

Graves Disturbed-

Graves Near Chitina Vandalized

By Jacqueline Glasgow
Staff Writer

Wanton vandalism of native gravesites has been reported in the Copper River region. Reported by Roy Ewan and Herb Smelcer of Ahtna, Inc., it is believed that the damage was done by "fortune hunters" seeking valuable relics and artifacts.

A small Indian burial ground near the village of Chitina was broken into, three of the four graves unearthed, fences that surround the graves torn down, and bones scattered on top of the ground.

"You can see ribs laying around," reported Ewan. "It looks like it happened last fall."

The graves date back to the early 1900's and are those of an Athabascan Indian family. Joe Eskilida, a modern day descendant, has filed for a native allotment which he believes

would include the gravesite.

Ahtna, Inc. Pointed out that the problem has intensified in their area since the building of several new roads, which provides access into areas not open to the general public before.

The native corporation is looking into the incident and may request an investigation by state troopers. They are also exploring the possibility of initiating a program of surveillance of native burial grounds to prevent further incidents.

Following is the complete text of the letter from Ahtna, Inc.:

May 11, 1973

Mr. Howard Rock, Editor
Tundra Times
P. O. Box 1287
Fairbanks, Alaska 99701

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Graves Vandalized...

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Dear Howard,

A major problem among the Natives of Alaska has been "fortune hunters" in Native graves. This problem is rapidly becoming more serious as accesses to the outlying areas are developed.

This problem is increasing in Ahtna's region because of the new McCarthy road and the existing secondary roads that are being developed. Recently, in the Chitina area, camp sites have been built near Native graves. This offers innumerable opportunities for "fortune hunters" to dig through the graves for relics. Among the things that have been happening is that "campers" have been using the fences around the graves for firewood. In extreme cases, they are actually digging up the graves and scattering the bones in search of "gold" or whatever is buried there.

In the Strelna area on the McCarthy road, four graves on Joe Eskilida's property have

been disturbed. Three of the graves have been vandalized.

We feel that this is a very serious offense, and although we have never caught anyone yet, we request that the people of Alaska keep close surveillance of existing Native grave sites and report any vandalism to the nearest law enforcement authority. These people should be severely punished, and we hope we can bring these vandals to justice.

We in the Copper River area would suggest that money be made available for a pilot program of seasonal surveillance of Native grave sites. We are looking into this possibility at this time.

Sincerely yours,

Roy S. Ewan
Executive Director

Herbert Smelcer
Land Planner