeology undergraduate and graduate students, early-career researchers (ECR), tenured faculty, community leaders, museum professionals, cultural resource management practitioners, and National Park Service archaeologists (Figure 1). Our goal in convening this group was to discuss the promises of (and barriers to) doing collaborative community-based archaeology in Alaska and develop a set of best practice recommendations. The workshop was also a learning and networking opportunity for students and ECRs who are just starting to build relationships and projects in the state (see LaZar, Althoff, and Beach, this volume).

During the CAAA workshop we discussed topics such as strategies for community-archaeology relationship building, the investment of time and resources to get a community-based project off the ground, cross-cultural communication, reporting responsibilities, and the challenges that students face in doing community-based research. These topics were broached over several formats, including break-out groups, keynote lectures, panel discussions, and question and answer sessions. The workshop participants also acknowledged that there are challenges and barriers that we still need to work on as an Alaskan archaeology community. These themes are discussed below and further explored through the contributions to this special issue.

BEST PRACTICES IN ALASKAN COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY

The participants in the CAAA workshop discussed best practices for three different aspects of community-based archaeology in Alaska: (1) relationship-building, (2) accountability, and (3) measuring success. We summarize each of these below, although we also note that there is no one-size-fits-all approach for good community-based research. As many participants have learned through their experience with community-based archaeology, the reality of this work is messy and full of surprises. Rarely does a community-based research project follow every best practice. That said, we hope this discussion of best practices will provide guidance to researchers who are struggling with a challenge in their community-based project and those who are looking for ideas about where to start.

RELATIONSHIP-BUILDING

Beginning a community-based research project is an investment in long-term relationships. Researchers should not expect to begin planning a project until they have established relationships of mutual trust and respect, which can take months or even years. Many Indigenous communities in Alaska are already intimately familiar with academic and government researchers who come and go

Figure 1. Participants at the 2023 Collaborative Archaeology in the Alaskan Arctic (CAAA) workshop at the University of Washington holding maskettes. Participants were inspired by archaeological belongings found in Alaska while carving. Standing (left to right): Justin McCarthy, Judy Bittner, Lizzy Wessells, Kathryn Krasinski, Patrick Gibbs, Hollis Miller, Trevor Lamb, Bree Doering, Sarah Simeonoff, Catherine West, Patrick Saltonstall, Isabel Beach, Lynn Church, Jayde Morningchild Grimard, Miranda LaZar, Michelle Henry, Amanda Althoff, Leslie McCartney. Kneeling (left to right): Sven Haakanson, Kristen Barnett, Francisca Demoski, Jillian Richie, Hannah Atkinson, Natasha Kruger, Kelsey Pennanen, and Shina duVall.

with the winds of grant funding or personal quests. What makes community-based archaeological research different from traditional Western research is the co-development of research protocols and the long-term committed relationships between research partners. Professional archaeologists should come to communities willing to listen and learn with an open mind and offer their technical expertise as a service to community cultural heritage goals. It is also important that outsider archaeologists allow themselves to be known by community members not just as researchers, but as whole people. As in any social relationship, this willingness to be open and give something of yourself builds trust and allows partners to approach each other on an even footing, both of which are crucial for good communication. It is also important to recognize that not all relationships will grow to the point of being able to conduct community-based research. An outsider archaeologist is not entitled to a project just because they attempted relationship-building with a particular community.

ACCOUNTABILITY

After relationships are established, researchers and community members can work together to outline the parameters of the research project and decide on the roles and responsibilities of each project partner (Atalay 2012; Colwell 2016). Ideally, projects are guided by community approval, ongoing consultation, and transparency in decision making, all of which create accountability for researchers. Without built-in ways for researchers to consistently check in with community partners, it can be easy for researchers (even those with the best intentions) to get carried away with a project, especially if they are facing external pressure from institutions and funding agencies. Accountability structures, such as regular check-in meetings or the co-writing of reports or publications, ensure that the research team can respond to changing priorities and needs of community partners over the life of the project. Accountability also extends into the realm of data sovereignty and community control over the research outcomes. Archaeologists should seek out the expert feedback of community partners when writing publications and credit those individuals with co-authorship as appropriate to share the accountability and authority of authorship (Sebastian Dring et al. 2019). Anthropology and archaeology have histories of committing epistemic injustice (Fricker 2007) when it comes to Indigenous communities by not allowing those communities to speak for themselves, tell their own stories with authority, or by removing knowledge, belongings, and ancestors from communities (Haakanson 2010). Authorship or co-authorship by community partners begins to address this injustice, while also keeping the research project accountable and relevant to the community.

