

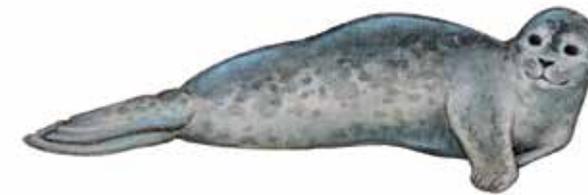


Figure 1.1: The pyramidal 18,000 ft. (5500 m) peak of Mount Saint Elias (*Was'ei Tashaa*) rises above the St. Elias Range to the north of Yakutat Bay. Beyond the peak lie the glaciers of the vast Bagley Icefield, which Ahtna migrants crossed on foot during their perilous trek to Yakutat from the Copper River. The mountain's summit on the horizon guided the travelers across the ice and is represented by a totemic crest of the Gineix Kwáan clan (Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, photo by Aron Crowell, 2014).

CHAPTER ONE

What “Really Happened”: A Migration Narrative from Southeast Alaska Compared to Archaeological and Geological Data

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We came from Copper River, like Moses going out of Egypt.

—Maggie Harry, 1952 (De Laguna 1972:236)

The Athapascans did not know about the sea, and they called one another together. They said, “What is that so very blue?” They said, “Let us go down to it.” “We have saved ourselves,” they said.

—K'áadasteen, 1904 (Swanton 1909:349)

When they came down there it was a foreign country. They didn't know what to eat, they didn't know how to live. And the spirits of that place adopted the humans... They showed them how to hunt seal, and they became friends of the spirit of the glacier.

—Chewsaa (Elaine Abraham), 2011

Two categories of oral tradition are recognized by the Yakutat Tlingit of southeast Alaska. The first is *tlaagú* (“myth”), ancient narratives with themes that include encounters with *at.óow* beings (animal and nature spirits associated with the genesis of clans) and Raven’s acts of cosmological creation. The second is *shkalneek* (“story” or history), concerning the lives of ancestors, migrations, wars, cataclysms, and other memorable events that occurred closer to the present and “really happened” (De Laguna 1972:210-211; Edwards 2009). Similar

distinctions are maintained by other Northwest Coast groups (Hymes 1990; Thom 2003). Both kinds of narrative are a foundation for cultural heritage and identity (Tlingit *shagóon*) and together with indigenous place names construe a sacred geography of the landscapes where ancestors lived and current generations abide (Thornton 2012). Northwest Coast oral traditions are perpetuated in multiple cultural frames, including songs and recitations at *ku.éex'* (Tlingit, memorial services or potlatches) and through *at.óow* depictions on crest objects and ceremonial regalia.

The two categories of oral tradition may intersect, as when Raven and other *at.óow* beings (vis the glacier spirit above) factor in otherwise realist narratives, but recent research suggests that *shkalneek* are substantially endowed with “historicity”—a foundation in knowable and demonstrable fact (Whitely 2002). The historicity of Tlingit, Tsimshian, and other Northwest Coast and interior oral traditions—in particular narratives that are recognized by descendant communities as having this quality—has been probed through comparisons with data from archaeology and geology. Orally recorded events of human and natural history (including earthquakes, glacial advances, and volcanic eruptions) have been correlated with confirmatory evidence and radiocarbon chronologies that extend back as far as 2000 years (Connor et al. 2009; Crowell and Howell 2013; Crowell et al. 2013; Cruikshank 1981, 2005; De Laguna 1972; Marsden 2001; Martindale 2006; McMillan and Hutchinson 2002; Monteith et al. 2007; Moodie et al. 1992; Sterritt 1998).

The aim of this conjunctive approach, carried out in cooperation with indigenous scholars and communities, is not to prove or disprove the truth of oral traditions. It is rather to enjoin two independent sources of information about the past, taking into account their very different modes of production and transmission. Oral narrative is a linguistic medium, uniquely capable of rendering and conveying through time the rich particularities of past action, personalities, and cultural perspective. Yet spoken stories are inevitably modified as they are told and retold through the generations, no matter how strict the social control over their reproduction (Henige 1974; Mason 2000; Vansina 1965). This inherent plasticity leads to the coexistence of multiple versions, the loss or addition of story elements, attributions

of events to varied actors or settings, and the comingling of occurrences from different periods. Untethered by calendrical dates, oral narratives tend to have uncertain chronologies and internal ordering.

In contrast, archaeology, geology, and allied sciences utilize quantitative techniques for correlating history and time such as stratigraphic excavation and radiocarbon dating. Given favorable preservation conditions, the buried remains studied by field scientists are far more durable and fixed than verbal accounts. In particular the archaeological record of dwellings, artifacts, faunal remains, and other traces of human behavior reveals cultural patterns and progressions that may have been imperceptible to historical participants.

The epistemological characteristics—and limitations—of this type of scientific evidence must also be considered. Excavations uncover only a tiny fraction of the actual physical record, introducing potentially significant sampling biases. Radiocarbon analysis and other dating techniques, while useful, entail error ranges measured in decades or longer, a level of temporal resolution that allows historical periods to be discerned (for example, an era of warfare or cultural change) but which seldom permits single events of lesser duration to come into distinct focus. In contrast to the vivid spoken testimony of oral tradition, archaeology is a strictly forensic record of collective human activity in which any particular individual, however prominent in historical memory, is rarely traceable. With certain exceptions (e.g., recovered texts, art, and ceremonial facilities) archaeology offers only limited and inferential access to intangible culture and the life of the mind. The contrasting interpretive potentials of oral tradition and scientific data about the human and environmental past thus give rise to both opportunities and challenges for synthesis.

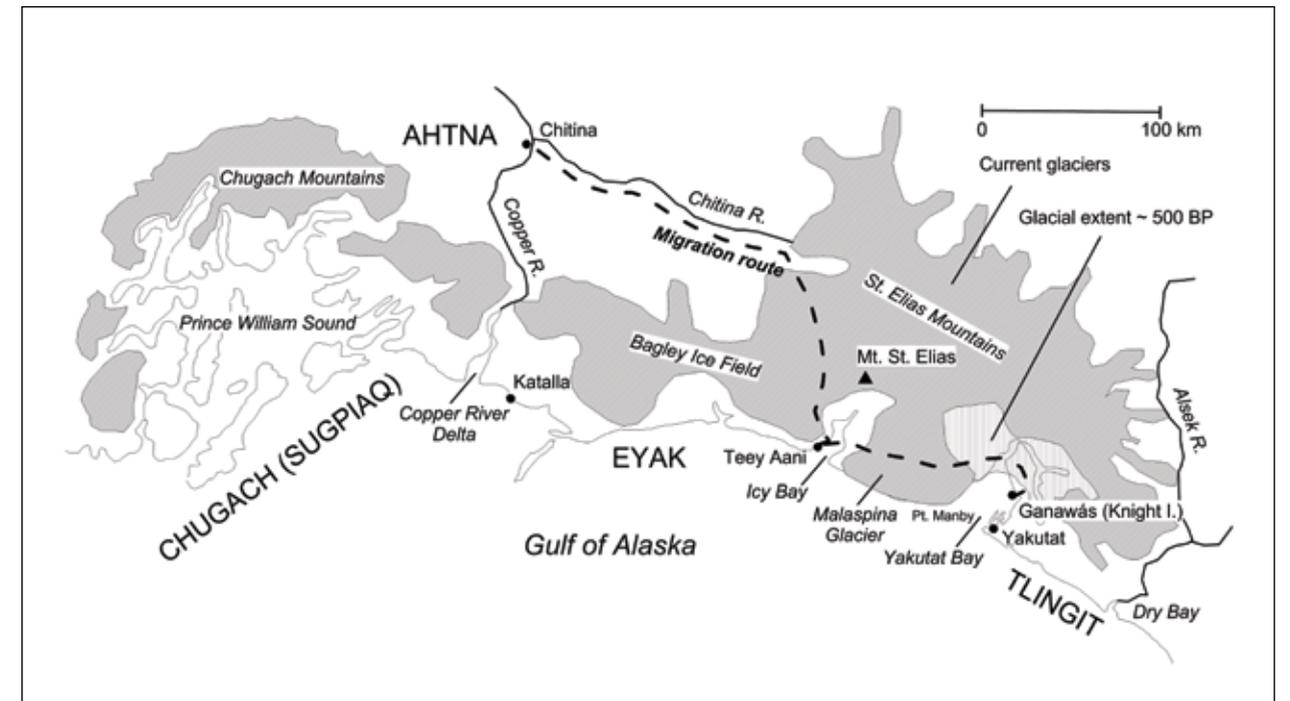


Figure 1.2: The Gineix Kwáan migration route.

Integrating Oral Tradition, Archaeology, and Geology Related to a Yakutat Migration Narrative

A multi-source methodology is used here to elucidate an important *shkalneek* narrative, about five centuries old, which describes the migration of an Athabascan Ahtna clan known as the Gineix Kwáan from their village at Chitina on the Copper River to Yakutat Bay on the Gulf of Alaska coast. This breakaway group belonged to the Lower Ahtna, who controlled native copper sources in the Chitina River basin and traded extensively in this valuable resource both before and after Western contact with the Tlingit, Eyak, Sugpiat, Dena’ina, Tutchone, and other indigenous peoples of southern Alaska and the Yukon Territory (De Laguna and McClellan 1981; Pratt 1998).

The migration of the Gineix Kwáan was a perilous trek of over 300 km up the Chitina

River drainage, south over the Bagley Icefield to the slopes of Mount St. Elias (North America’s second highest peak) and on to Icy Bay, then over Malaspina Glacier to Yakutat Bay (Figure 1.2). On the coast they encountered and married into an Eyak clan called the Galyák Kaagwaantaan. The narrative concludes with the group’s purchase of Yakutat Bay using copper brought from their homeland; the adoption of a new name, Kwaashk’i Kwáan, referring to a salmon stream in the acquired territory; and the beginning of a new lifeway as coastal hunters (Cruikshank 2001:382-384; De Laguna 1972:231-247; Harrington 1940; Swanton 1909:347-368). The subsequent arrival of Tlingit and Tlingit-Athabascan immigrants from Dry Bay and further south during the 18th century contributed to cultural fusion at Yakutat Bay, and the Kwaashk’i Kwáan became Tlingit speakers while maintaining aspects of their Ahtna-Eyak cultural identity.

