

# Utqiagvik provides anthropological goldmine

By Janice L.L. Hudetz

Utqiagvik sits on a high plain overlooking the Arctic Ocean in the northernmost reach of land in Alaska, where for centuries an Eskimo family lay entombed in their ancient home.

Strong Arctic winds moved a large iceberg in from the sea and destroyed their house during the early hours of the day while they slept. The oldest woman grabbed her sewing bag and mukluks to flee from the disaster only to be crushed by a large piece of wood.

Utqiagvik (Utkiavik) today is part of the modern Eskimo village of Barrow where new housing sites are located beside archaeological mounds rich in history and artifacts. There are as many as 60 mounds of anthropologic interest, according to Dr. Raymond Newell, Professor of Anthropology at Rijksuniversiteit, Groningen, Netherlands.

Dr. Newell and other members of the archaeological expedition spoke to a standing room only audience of approximately 200 people at the Anchorage Fine Arts Museum Sunday, March 12.

During the summer of 1982 one of these old mounds, later to be numbered "44," produced two well preserved Eskimo women and three other remains.

The bodies were removed and examined with the permission of the village elders, North Slope Borough and the city of Barrow, with full cooperation by the landowner Levi Greist.

Local people and anthropologists, having known of the resources that lay unearthed in the region, directed their efforts to seek a bridging of cultures past and present.

The bodies were reburied with a memorial by village elders in Barrow. Although there is great interest in the history of the persons and who they were, no one can determine that information at the present

time. Oral history in the area does give relative events surrounding these circumstances, according to archaeologists involved in the find.

Dr. Michael Zimmerman, a paleopathologist formerly with the University of Pennsylvania and now with Jeans Hospital in Philadelphia, who performed the autopsy on the bodies said they were extremely well preserved. He determined that the 40-45-year-old woman had had a baby just prior to the catastrophe as shown by microscopic examination of the mammary glands. Both women had severe cases of osteoporosis

from lack of sunlight.

The autopsy also revealed that the oldest woman had hardening of the arteries and lung conditions caused by inhaling soot and smoke from seal oil lamp. Causes of death were obviously severe chest injuries due to crushing.

Exact ages of the people were a result of scientific analysis of chemicals in the teeth, microscopic examinations of anatomy changes, and change in the pelvic bone structure. The "northern body" which was the 25-year-old woman, was found in the northern end of the structure; and the

"southern body," the oldest woman, about 45, was found in the south side of the house near the entrance. The three other bodies were in their early teens or pre-adolescence.

Investigations by the research team present a very clear pattern and division of why the bodies were found in the house, the ages of the victims, their sex and the events place the probably date of the disaster in the 1500's. It was definitely pre-European contact, according to Dr. Newell, every article in the house originated in the area.

The discovery produced

three mukluks, polar bear skin trousers, bags and wood pots with Inupiat articles, bow and arrow parts, ivory and other ornaments. A cane with the head of a goose inlaid with jade eyes, bags of charms or amulets, dance masks and Inupiat games.

The presentation on these archaeological finds was a part of the Alaska Anthropology Association conference sponsored by ARCO Alaska, Inc., the Atlantic Richfield Foundation, the North Slope Borough and the Bureau of Indian Affairs provided funding for the 1981 research.