MEASURING SUCCESS

What constitutes a successful community-based research project will depend on the goals that research partners established at the outset. That said, for the most part, *how* the research is carried out is often more important than any scientific results that come out of a project. The processes of relationship-building, communication, co-production of knowledge, and accountability lead to an archaeology that is more ethical and more meaningful for all research partners. For some partnerships, success may look like long-lasting relationships that result in many projects (see Krasinski et al., this volume; Wade et al., this volume; West, this volume) or developing Indigenous methods of cultural and environmental research (Gleason et al. 2023). For others, it may look like creating opportunities for youth engagement and student training (Barnett, this volume; duVall et al. this volume; Guilfoyle et al. 2019; Hillerdal et al. 2022; Morningchild Grimard and Kruger, this volume) or developing accessible research outputs that can be easily used and understood by the partner community and/or the public (duVall, et al. this volume; Drabek and Lacy 2021; Miller et al. 2025; Wark et al. this volume; West this volume). Successful community-based archaeology may also involve local capacity building, the creation of plans for heritage stewardship, building digital and/or physical repositories for collections, cultural revitalization, or storytelling. If the community is getting tangible benefits from the partnership, relationships are strong, and accountability structures are in place, the project will likely be a success.

CHALLENGES TO CONDUCTING COMMUNITY-BASED ARCHAEOLOGY IN ALASKA

Doing archaeology in Alaska presents some logistical and financial challenges related to transportation, provisioning, and safety in often remote project locations. Adding a community-based element makes planning even more complex for researchers in academic or government institutions.

The biggest issues are funding and timing. Funding agencies rarely support community-based projects that are still in the relationship-building stage, which dissuades many archaeologists from doing this important groundwork. Thus, the limited archaeology funding more often goes to a few already-established projects, rather than providing resources to students and ECRs to build new relationships and projects. Many archaeologists who work in Alaska live outside the state, so that adds travel costs and minimizes the number of times that they can visit partner communities in person each year. While phone and internet services have improved in Native villages, there are still barriers to long-distance communication between archaeologists and community partners. In-person visits are crucial to building trust and maintaining productive community-based research projects. It is clear that more support is needed from institutions and funding agencies to bolster research that focuses on and serves community needs.

Conducting research in Alaska is challenging for archaeologists navigating collaborative work because of the patchwork of state, federal, local, and private landowners, and overlapping Alaska Native institutions, which can include municipal village governments, tribes, regional and village native corporations, and other Indigenous organizations. While it is the researcher's job to contact the appropriate community leaders and landowners, this complicated web of organizations, which may have slightly different (or even opposing) goals, is particularly difficult to navigate. What should a researcher do when there is a lack of consensus? How is 'community' defined for the purposes of the project? These questions intersect with local politics and do not have simple answers.

The impacts of climate change are another significant challenge to Alaskan communities and Alaskan archaeologists. As we are writing this in October 2025, a team of volunteer archaeologists is heading to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region, where communities and archaeological sites were destroyed by ex-typhoon Halong, to assist in recovering ancestral belongings that were eroded out of context during the storm. How can we work collaboratively and build relationships when the archaeological record is being destroyed at a rapid pace? This urgent question brings up issues of safety, the legacies of 'salvage' anthropology, digitization, and repatriation. In this context, in which heritage professionals and Alaska Native communities need to trust one another, community-based archaeology, with its focus on communication and accountability, could not be more important.

FORGING PATHWAYS FORWARD

The contributions to this special issue provide advice and encouragement for archaeologists conducting community-based research in Alaska. The authors describe case studies from their research projects and push the discipline forward by advocating new ways of theorizing, doing, and supporting community-based archaeology. The special issue includes a range of different perspectives in Essay, Article, and Report formats.

Kristen Barnett's essay discusses a framework for pursuing "the good" in her collaborative field work with the Yup'ik community in Togiak. She discusses the realities of boundary spanning for Indigenous archaeologists, who are often called upon to represent both institutional and community viewpoints in addition to forging their own path. Barnett demonstrates these challenges through a discussion of the archaeological field school she leads in Togiak. This contribution explains how Barnett accounts for the needs of the many participants in the project, while also balancing field safety and logistics.

The success of Barnett's field program is highlighted in the essay by Jayde Morningchild Grimard and Natasha Kruger, who participated in the Togiak field school as undergraduates and now continue to work on the project as graduate students. Morningchild Grimard and Kruger found a purpose as field school students in Togiak, and the project inspired them to pursue archaeology and deepen their responsibilities to, and relationships with, the Togiak community. Their essay discusses the complicated negotiations with the colonial history of archaeology that students go through in their training and how transformative and affirming it can be to participate in community-based work.