The migration narrative continues to be told by Kwaashk'i Kwáan elders and is symbolized by an *at.óow* crest design depicting Mount Saint Elias, which guided the migrants across the glaciers. Surviving place names of Eyak, Tlingit, and Ahtna origin commemorate locations on the migration route and at Yakutat Bay (De Laguna 1972; De Laguna et al. 1964; Thornton 2012).

Archaeological sites in the Copper River basin (Hanson 2008; Ketz 1983; Pratt 1998; Shinkwin 1979; Workman 1977) provide a baseline for the group's Ahtna culture in its original setting, but the most specific evidence for dating the Gineix Kwáan migration comes from Yakutat Bay itself. According to the migration narrative the clan's first settlement in their new territory was on *Ganawás* (Knight Island), a village that came to be known as *Tlákwaan* (Tlingit, "Old Town"). Frederica de Laguna, who pioneered efforts to combine ethnology, archaeology, and oral history in the Tlingit region, excavated extensively at *Tlákwaan* in 1951 (De Laguna 1972; De Laguna et al. 1964). Her work suggested that Eyak and perhaps Ahtna elements were represented in the culture of the inhabitants and that the site might have been founded as early as the mid-16th century. There was no evidence of occupation into the period of Russian, Spanish, British, and American contact, which started in the late 1780s.

In 2014, the Smithsonian Institution's Arctic Studies Center investigated *Tlákwaan* (State of Alaska archaeological site designation YAK-00007) as part of an historical landscape study of Yakutat Bay in collaboration with the Yakutat Tlingit Tribe, Sealaska Corporation (an Alaska Native regional entity), U. S. Forest Service, National Park Service, State of Alaska, and National Science Foundation (Crowell 2012). The site was selected as a Native historical place (site AA-10532) by Sealaska Corporation (1975) under Section 14(h)(1) of the Alaska Native

Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) and certified eligible by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in 1983; see Pratt (2009) for a discussion of the ANCSA 14(h)(1) program. Data recovery was conducted through a Memorandum of Agreement signed by all of the cooperating parties and authorized by the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) (16 USC 470f, Section 106).

Fieldwork authorized by the agreement was limited to surface surveys and controlled excavation of a 4 x 1 m test trench in the shell and bone-rich midden adjacent to De Laguna's excavations. The objectives of subsurface testing included: reinterpretation of the cultural sequence and stratigraphy; recovery of faunal remains for identification; and precise radiocarbon dating of the occupation. De Laguna's *Tlákwaan* artifact collection, curated at the University of Pennsylvania Museum in Philadelphia, was subsequently reexamined and photographed. Kwaashk'i Kwáan elders Elaine Abraham and Lena Farkas retold and helped to interpret the migration story and provided Knight Island and Yakutat Bay place names, assisted by Kwaashk'i Kwáan indigenous studies researcher Judith Ramos (University of Alaska Fairbanks) and linguist Gary Holton (University of Alaska Fairbanks).

Glaciological data are also relevant to dating the Gineix Kwáan migration and the reconstruction of its environmental context. During the late Neoglacial period Yakutat Bay was completely filled with ice—comprised of the combined masses of Hubbard and Malaspina glaciers—until recession began around A.D. 1200 during the warming climate of the Medieval Optimum (Barclay et al. 2001; Calkins et al. 2001). Oral narratives indicate that when the Gineix Kwáan first arrived Hubbard Glacier—which today is located some 60 km from the bay's entrance—was still in mid-retreat, a fact to which the Eyak place name (*Yaakwdáat*, meaning "salt water pond" or "a lagoon is forming") refers (Thornton 2012:18).

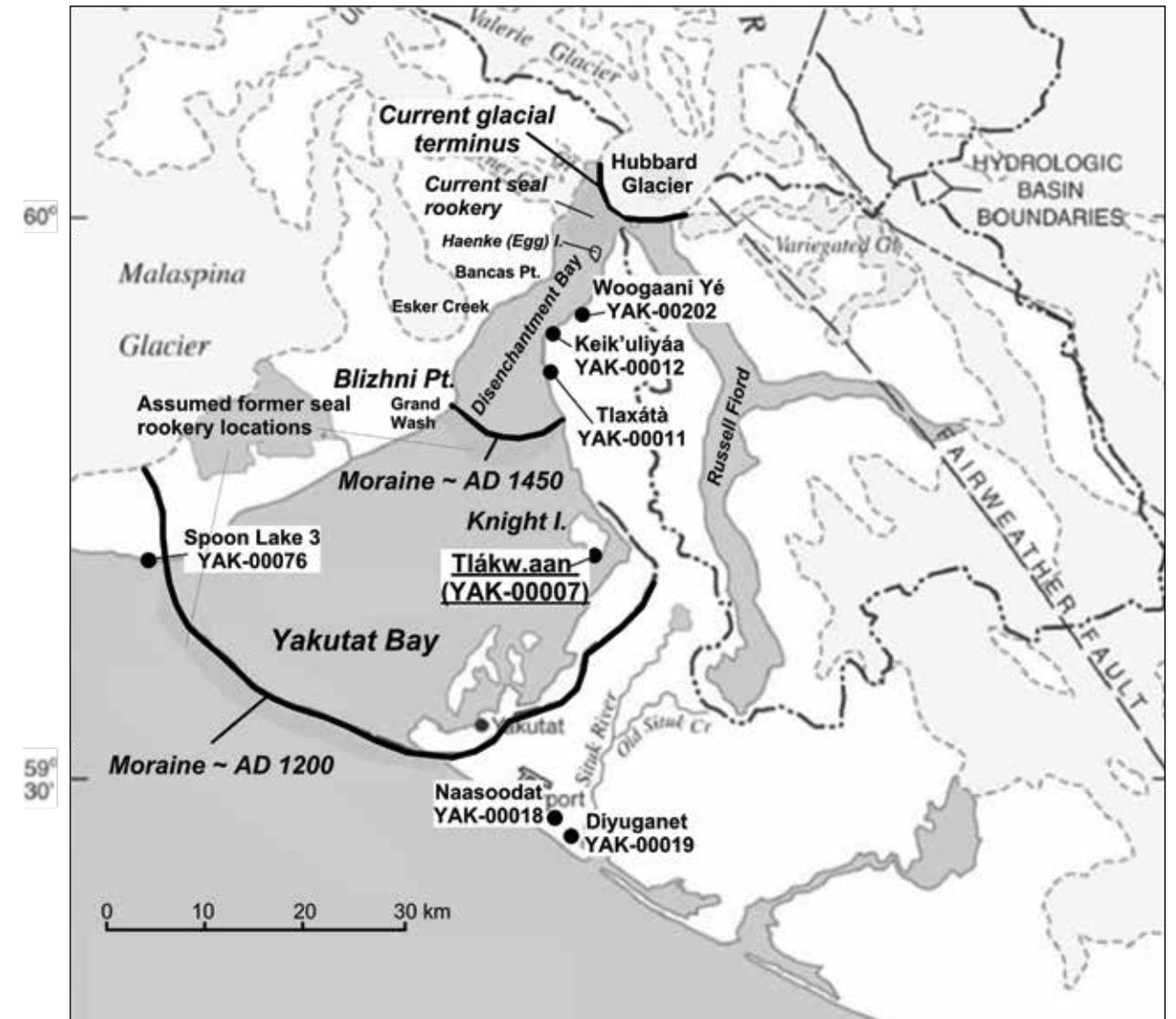


Figure 1.3: Glacial limits and archaeological sites, Yakutat Bay.

Knight Island is said to have then been treeless, indicating recent deglaciation. Geological studies place the glacier's front north of the island at Blizhni Point by about the mid-15th century, suggesting that occupation as early as A.D. 1400 might have been possible (Barclay et al. 2001). Eyak clans whom the Gineix Kwáan immigrants found already living at Yakutat Bay, and from whom they purchased the territory,

resided by A.D. 800 at *Diyaguna'et*, *Naasoodat*, and other sites on the Yakutat foreland, which remained ice-free during the Neoglacial period (Davis 1996). Yakutat Bay archaeological sites and glacial limits are shown in Figure 1.3.

Proximity to the glacier may have been especially significant to the people of Old Town because harbor seals concentrate among the ice floes near its face during the spring birthing



Figure 1.4: Lena Farkas and Elaine Abraham recording Yakutat Bay place names, 2011 (Courtesy Judith Ramos).

and mating season. Hunting at the ice floe rookery, now much farther from Knight Island than in past centuries because of glacial retreat, was traditionally a central focus of the Yakutat subsistence economy and remains important today (Burroughs et al. 1901; De Laguna 1972; Goldschmidt and Haas 1998; Kruse and Springer 2007; Springer et al. 2007; Wolfe and Mishler 1994).

The Gineix Kwáan Migration in Oral Tradition

The Gineix Kwáan migration narrative has been transcribed in multiple versions, which are

collated here to demonstrate the core features of the story, illustrate the range of variation, and identify aspects that are potentially verifiable by archaeological or geological data. The earliest documented recounting was given in Tlingit to linguist John Swanton at Sitka in 1904 by *K'áadasteen*, a Kwaashk'i Kwáan elder (Swanton 1909:347-368; see also Jones 2017). This was already several centuries after the original event so *K'áadasteen's* was not the "original" version but rather the first to be fixed in writing. A summary of his account is presented below in ten episodes, interposed with variants and additions provided by later narrators. In the collation the speakers are identified by their

initials and clan affiliations, and author's notes are in square brackets.

In addition to *K'áadasteen* (K, Kwaashk'i Kwáan) the narrators include Maggie Harry (MH, Kwaashk'i Kwáan), who told the migration story to linguist John Harrington in 1939 (Harrington 1940) and later to Frederica De Laguna (De Laguna 1972:235-236). In 1949, Harry Bremner (HB, Kwaashk'i Kwáan) provided the longest and what De Laguna considered to be the most authoritative recent version (De Laguna 1972:231-233). She heard other retellings and comments between 1949 and 1954 from Sarah Williams (SW, Kwaashk'i Kwáan); Susie Abraham (SA, Kwaashk'i Kwáan); Katy Dickson Isaac (KDI, Kwaashk'i Kwáan); Helen Bremner (HB, Galyák Kaagwaantaan); John Bremner (JB, Kwaashk'i Kwáan); Olaf Abraham (OA, Teikweidí); Jack Ellis (JE, L'uknax.adí); and Jenny Kardeetoo (JK, Kwaashk'i Kwáan). George Johnson, an Eyak man born in Cordova (GJ, Tcicqédi), commented on the story to Harrington (Harrington 1940). Elaine Abraham (EA, Kwaashk'i Kwáan) and Lena Farkas (LF, Kwaashk'i Kwáan) recounted the story to us at Yakutat in 2011 (Figure 1.4). De Laguna recorded Ahtna songs dating to the migration (De Laguna 1972:23-240, 1155-1157, 1226-1227) and these are still performed at contemporary Yakutat potlatches.