Miranda LaZar, Amanda Althoff, and Isabel Beach detail the many challenges that graduate students face in trying to conduct community-based archaeology in Alaska, including finding social and material support for projects that are often far away from students' academic homes. They argue that graduate students of Alaskan archaeology should lean into the principles of community-based research to create a network of peer mentorship and support. In response, they have developed the Alaska Archaeology Graduate Community to facilitate relationship-building among graduate students. We hope that our student readers will join them!

Shina duVall and other colleagues from the National Park Service (NPS), Village of Nondalton, Native Village

of Shishmaref, Kawerak Inc., Portland State University, Cultural Alaska, and Ahtna Incorporated describe how the Cultural Resources Program at NPS Alaska implemented a new strategic plan for 2021–2025, which mandated active collaboration with Indigenous and local communities in cultural heritage projects. This essay gives a suite of case studies from Klondike Gold Rush National Historical Park, Lake Clark National Park and Preserve, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, which highlight the positive outcomes of co-stewardship, the involvement of Alaska Native youth, and an emphasis on Tribal research goals and sovereignty. These case studies illustrate the benefits to cultural heritage professionals and community members when an institution changes its priorities to support collaborative research programs.

Catherine West provides a case study from a long-term partnership in the Kodiak Archipelago. She discusses how she has been able to maintain her connections with Alutiiq communities through the Alutiiq Museum and Archaeological Repository (AMAR), which serves as a community liaison for the region. Community liaisons develop, support, and manage relationships between academic and government researchers and local communities. West describes the Ancestral Alutiiq Foods Project, which drew on the zooarchaeological research led by West's lab to create an educational poster and a coloring book, both of which were distributed through the Alutiiq Museum. This article highlights the importance of long-term connections and communication between research partners, including community liaisons, so that research projects and goals can stay in line with current community heritage needs and goals.

In the second article, Kathryn Krasinski, Brian Wygal, Angela Wade, and Norma Johnson discuss a case study from another long-term community-based archaeology project, in which they present their examination of Dene trails in the Matanuska watershed. Their article outlines the story of relationship building amongst Krasinski and Wygal, who are experienced archaeologists; Chickaloon Village Traditional Council; and citizens of the Chickaloon Native Village. Krasinski et al. (this volume) demonstrate how community-based methods facilitated the merger of traditional environmental knowledge and oral history with archaeological practice in the investigation of ancient Dene trails.

Kyle Wark and colleagues describe how they used community-based participatory research (CBPR) protocols to develop an intervention program related to food sovereignty in Southcentral Alaska. The research team facilitated the formation of a community advisory board that helped identify community needs and choose appropriate intervention strategies. The resulting Traditional Foods Gathering promoted food sovereignty through knowledge sharing and skill building related to traditional foods and medicines with great success, and the research team is planning subsequent Gatherings for the next several years. This case study exemplifies how CBPR strategies can lead to positive outcomes and investment in effective solutions to the challenges that Indigenous communities identify.

In her thoughtful report, Sarah Simeonoff draws from her experience as a white and Indigenous archaeologist to question archaeology's focus on the categorization of Indigeneity, which she argues can alienate and discourage potential Indigenous archaeologists from entering the discipline. Simeonoff adeptly states, "If Indigeneity itself is a definition available for refinement by the academy, so too are the qualifications for Indigenous researchers." Instead, she suggests that archaeology fully lean into methodological advancements in collaborative and community-based research to attract and retain a strong pool of practitioners of diverse positionalities.

Angela Wade et al. report on the discovery of a site near Old Man Lake that they believe to be the home of Chief Andre's band of Ahtna, a significant site in Chickaloon oral history. This site was encountered during a cultural resource management survey of a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) parcel that was initiated and led by Chickaloon Native Village Tribal Historic Preservation Office and BLM in collaboration with Adelphi University. Following from Krasinski et al. (this volume), this report is an example of how relationship-building can lead to productive collaboration on numerous research projects.

Finally, Sven Haakanson presents a brief interview with Patrick Saltonstall, in which Patrick reflects on three decades of community-oriented outreach on Kodiak. As Curator of Archaeology at the Alutiiq Museum, Patrick discusses the evolution of community-based methods and offers advice for future practitioners. Patrick and his colleagues at the Alutiiq Museum have contributed incalculably to the community of Kodiak and Alaska as a whole.

We would like to close this introduction by thanking the contributors to this special issue, all the participants in the CAAA workshop, and Nancy Eliason for sponsoring the workshop and publication. It has been a

joy to see conversations that began at the workshop grow into new scholarship and new partnerships. The experience has been truly transformative for us, personally and professionally. We hope that readers will find inspiration among the contributions to this special issue and continue moving Alaskan archaeology forward towards collaboration and respect for Alaska Native sovereignty.

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