Summary Narration

1. *K'áadasteen's* account begins with the death of a chief named *Łtaxda'x* who owned a valuable feast dish [an *at.óow* object symbolizing clan identity] and a *tináa* [copper shield, an *at.óow* wealth item]. The name of the clan was Ca'dadūx (K).

a. *Łtaxda'x* was the leader of a Raven moiety Copper River [Ahtna] clan that lived at Chitina. This clan was called the Gineix Kwáan [rather than or in addition to Ca'dadūx], a name that comes from the *Gineix* (Big Bremner) River, which joins the Copper River below Chitina (HB).

b. The clan's name was Gineix Kwáan but the leader's name was *GuditŁa* (SW, KDI).

c. The dish was made of horn from a giant moose (HB, KDI, EA); the moose horn was decorated with abalone shell (SW, KDI); the dish was made of walrus ivory inset with beautiful stones (MH); it was made of wood with dentalium shells around the edge (KDI). [The bowl combines products of the interior and coast and may be a symbol of trade or migration.]

2. There was a dispute over inheritance of the feast dish, leading to a schism in the chief's house [*hít*, "house" and the matrilineal kin group residing there]. A faction of about 40 people led by four brothers decided to leave and "go straight for that mountain" [Mount Saint Elias] (K).

a. One brother kept the dish at Chitina and the other three left with their families, one going down the Copper River and settling at its mouth; one traveling south on the ocean to Yakutat in a skin boat; and the fourth setting out across the glacier. The migration across the ice took 100 years; the people travelling by boat arrived at Yakutat before them (MH).

b. "They [women of the clan] moved in a body to the side of the younger brother, which meant they were voting for the younger brother to be their chief. So he leaned over and got that bowl. That signified that he's chief. And then that migration started." The brother who was not chosen as leader led the migration to Yakutat (EA).

c. The migration took place ten generations ago, and ancestors from each generation can be named (MH).

3. The travelers crossing the glacier wore hats, coats made of weasel and martin skins, and nose pins. As they approached the mountain they found a place with many ground squirrels. They clubbed the squirrels, which caused fog to appear. The group became lost in the fog and some were separated and disappeared (K).

a. The group that split off in the fog turned back and came out at the mouth of the Copper River, later moving to Katalla up the coast; they were given the name Ganaxtedi (HB).

b. The people crossing the glacier were starving. In the distance they saw a little hill with trees [a pinnacle projecting above the ice] and mistook it for a wolverine. They later saw what they thought was a rabbit but it turned out to be the distant peak of Mount Saint Elias. “It was a compass for the people so they wouldn’t get lost” (HB).

c. The brother and his family who were travelling by sea saw the snowy peak of Mount Saint Elias in the distance and thought it was a seagull on the water (MH).

4. The migrating group climbed toward Mount Saint Elias [across Bagley Icefield], and then found a way around its west side [descending through a pass to Yahtse Glacier]. As they struggled on the ice they sang a song from their Copper River homeland and mourned loved ones who had been left behind or lost in the fog (K).

a. The people composed songs in the Ahtna language that they sang on the migration. One was a mourning song about a man who accidentally shot his brother with an arrow (MH). Some say he was shot with a gun (KDI) but there were no guns at that time (HB).

5. From the heights they saw the ocean [Gulf of Alaska] for the first time, saying “What is that

so very blue?” They went down to the ocean to save themselves [following Yahtse Glacier to Icy Bay]. At the bottom they crossed a [meltwater] river that was boiling out from under the ice. They claimed Mt. Saint Elias as an *at.óow* crest because they were the first to pass by it (K).

a. They came upon Mount Saint Elias and adopted it as a crest. “They danced down from that mountain. They were happy when they are coming on this side. Lots of things happen there and there are songs” (SW).

b. “The glacier was formed so there were steps all the way down to the water, and there was gravel on top of the ice. And every step or platform that was there, they made songs and danced” (KDI).

6. They built a house beside the river to shelter for the winter, naming it Mountain House [*Shaa Hit*, Swanton 1909:350] in memory of how close they came to dying on the trek. They resided at Icy Bay for ten years, building a whole town (K).

a. At Icy Bay “the glacier was all over the bay, way out” [at its maximum extent, larger than today]. The settlement at Icy bay (*Was’ei*) was a temporary camp called *Teey Aani* (“Yellow Cedar Bark Town,” Thornton 2012:17), named for bark they brought with them to cover their dwellings. The place was just west of what is now the bay, at *Was’ei Dak* (“outside of *Was’ei*,” Thornton 2012:17) (HB).

7. At Icy Bay a woman adopted a seagull that grew to a giant size. Young men were sent from Icy Bay in a skin boat to explore along the coast to the south. They got to Yakutat Bay and crossed it to a town where Koskedi and Łuxedi residents [probably Eyak clans living at Lost River] turned them away. They returned to Icy

Bay. Some months later, a group of [Galyák] Kaagwaantaan came to Icy Bay in a skin canoe from the mouth of Copper River and they were welcomed (K).

a. The leader of the Gineix Kwáan at Icy Bay was concerned that they would become a “lost tribe” because they were Ravens and had no Eagle moiety partners to marry. The arrival of the Galyák Kaagwaantaan, an Eagle Eyak clan, saved the Gineix Kwáan men from having to marry their “sisters” of the same clan (HB).

b. The leader of the Galyák Kaagwaantaan was a Teikweidí [Tlingit Eagle] man named *Xatgawet*. He married two beautiful Gineix Kwáan sisters, *Ándúł* and *Dúhàn*, and became rich because of the copper they owned (SA, EA, LF; see De Laguna 1972:242-245).

c. The Gineix Kwáan encountered the Galyák Kaagwaantaan after finding blood on the ice where hunters had been skinning seals (HB). [Icy Bay is a major harbor seal rookery.]

d. While they were living at Icy Bay a boy fell into a glacial crevasse and could not be rescued; his mother adopted a seagull in his memory (SW, SA, HB). [A mourning song for the child is still performed at Yakutat in the Ahtna language; see De Laguna 1972:1157]. According to Harry Bremner, this was the origin of the giant seagull story, which he described as myth (*tlaagú*) (HB).

e. The people whom the bothers met living at the town in Yakutat Bay were Łuxedi, an Eagle clan (KDI) or “Aleuts” [i.e., Chugach Sugpiaq people from Prince William Sound] (MH, SW).

8. Six Gineix Kwáan brothers returned to the Copper River to retrieve a *tináa* [copper shield

or plate] whose “real owner” [possibly the clan leader *Łtaxda’x* from Episode 1 above] had died. Bringing the *tináa* with them, the group [Gineix Kwáan and Galyák Kaagwaantaan, now intermarried] went to Yakutat Bay by boat. They crossed Yakutat Bay and came ashore on the other side in an area occupied by the Koskedi [an Eyak clan] (K).

a. [Instead of by sea] the group went on foot “across the ice” all the way from Icy Bay to the east side of Yakutat Bay near Mt. Tebenkoff [a route that implies Malaspina/Hubbard Glacier at that time extended across Yakutat Bay at a point north of Knight Island; see Figure 1.3]. The travelers saw a “beautiful beach” below [possibly Logan Beach] and went down to it, meeting the Hmyedi in the vicinity of Knight Island (HB).

b. “They came walking overland from Icy Bay and found Yakutat” (GJ). Some boys from Icy Bay ran across the [Malaspina] glacier to Yakutat Bay and discovered that people were there from signs of seal hunting (SW).

c. A solid glacier covered all of Yakutat Bay and extended north to Icy Bay and beyond; it began receding when the Gineix Kwáan immigrants killed a dog as they approached Icy Bay and threw it into a crevasse. The name *Yaakwdáat* means “a lagoon is forming” (KDI).

d. “When the people first came to this area, the glacier extended from Point Latouche [see Figure 1.3] across to the Manby side [west side of the bay]. The Manby side was apparently then all ice. Knight Island was bare of trees, just as it is now around . . . those areas from which the glaciers have recently retreated.” The sandy places

on Knight Island around Old Town were covered with strawberry plants, and there was no forest on Krutoi Island (JB).

e. The whole of Knight Island was a strawberry patch; there were no trees (OA).

9. The Koskedi were hostile to the arrivals, and when they discovered a man from the immigrant group fishing at a stream called *Kwáashk'* (Eyak, “humpback salmon”) they broke his salmon spear. To settle the dispute the six brothers bought Yakutat Bay with the *tináa*, which was worth ten slaves. All of the Koskedi and Łuxedi then left the bay (K).

a. The original owners of *Kwáashk'* creek [variously the Koskedi (K), Hmyedi (HB); Yinyeidi (EA, LF) or Aleuts (SW)] sold the creek, and the new owners [the Gineix Kwáan] thus acquired the name Kwaashk'i Kwáan [people of *Kwaashk'*] (HB, KDI, EA).

b. The same group that owned *Kwáashk'* creek caught the Kwaashk'i Kwáan daughter of a Galyák Kaagwaantaan clan leader as she was picking strawberries on *Ganawás* [Knight Island] and cut the berry basket from her back. Her father then bought Knight Island for her clan (HB). Alternatively, the girl's brother *Dux* bought the island (JK); or it was *Xatgawet* who paid with copper for *Kwáashk'* creek and Knight Island (EA, LF, SA, KDI).

c. The purchase of territories in Yakutat Bay was made with the *tináa* brought from Copper River (worth eight slaves) and also sea otter furs (HB) or with a canoe that had 14 *tináa* tied to its thwarts, each worth ten slaves (SW). “Because they lived up the Copper River the Kwaashk'i Kwáan had *tináa* then. They used copper for everything—for knives, whenever they had a war” (SW).

d. The immigrants built a big town on *Ganawás*; it had only Kwaashk'i Kwáan houses (SW). *Dux*, a Kwaashk'i Kwáan clan leader, built the first house there, called *Noow Hít* (“Fort House”) and a man married to his sister built *Xóots Hít* (“Bear House”) (JK). The village on Knight Island was the oldest one around Yakutat Bay (OA). Its real name was *Yéil Áa Daak Wudzigidi Yé* (“Place Where Raven Fell Down”) because “there were so many big houses there, and when it's calm weather, the smoke goes straight up. So the raven that tries to fly over never gets to the end. It falls down” (OA, SA, EA). The people lived there before the Russians ever came to Yakutat (Figure 1.5). [The earliest contact was in 1788, with the Izmailov-Bocharoff expedition.]

e. It was *Xatgawet*, a Teikweidí rich man who owned many slaves, who built the village on Knight Island (EA, LF, JE, SA, KDI). He named it *Tlákwaan* (Old Town) after *Tlákwaan* (Klukwan) on the Chilkat River in southeast Alaska, in order “to pretend it was a high-class people's place” [provided by various Yakutat commentators; however, others believe *Xatgawet* lived during Russian times and had nothing to do with the Gineix Kwáan migration; see De Laguna 1972:245-247].

f. Another name for *Ganawás* (Knight Island) was *K'ootsinadi.aan* (“shaken land”) “because there were so many of them, the land shook when they walked” (EA, LF). [The name *Ganawás* has not been translated, and may be of Eyak, Ahtna, or even Chugach origin (De Laguna et al. 1964:31).]

10. A mountain spirit granted the youngest of the six brothers great hunting powers and showed him that the animals of Yakutat Bay, including grizzly bears, black bears, and

mountain sheep, lived inside a mountain. Later the brothers all went together in a canoe to hunt for seals in front of the glacier, which was “the seals' home” and where the animals were abundant [the ice floe harbor seal rookery at Hubbard Glacier]. The position of the glacier at that time was “just at the head of *Kwáashk'*” [i.e., at the head of the creek's drainage, also suggesting a mid-bay position similar to that described above in commentaries to Episode 8]. Before crossing that glacier [or in front of it], people listened inside a hollow cottonwood tree for sounds of approaching storms that might make the crossing dangerous (K).

a. “When they came down there it was a foreign country. They didn't know what to eat; they didn't know how to live. And the spirits of that place adopted the humans... They showed them how to hunt seal, and they became friends of the spirit of the glacier. That is why they have a special connection with the glaciers and the mountains in all that area...” (EA).

The remainder of *K'áadasteen's* narrative diverges from the Gineix Kwáan migration story and is not relevant to the present analysis (Swanton 1909:361-368).

Discussion of the Oral Tradition

Variations in the Gineix Kwáan migration narrative, including the differing names recalled for places, individuals, and clans, are noted in the synopsis above. Given the continual process of change inherent in oral tradition and the multiplicity of narrators in each generation it is possible that some of these variants already existed at the time of *K'áadasteen's* recounting in 1904, while others may have arisen more recently.

Despite such differences in detail the same basic sequence of events occurs in all versions, suggesting that long-term fidelity

to what “really happened” resides in the main plot elements of the narrative. Among these core elements is the migration itself from the Copper River up the Chitina River basin and over montane ice fields to Icy Bay and Yakutat Bay (episodes 2 through 5 above), although a coastal route for part of the group was recalled by one narrator (2a). All versions agree that an interim settlement was built at Icy Bay (6); that the immigrants found Yakutat fiord still filled with glacial ice to a point north of Knight Island (8, 10); that the immigrants came into conflict with Yakutat residents over access to food resources (9); and that one of their leaders bought territory including Knight Island and *Kwáashk'* stream using one of more *tináa* brought from the Copper River homeland (9). The Kwaashk'i Kwáan then built the town known as *Yéil Áa Daak Wudzigidi Yé* or *Tlákwaan* on Knight Island and lived there until abandoning the settlement prior to Western contact (9). They fished for salmon (9), hunted seals along the glacial edge (10), and harvested land animals including bears and mountain sheep (10).

The temporal uncertainty of oral tradition is reflected in the difficulty of deriving a secure date for the migration from narrative evidence alone. Maggie Harry (2c) believed that it took place ten generations prior to her own and was able to list ancestors from each cohort (De Laguna 1972:240). This suggests a date of about A.D. 1690, although generations are often undercounted in oral tradition (Henige 1974:27-38; Vansina 1965:153-154). In connection with the Kwaashk'i Kwáan purchase of Knight Island, the same narrator in the 1950s commented that “three hundred years ago there were no trees at Yakutat—just strawberries” (De Laguna 1972:236). However, Maggie Harry's belief that the migration across the montane ice took 100 years is unsupported given the hostility of that environment to human occupation. Katy



Figure 1.5: “Raven’s Flight over *Tlákw.aan*” by Emily Kearney-Williams, 2017. *Tlákw.aan*, the first village built by people of the Gineix Kwáan clan after their migration to Yakutat Bay, is depicted on the basis of archaeological evidence. In oral tradition Raven once tried to fly over the settlement but was overcome by smoke from its many hearth fires, an incident commemorated by the place name *Yéil Áa Daak Wudzigidi Yé* (“Place Where Raven Fell Down”). The large wooden plank structures are lineage houses; the smaller are food storage caches and other outbuildings. The scene depicts young spruce trees growing on a recently deglaciated landscape.

Emily Kearney-Williams

Dickson Isaac's reference to the use of a firearm during or before the migration (4a) is clearly an anachronism, since all other information places the migration in pre-Russian times. Similarly, the Tlingit leader *Xatgawet* is ambiguously associated with both the migration and post-contact times (7b, 9e), possibly an example of temporal compression (mixing of eras) in oral narrative (Crowell and Howell 2013) or due to two individuals possessing the same name.

Observations about environmental change are embedded in the narrative and in associated place names, a regional cultural-linguistic pattern (Connor et al. 2009; Cruikshank 2001; Monteith et al. 2007; Thornton 1997, 2008; 2012:xi-xxiii). The extent of Yahtse Glacier in Icy Bay (6a) and of the Hubbard/Malaspina ice mass in Yakutat Bay (8, 10) are noted in addition to glacial retreat (8c), the exposure of new land (8d,e), and post-glacial plant succession (8d,e). Katy Isaac Dixon's explanation for the glaciers' retreat—that a dead dog was thrown into a crevasse (8c)—is based in the belief that glaciers are sentient beings who respond to an invitation “to eat” by advancing and to pollution or human disrespect by pulling back (Connor et al. 2009; Cruikshank 2001, 2005; De Laguna 1972:286-287).

A guiding cultural theme of the story is reciprocity between Raven and Eagle moieties (Raven and Seagull among the Athna), the complementary “halves” of matrilineal Tlingit, Eyak, and Athabascan societies that intermarry, exchange resources, and support each other during times of loss and grief (De Laguna 1972, 1990a, 1990b; Worl 2010). In the Gineix Kwáan migration story the shared moiety structure supports intermarriage and the exchange of wealth and knowledge across cultural-linguistic boundaries. Thus an Eyak Eagle clan (the Galyák Kaagwaantaan) shares its skin boats, weapons, and sea mammal hunting skills with its Ahtna Raven marriage partners, the Gineix

Kwáan (7a, above), enabling them to learn “how to live” in the coastal environment of Yakutat Bay where they become seal hunters (10), aided by protective mountain and glacier spirits (10a). In turn the Gineix Kwáan use *tináa* made of native copper from the riverine interior to buy land at Yakutat and to fund their social partnership with the Galyák Kaagwaantaan. It is also said that *Xatgawet*, a Tlingit Eagle of the Teikweidí clan and leader (in some versions) of the Galyák Kaagwaantaan, “became rich” in copper through his marriage to two Gineix Kwáan sisters (7b).

Comparison of the Oral Accounts to Archaeological Evidence from *Tlákw.aan*

To identify aspects of consilience between oral tradition and archaeology and to integrate both views of the past, key narrative points of the Gineix Kwáan migration epic are now considered in the light of archaeological evidence from *Tlákw.aan*, the village that the migrants founded in Yakutat Bay. Other settlements along the migration route, including the Icy Bay village named *Teey Aani*, have potentially been preserved as archaeological sites but remain undiscovered. The *Tlákw.aan* of oral record, however, may be securely identified as the YAK-00007 site on the south shore of Knight Island, both on the basis of strong local attribution and the absence of other candidate sites (Crowell field notes 2011-2014; De Laguna et al 1964:20-23; Sealaska Corporation 1975). One other pre-contact settlement is known to exist on Knight Island, a hunting camp discovered in 2012 (YAK-00205); but this site with only three small house pits is too limited in scale to correspond with the ancient village.

Settlement Size and Population

In oral tradition, *Tlákw.aan* is described as the first and most important Yakutat Bay

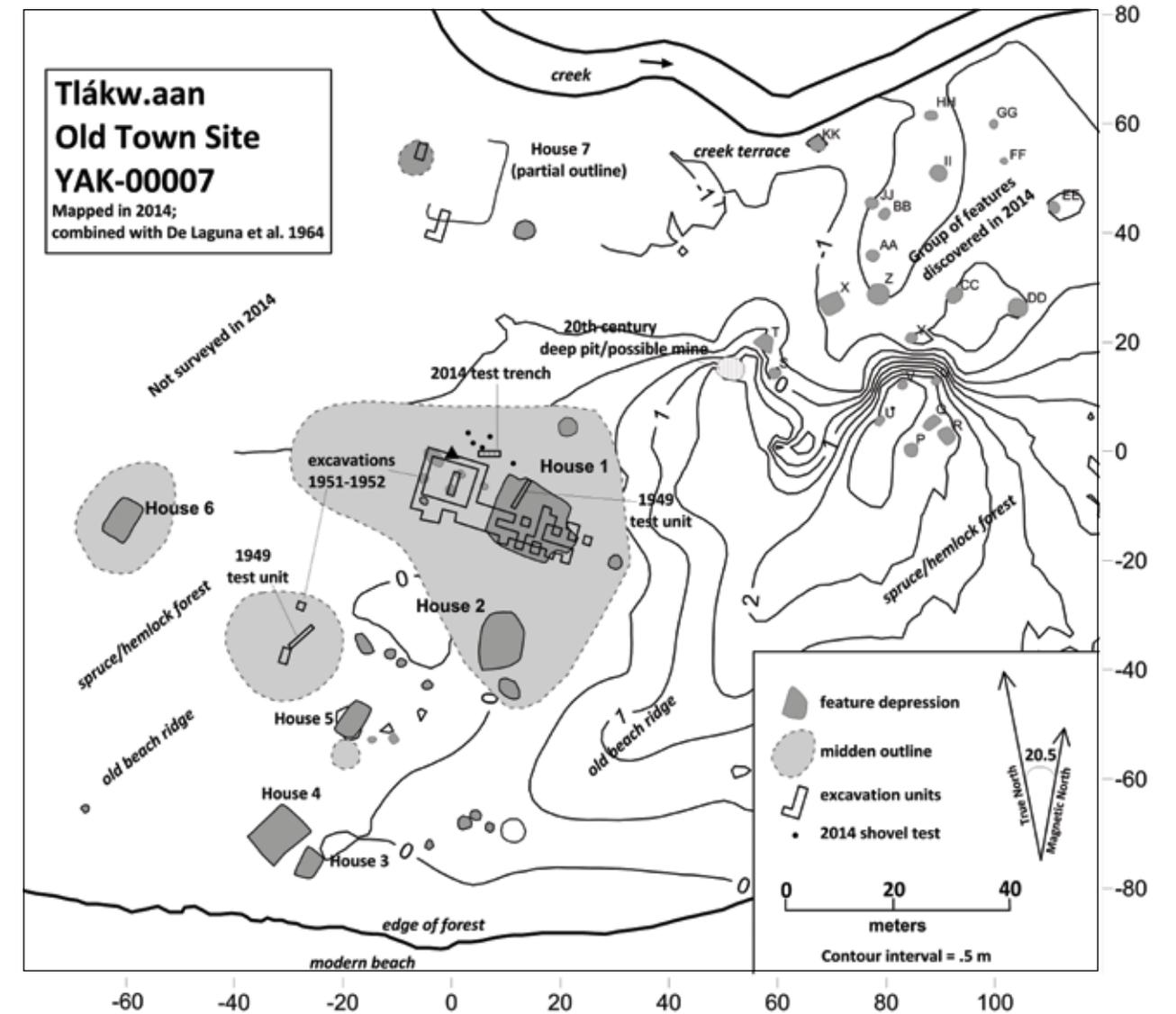


Figure 1.6: The *Tlákw.aan*/Old Town archaeological site (YAK-00007). The same terrain and cultural features are depicted in Figure 1.5.

settlement of the Gineix Kwáan and is given the name *Yéil Áa Daak Wudzigidí Yé* because of its “many big houses” with smoking hearths. The *Tlákw.aan* site should therefore be extensive, containing the remains of numerous multifamily houses.

The YAK-00007 site (Figure 1.6) occupies a forest clearing of about 200 x 100 meters (2.0

hectares / 4.94 acres) bordered by a mature spruce and hemlock forest with trees up to 1.5 m in girth. Ages of the largest trees have not been determined but are in the range of 200 to 300 years. Younger trees have encroached on the clearing over the last century or more, and vegetation in open areas includes rye grass, wild celery, and salmonberry bushes.

De Laguna mapped seven square or rectangular house pits at the site (Houses 1-7) as well as smaller surface depressions left by underground storage caches. Four areas of midden were found containing animal bones, shell, charcoal, and fire-cracked rock (Mounds A-D). Average midden depth was less than 75 cm (30 in.) but some pits extended up to 230 cm (90 in.) below the surface. Over 40 subsurface pits and buried structures were uncovered, representing earlier phases of occupation. The two largest dwellings at the site were House 1 and House 7, both about 15.6 m (50 ft.) long. The other houses were 5.9 m to 9.1 m (18-30 ft.) long.

A second group of cultural depressions was discovered in 2014 to the northeast of the main occupation area (Figure 1.6, Features P through JJ). These are circular to rectangular and range in size from 2.0 m to 4.4 m in maximum dimension. While some of the larger pits could represent small semi-subterranean houses, most or all were probably winter storage caches for meat, dried fish, berries, and other foods utilized by the inhabitants of *Tlákwaan*.

The areal extent and number of houses at the YAK-0007 site confirm that *Tlákwaan* was at least a moderately sized village, although not as vast as oral tradition suggests. It is more extensive than most other Yakutat sites although *Diyuganet* on the Lost River is far larger with 26 house pits (Davis 1996:192-200).

An approximation of the population of *Tlákwaan* may be derived from comparative ethnohistoric information. The largest traditional houses in the Tlingit region were 15 m to 18 m square (49-59 ft. square) and sheltered 40 to 50 people (De Laguna 1972:294-299; 1990a:207-208; Emmons 1991:59-68). This suggests an average of about 6 sq. m of interior space per person. Extrapolating from the total floor area of the houses at *Tlákwaan* (707 sq. m without including any of the northeastern pits) the

resident population would have been around 118 persons. This assumes that all the surface houses were occupied at the same time, although some evidence (discussed below) indicates that this was probably not the case. Also, because it is based on surface features, the estimate would apply only to the final period of site occupancy rather than to deeper, older layers. *K'áadasteen* (episode 2, above) stated that the original group of Ahtna migrants included 40 people, who were joined by an unknown number of Eyaks at Icy Bay (episode 7). The descendants of this relatively small founding group might have increased in number over time, expanding the village.

Architecture of the Houses

The primary line of oral tradition holds that a Copper River Ahtna Raven clan (the Gineix Kwáan) joined an Eyak Eagle clan (the Galyák Kaagwaantaan) during the migration and that members of both groups built the village of *Tlákwaan* (episode 7). In an alternative version, *Xatgawet*, a Tlingit Teikweidí clan leader, constructed the settlement (episode 9e). House remains at YAK-0007 should permit identification of the cultural origins of the site's founders, to the extent that Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit houses differed from each other in style and construction.

The traditional residential structures of the Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit—variously known in English as lineage, chief's, or winter houses—shared basic features of design as well as variations that can be archaeologically distinguished. All were plank buildings with wooden frames and housed multiple families related by matrilineal descent and marriage. The Ahtna chief's house of the 19th century was reported to be rectangular (5-10 m long) with a floor excavated up to 1 m below ground level (Allen 1887:130; De Laguna and McClellan 1981:645; Ketz 1983:145-149; Shinkwin 1979:40-50). Wooden sleeping platforms lined

the walls and were partitioned into family compartments. The house had a central cooking hearth, overhead smoke vent, vertical and/or horizontal wall planks, and a bark roof supported by single or double ridge poles. A rectangular annex for steam bathing was often connected to the main house.

Eyak multi-family dwellings were similar in size and construction to their Ahtna counterparts but had only a single ridge pole (Birket-Smith and De Laguna 1938:32-43; De Laguna 1990b:181). Birket-Smith and De Laguna described historic Eyak house floors as level with the ground but Davis (1996:210-309) interpreted pit houses at *Diyuganet* and *Naasoodat* on the Yakutat foreland as Eyak because they antedated Tlingit migration into the area. These were associated with calibrated radiocarbon dates as early as the 10th century A. D. and were built inside pits up to 2 m deep with vertical plank walls that extended to the bottom. One house at *Naasoodat* had an earthen bench around its central hearth. The Eyak practice of using grooved base frames to secure the lower ends of vertical wall planks (De Laguna et al. 1964:73) was not observed at these sites.

Tlingit lineage houses of the 18th and 19th centuries varied in size (6-18 m long) but were typically larger than Ahtna or Eyak dwellings of the same period (De Laguna 1972:294-299; 1990a:207-208; Emmons 1991:59-68; Russell 1891:79-80; Seton Carr 1887:156-157). The house had vertical plank walls based at ground level without a bottom frame. Entry was through a circular opening in the front wall. The interior pit was up to 4 m deep and surrounded by stepped residential platforms which were divided into family apartments. A wood-burning hearth occupied the center of the floor with a smoke hole above. The roof was covered with spruce planks and supported by two heavy beams. Posts that held up the ridge beams were often carved and painted with clan crests, as

was the house front. In some houses a screen with crest emblems divided the house leader's apartment from the rest of the interior space.

De Laguna interpreted all the houses at YAK-00007 as Tlingit in design, apparently because they had excavated floors and lacked the basal wall frames she believed were diagnostic of Eyak construction (De Laguna et al. 1964:43-76). Nonetheless, all had Eyak or Ahtna-like aspects and did not conform entirely to the Tlingit ethnohistoric model. House 8, found buried under Mound B deposits and built early in the history of the site, had vertical wall planks inside a pit as at *Diyuganet*, a bark-covered roof, and a single ridge pole. House 9, which dated to a later period based on its superposition over House 1, was similarly constructed with a single ridge pole and no side benches. House 1 had a side bench along its north wall and a double-beam gabled roof "as on the large Tlingit houses of historic times" but lacked a stepped pit and central hearth. House 7, also interpreted as a Tlingit-style lineage house, had a deeply excavated floor but no side benches.

Given these variations, and taking into account the architecture of Eyak houses built at *Diyuganet* and *Naasoodat*, De Laguna's identification of the *Tlákwaan* structures as Tlingit is questionable. They instead seem to reflect the mixed Ahtna-Eyak heritage that the oral tradition would project, although most of the houses were larger than either of those groups built during the post-contact period after they had suffered severe population decline. It is notable that House 7, one of the largest dwellings at *Tlákwaan*, was interpreted by De Laguna as one of the oldest because of the mature spruce trees that have overgrown it, making it unlikely to have been a product of late Tlingit influence.

Age and Duration of Occupation

Maggie Harry believed that *Tlákwaan* was founded ten generations, or about 200 years,

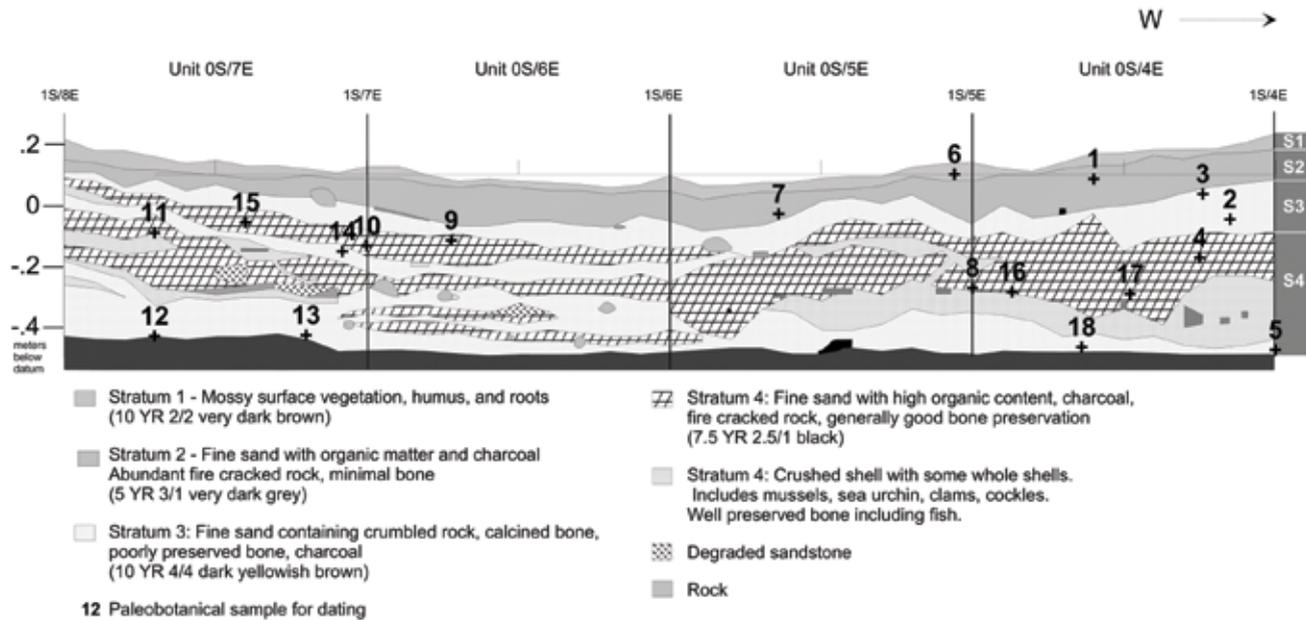


Figure 1.7: South wall profile of 2014 test trench at the *Tlákwaan* site, including locations of paleobotanical samples.

before her own birth in 1892, and that people lived there until shortly before Russian or Spanish contact (episodes 2c and 9d, discussed above). The implied span of occupation is thus about a century, approximately A.D. 1690–1780. Archaeologically, multiple layers of cultural debris would be expected for a site that was inhabited for this period of time or longer, and the exact chronology of occupation should be determinable from calibrated radiocarbon dates on samples of plant material (e.g., charcoal, wood) from different levels of the midden.

De Laguna reported two uncalibrated dates on charred wood from the lower levels of Mound B: 136 ± 62 radiocarbon years before “present” (RCYBP [meaning 1950]) and 328 ± 78 RCYBP (De Laguna et al. 1964:206). The older of these dates falls in the early 17th century A.D., about as expected from Maggie Harry’s oral information. However, the two dates are quite different and do not adequately define the occupation period.

One purpose of the 2014 test trench was to record midden stratigraphy and collect a vertically-controlled series of radiocarbon samples for more precise dating. The trench deposits (Figure 1.7) were 60-65 cm deep and corresponded to the general site stratigraphy reported by De Laguna (De Laguna et al. 1964:36-41). Stratum 1 consisted of brown humus accumulated from vegetal growth over the centuries since the site was last inhabited. Stratum 2 was the uppermost cultural layer, composed of sand mixed with large amounts of charcoal and fire-cracked rock generated by cooking fires and steam bathing. Stratum 3 was sand mixed with lesser amounts of fire-cracked rock, charcoal, and fragments of burnt animal bone. Stratum 4 at the base of the midden (the earliest period of occupation) was the thickest and most complex deposit, composed of beach sand interlayered with charcoal, fire-cracked rock, well-preserved fish and animal bones, and lenses of marine shell (butter clams, cockles, mussels, sea urchins, and snails). De Laguna

Table 1.1: AMS Radiocarbon Results for Samples from the *Tlákwaan* site YAK-00007. Kováčik and Cummings 2015.

Sample No.	Sample Identification	AMS ¹⁴ C date	1-sigma calibrated date (68.2%)	2-sigma calibrated date (95.4%)	δ ¹³ C (0/00)	Stratum
PRI-15-039-1	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	351 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1480-1530 AD 1570-1630	AD 1450-1530 AD 1540-1640	-28.14	S2
PRI-15-039-3	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	145 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1670-1700 AD-1720-1780 AD 1790-1820 AD 1830-1870 AD 1910-1940	AD 1660-1890 AD 1910-1950	-24.75	S3
PRI-15-039-2	Conifer needle, charred	234 ± 26 RCYBP	AD 1640-1670 AD 1780-1800	AD 1630-1690 AD 1730-1750 AD 1760-1810 AD 1930 -	-25.92	S3
PRI-15-039-4	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	366 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1460-1520 AD 1590-1620	AD 1450-1530 AD 1550-1640	-26.35	S4
PRI-15-039-5	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	366 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1460-1520 AD 1590-1620	AD 1450-1530 AD 1550-1640	-24.23	S4
PRI-15-039-8	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	371 ± 23 RCYBP	AD 1450-1520 AD 1590-1620	AD 1440-1530 AD 1570-1640	-25.63	S4
PRI-15-039-9	<i>Populus</i> charcoal	357 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1460-1530 AD 1570-1630	AD 1450-1530 AD 1550-1640	-26.48	S4
PRI-15-039-10	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	324 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1510-1600 AD 1610-1640	AD 1480-1650	-26.35	S4
PRI-039-15-14	<i>Picea</i> charcoal	310 ± 24 RCYBP	AD 1520-1590 AD 1620-1650	AD 1490-1650	-25.6	S4

reported that bone, stone, and copper artifacts occurred throughout the midden but at a somewhat higher frequency in the upper cultural strata (De Laguna et al. 1964:85-86).

Seventeen samples of wood charcoal, wood, bark, and conifer needles were collected from Strata 2, 3, and 4 of the trench, as indicated in Figure 1.7, and submitted for species identification and AMS (accelerated mass spectrometer) dating to the PaleoResearch Institute (Boulder, CO). All samples including those from the base of the deposit were

identified as *Picea* (spruce) except for one fragment of *Populus* (aspen or cottonwood) (Kováčik and Cummings 2015).

AMS dates were run on nine of these samples and fell into two groups, with the oldest seven ranging between 371 ± 23 RCYBP and 310 ± 24 RCYBP (Table 1.1, Figure 1.8). Six of the samples in this group were from Stratum 4 and one was anomalously from Stratum 2. These estimates intersect a plateau in the dendrochronological calibration curve and so have bimodal

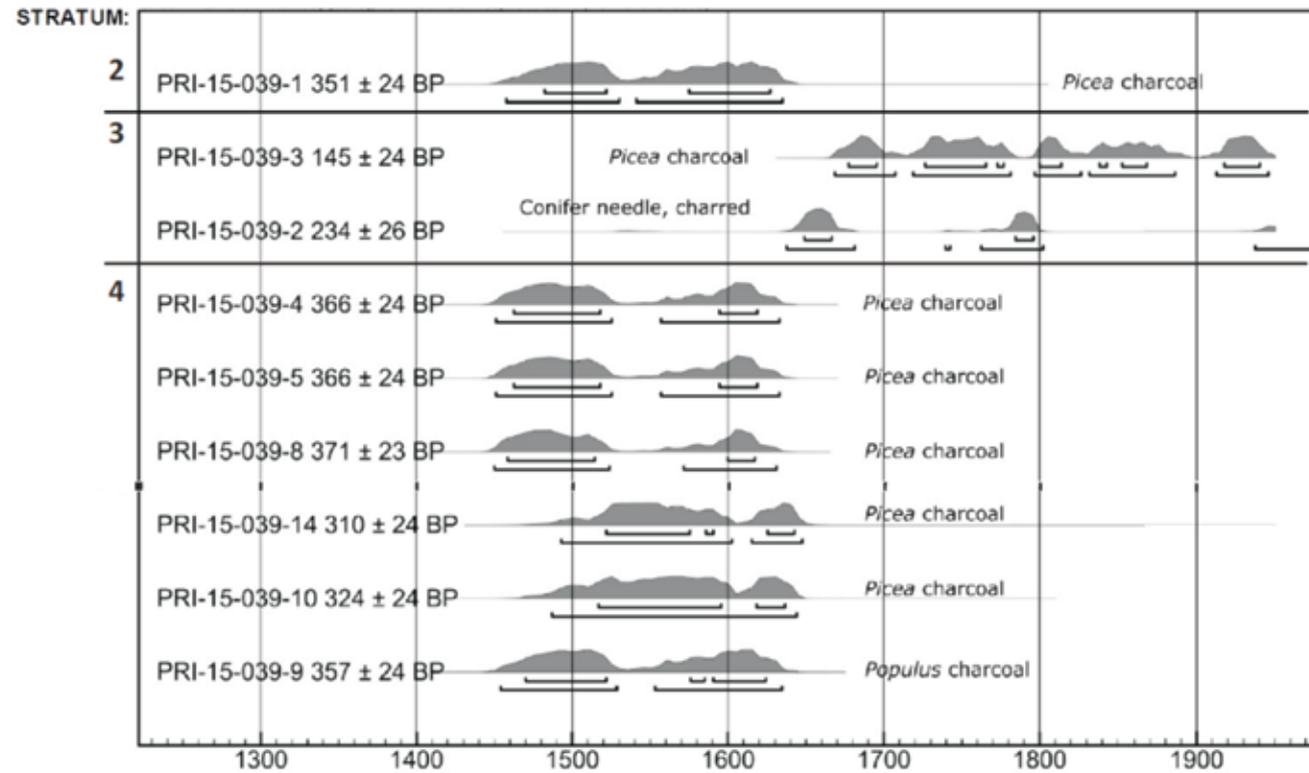


Figure 1.8: Multiplot of AMS results (CAL AD) from *Tlákwaan*/Old Town, YAK-00007, 2014 test trench (Kováčik and Cummings 2015).

calendrical distributions. The earlier ranges start in the mid to late 1400s and the later ranges in the early 1500s to early 1600s (Figure 1.8). The early peaks are close to the deglaciation of Knight Island about 600 years ago and older than the local availability of spruce, so are implausible on that basis. The younger peaks are quite similar to each other without the variability that random growth ring sampling of centuries-old trees (the “old wood problem”) would produce, so it is likely that the source trees were young, first-growth spruce that germinated around A.D. 1500 or later. Overall, this set of seven dates identifies the mid-1500s to mid-1600s as the most likely span of deposition represented by Stratum 4.

The second group includes two dates from Stratum 3: 234 ± 26 RCYBP on a conifer needle

and 145 ± 24 RCYBP on spruce charcoal. The former is the most reliable because needles stop growing and absorbing atmospheric carbon after only 5-7 years, avoiding the old wood problem. The earliest two calibrated date ranges for the needle (A.D. 1630-1690 and A.D. 1730-1750) are the most reliable, since there is no evidence at *Tlákwaan* of Spanish or Russian contact. Therefore, the most likely dates for accumulation of Stratum 3 are the late 1600s to early 1700s, with no indication of a temporal gap between Stratum 3 and Stratum 4 below.

In sum, radiocarbon dates from the 2014 test trench in Mound B near House 1 suggest that *Tlákwaan* was inhabited by the mid-1500s and that people lived there through the 1600s and possibly into the early 1700s. These

results would push the beginning of occupation back more than a century before the A.D. 1690 estimate inferred from Maggie Harry’s genealogical account.

Another time marker embedded in the migration story suggests an even earlier date for the founding of the settlement. In episode 8d, Knight Island is described as having been so recently deglaciated that it lacked trees and was covered with strawberries, a stage of plant succession that would probably have obtained no later than the early to mid-1400s (Barclay et al. 2001). This oral evidence does not appear to be consistent with paleobotanical data from the 2014 test trench, where spruce—a species that does not take hold for at least a century after deglaciation—occurs from top to bottom and where no early-succession tree species such as willow and alder were found. The likely explanation is that Mound B was not formed during the earliest phase of occupation at the site, as also supposed by De Laguna who thought that House 7 and associated middens C and D might be older (De Laguna et al. 1964:85). Thus, while the exact date for the founding of *Tlákwaan* remains unresolved, a mid-15th century date seems possible.

Artifacts

Artifacts recovered from the *Tlákwaan* archaeological site should provide information about the cultural origins of the occupants with the possibility that Ahtna, Eyak, and Tlingit types could all be present based on oral data. De Laguna’s general assessment was that “we should consider Yakutat archaeology to be Eyak archaeology” because of the late date of Tlingit migration into the area (De Laguna et al. 1964:207). She allowed that Ahtna traits might also be discerned among the artifacts recovered at *Tlákwaan* but was unable to assess this possibility because so little archaeological information was available at the time from the

Ahtna and Eyak regions (Rainey 1939; VanStone 1955). Lacking any good alternative she compared the *Tlákwaan* material to collections from Sugpiaq (Chugach) sites in Prince William Sound (De Laguna 1956) which include oil lamps, splitting adzes, barbed harpoon heads, and other types known to have been shared by the Eyak.

Subsequent investigations at Ahtna sites in the Copper River basin (Hanson 2008; Ketz 1983; Shinkwin 1979; Workman 1977) and at Eyak sites on the Yakutat foreland (Davis 1996) enable a new assessment of the *Tlákwaan* collection. The following discussion focuses on selected types and does not provide a complete description of the *Tlákwaan* collections, which includes 987 artifacts from De Laguna’s excavations (De Laguna et al. 1964:92-186) and 15 from the 2014 test trench.

Projectiles

Copper arrow points from *Tlákwaan* (n=5) have leaf-shaped blades, sloping shoulders, and narrow, pointed tangs (Figure 1.9A-C). They are closely comparable to leaf-shaped points from Ahtna sites including GUL-00077 with dates from approximately A.D. 925 to 1485 (Hanson 2008:Fig. 9; Workman 1977) and the early 19th century Dakah De’Nin’s Village (Shinkwin 1979:Fig. 10). Trace element analyses of two of the *Tlákwaan* points (Cooper et al. 2008; Veakis 1979) indicated that the metal probably came from a Chitina River source.

Large ground slate endblades for lances (n=3; Figure 1.9D) and smaller slate endblades for arrows (n=6; Figure 1.9E) are relatively uncommon at *Tlákwaan* in comparison to late prehistoric Eyak (Davis 1996:466-471 and Figs. 95-96) and Sugpiaq sites (e.g., De Laguna 1956, 1975; Clark 1974; Crowell and Mann 1998; Knecht 1995). Workman (1977) noted that among the Ahtna copper replaced stone and bone as the material used for many types of tools.

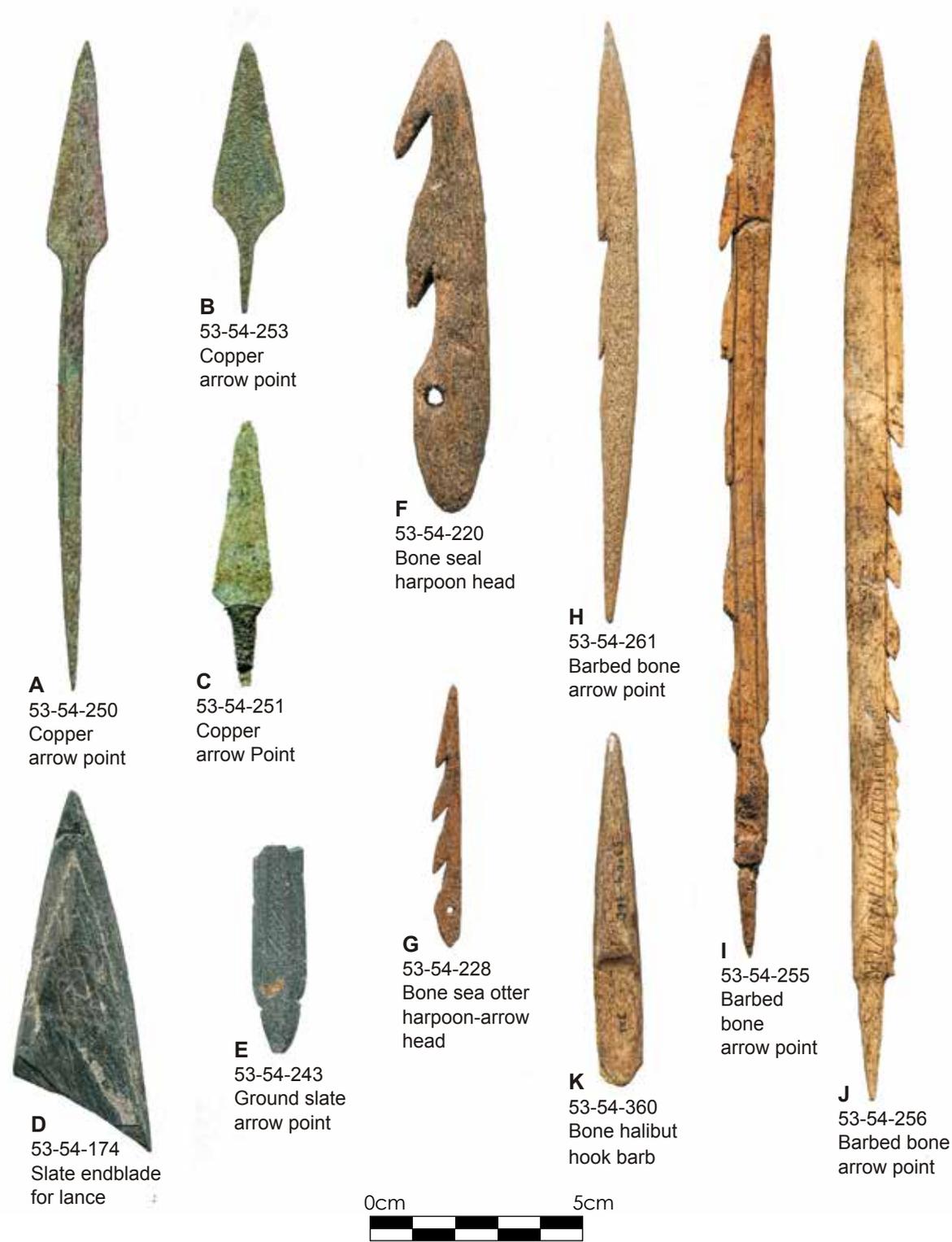


Figure 1.9: Projectile points from the *Tlákw.aan* site YAK-00007

Unilaterally barbed arrow points with conical tangs made of bone or antler (n = 19; Figure 1.9H-J; De Laguna et al. 1964:Fig. 17) are an archaeologically documented Ahtna type (Hanson 2008:Fig. 16; Shinkwin 1979:Fig. 13D and 14D; VanStone 1955), although also widespread during the last 1000 years among most Alaskan Athabascan and Inuit groups as well as the Tlingit. Unilaterally barbed bone harpoon heads with tapered tangs and line holes, used for taking seals, dolphins, and sea lions (n=12, Figure 1.9F), reflect the maritime focus of the *Tlákw.aan* subsistence economy and were used by all southern Alaskan coastal groups including the Tlingit (De Laguna 1960), Eyak (Birket-Smith and De Laguna 1938), and Chugach (De Laguna 1956), but not by the Ahtna in their original inland territory. Small barbed harpoon-arrow heads for sea otters (n=9; Figure 1.9G) had a similar cultural distribution. Pointed bone pieces with flattened sides, identified by De Laguna as gaff hook points but which actually served as barbs for halibut hooks (n=5, Figure 1.9K) represent another facet of coastal adaptation.

Woodworking Tools

Splitting adzes (n=14, Figure 1.10A-B) made of pecked and ground greenstone or schist with hafting knobs or grooves were broadly distributed after 1000 B.P. across southeastern and southern Alaska as far west as Kodiak Island, but have not been reported for the Copper River Ahtna. Other *Tlákw.aan* woodworking tools include stone planing adzes (n=13, Figure 1.10C), stone chisels (n=76, Figure 1.10D-E), and beaver or porcupine teeth (n=13, Figure 1.10G-H) used as carving knives. These types have been found at Ahtna sites (Rainey 1939; Shinkwin 1979; Workman 1977), Eyak sites on the Yakutat foreland (Davis 1996) and in Prince William Sound (De Laguna

1956). Nails and small fragments of iron, almost certainly derived from driftwood or wreckage (n=19; not illustrated), were probably used as bits for wood and bone-working tools (De Laguna et al. 1964:88-90).

Cutting and Scraping Implements for Skin and Meat.

The *Tlákw.aan* assemblage includes paddle-shaped scrapers made of flaked slate or schist (n=5, Figure 1.10F) as well as semi-lunar slate scrapers (n=7, Figure 1.10L), both comparable to Chugach types (De Laguna 1956:131-135) and used for hide preparation. Boulder spall scrapers (n=6, Figure 1.10J) used for preparing skins are a predominant artifact in the Ahtna region (Hanson 2008:122-123; Ketz 1983:174-175, 187-188; Shinkwin 1979:61-62; Workman 1977) and occur in other Athabascan, Eyak, and Sugpiaq areas.

The most distinctively Ahtna cutting tools from *Tlákw.aan* are semi-lunar knives with wooden handles and crescentic copper blades (n=9, Figure 1.11 A-B) used for slicing salmon and other fish, a type that is duplicated at the pre-contact GUL-00077 site (Hanson 2008:Fig. 11). There is also a unique *Tlákw.aan* copper semilunar knife with a grass-wrapped tang (Figure 1.11C).

Lamps

Undecorated oil lamps (n=51, Figure 1.12 A-C) hollowed from limestone, basalt, and other rocks are abundant in the *Tlákw.aan* collection and were used to light house interiors. Stone lamps for burning sea mammal oil are a coastal trait unknown in Ahtna territory. Stone lamps are rare in Tlingit collections, although a few were found at the *Daax Haat Kanadaa* site near Angoon (De Laguna 1960). They were universally used by other Alaskan coastal peoples including the Eyak (Davis 1996:490-496), Chugach (De Laguna 1956:143-146), and Kodiak Island Sugpiaq (Clark 1984).



Figure 1.10: Woodworking, cutting, and scraping tools from the *Tlákw.aan* site YAK-00007



Figure 1.11: Copper semi-lunar knives from the *Tlákw.aan* site YAK-00007

Ornaments

Tlákw.aan ornaments made of native copper included bracelets (n=6, Figure 1.13A), rings (n=4, Figure 1.13B), coiled wire beads (n=2, Figure 1.13C), tinkler cones (n=4, Figure 1.13D), and pins (n=4, Figure 1.13E). The rings and cones have close parallels among the pre-contact Ahtna copper jewelry from GUL-00077 (Hanson 2008:Figs. 12 and 13). The Eyak and Sugpiaq also wore copper ornaments and examples have been discovered at archaeological sites, including a bracelet from Kachemak Bay (De Laguna 1975:Pl. 49-10). These pieces may have represented the wealth and high status of *Tlákw.aan*'s inhabitants, as

recalled in oral tradition. They also wore coal beads (n=36, Figure 1.13F-H), possibly made from coal collected at seams along Esker Creek on the west side of Yakutat Bay. Unfinished beads and coal fragments suggest on-site manufacture. Holes through the beads are straight (Figure 1.11G), suggesting possession of metal drill bits. Coal beads were common in Prince William Sound, Cook Inlet, and elsewhere on Alaska's southern coast.

Overall, artifacts from the site appear to be a combination of Ahtna implements and Eyak, Sugpiaq, or Tlingit types, the latter primarily related to maritime hunting and fishing.



Figure 1.12: Stone lamps from the *Tlákw.aan* site YAK-00007

This result, while not definitive, is consistent with the combined Ahtna-Eyak origin of the migrants as described in oral tradition and with indications (episode 10) that the Ahtna adjusted to coastal life by adopting maritime technologies (e.g., barbed and toggling sea mammal harpoons, ground slate knives, stone lance points, halibut hooks, seal oil lamps) from their Eyak affines.

Distinctive Ahtna identity at *Tlákw.aan* is most strikingly represented by diverse native copper items (arrow points, knives, earrings, bracelets, rings) which have only rare Eyak, Tlingit, or Sugpiaq counterparts. Copper artifacts at *Tlákw.aan* link the site's inhabitants to their Copper River homeland, and the relatively high frequency of these items in the upper levels of the site (De Laguna et al.



Figure 1.13: Personal ornaments from the *Tlákw.aan* site YAK-00007

1964:87-88) indicates that a trade connection must have been maintained long after the original migration (Pratt 1998). No direct references to post-migration contact with the Copper River region appear in the oral narratives except the incident in which six Gineix Kwáan brothers return home to retrieve a copper *tináa* for the purchase of Knight Island (episode 9). Perhaps this element of the story has a larger meaning, signifying an enduring connection between Yakutat Bay and Upper Ahtna territory on the Copper River. Sarah William's statement that the Gineix Kwáan "used copper for everything—for knives, whenever they had a war" (episode 9c) might also refer not just to copper items the migrants were able to bring with them on their original journey but to continuing importation and use. Finally, it is notable that YAK-00007 is

the only site in Yakutat Bay where pre-contact copper artifacts have been found, supporting its identification as *Tlákw.aan* village.

Faunal Remains

According to the migration narrative the residents of *Tlákw.aan* fished for salmon (episode 9), hunted harbor seals at their glacial rookery (episode 10, 10a), and took terrestrial game including bears and Dall sheep (episode 10). At YAK-00007, where animal bones are well preserved due to the buffering of soil acidity by calcium carbonate from marine shells, these and other species should be represented.

Species identifications of faunal remains from the 2014 trench (Michael Etnier, personal communication, 2016) are generally consistent with earlier findings from the site (De Laguna et al. 1964:77-84). The total number of identified

specimens (NISP) from all strata was 6479 (Table 1.2). Fish remains (NISP = 3858, or 59% of the total assemblage) were dominated by salmon with the addition of a few cod and dogfish. Mammals (NISP = 2617, or 40%) were predominantly marine species including harbor seals, fur seals, dolphins, sea lions and sea otters. Harbor seals (NISP = 747) were by far the most numerous. There was a minor representation of terrestrial animals (mountain sheep or goat, black bear, beaver or porcupine, NISP = 14, or .2%) and of birds (NISP = 13, or .2%).

The age distribution of the harbor seal remains gives a strong indication of rookery harvesting, with a concentration on the hunting of pups or a practice of bringing these smaller animals back to the village site as whole carcasses. While age estimates were not possible for 537 of the 747 total harbor seal specimens, of the remaining 210 there were 22 adults (10.5%), 21 immature (10%), and 167 young-of-the-year, or pups (79.5%).

The faunal assemblage verifies oral accounts of subsistence practices at *Tlákw.aan* and indicates that hunting and fishing extended from spring (harbor seal, shellfish, sea otter, and fur seal) through summer (salmon, sea mammals) and into fall (mountain sheep or goat, black bear).

Conclusion

The archaeological record of the *Tlákw.aan*/YAK-00007 site—including its size, architecture, age, artifact assemblage, and faunal remains—is remarkably consistent with oral narratives that describe the Gineix Kwáan migration from Copper River, the clan’s co-founding with the Galyák Kaagwaantaan of a village on Knight Island, and residence there until shortly before Western contact. Archaeological data confirm that the migration occurred, provide a chronological framework for the event and its aftermath, and demonstrate the cultural

transformation of an inland riverine people to hunters and fishers on the Gulf of Alaska coast. Maritime adaptation, an explicit theme of the migration narrative itself, is verified by the tangible evidence of animal bones and implements used for hunting, fishing, skin processing, and food preparation.

In evaluating the debate between skeptics and advocates of integrating oral tradition with archaeology (e.g., Anyon et al. 1997; Echo-Hawk 2000; Mason 2000), Whiteley concluded that “oral traditions and other forms of encoded cultural representations, like ritual dramas and place-names, contain genuinely historical components that are readily usable in interpreting the past, as well as more strictly mythological elements” (Whiteley 1992:412-413). The strong historicity inherent in *shkalneek* oral traditions—as opposed to essentially mythical *tlaagú*—is recognized by Tlingit oral scholars, and despite the epistemological contrasts between oral and materialist knowledge systems (Dods 2004) there are significant areas of intersection in which “scientific history and oral tradition may be mutually informative and verifiable” (Crowell and Howell 2013:19).

This proposition is demonstrated by the methodology of heuristic tacking between both kinds of evidence. For example, oral narratives describe the position of Hubbard Glacier and the early stage of vegetational succession on Knight Island at the time of the immigrants’ arrival, generating archaeological hypotheses that were tested by means of stratigraphic excavation, radiocarbon dating, and paleobotanical analysis. The scientific evidence yielded an earlier estimate of when the migration occurred than implied by generational counting. On the other hand, the predominance of spruce in the midden test trench is incompatible with oral descriptions of a treeless island at the time of settlement,

Table 1.2: Preliminary Identifications of Fauna from YAK-00007 Test Trench, 2014. Michael Etnier.

Taxon	NISP	Age	Totals
Fish, unidentified	1169		
Cod	2		
Salmon	2678		
Dogfish	9		
Total fish			3858
Bird, unidentified	13		
Total birds			13
Mammal, unidentified	1696		
Artiodactyl	6		
Pinniped, cf. harbor seal	110		
Harbor seal total	747		
Adult		22	
Immature		21	
Pup		167	
Indeterminate		537	
Sea Lion	1		
Sea otter	3		
Porpoise	37		
Large rodent	7		
Black bear	1		
Total mammals			2617
Total NISP			6479

suggesting that part of the *Tlákw.aan* site must be older than the area excavated.

Similarly, the affiliation of Ahtna and Eyak clans during the migration implies that artifacts and houses at *Tlákw.aan* should materially express both cultures, a prediction that is borne out by archaeological findings. On the opposite tack, archaeological data indicate that trade in

copper with the Ahtna homeland continued long after the original migration, a dynamic that is not portrayed in the oral accounts although copper and its social value are otherwise important themes. While the practice of ice floe rookery hunting for harbor seals is only implied by *K’áadasteen*’s mention of the legendary brothers’ hunting trip to the “seals’ home” at



Figure 1.14: Yakutat Tlingit elder George Ramos, Sr. (*Woochji'xoo eesh*) looks out across the head of Yakutat Bay toward *Taasaa Sít* (Hubbard Glacier). Ramos grew up hunting among the ice floes discharged by the glacier, where thousands of harbor seals gather each spring to give birth and nurse their pups (Courtesy Smithsonian Institution, photo by Aron Crowell, 2011).

the glacier's edge (see Figure 1.14), faunal data highlight the dietary importance of this annual spring harvest. In these and other instances, archaeology's broad frame of reference for the interpretation of cultural patterns and processes complements oral tradition's specificity of person, place, and action. When brought together the two systems of knowledge provide a way of "reading the past" that is powerfully enriched in cultural meaning and historical understanding (Hodder and Hutson 2003).

Demonstrating the productivity of this type of evidentiary dialogue has been one

purpose of the present study and may, it is hoped, provide a methodological contribution to ethnohistorical archaeology. For younger generations at Yakutat, including those who helped us in the field in 2014, this work underlines the importance and validity of the history that elders teach.

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