

Copper and Stone Tool Artifacts

ANCHORAGE — Copper and stone tool artifacts excavated last month from a site in South-central Alaska are giving archeologists the first look at a time period in Alaskan history previously undocumented.

The site, believed to have been a summer camp for late prehistoric Ahthna Indians, is in the Copper River Basin, about nine miles northeast of Glennallen. It was discovered by archeologists of the Alaska Methodist University (AMU), doing surveillance work for the trans-Alaska pipeline project.

AMU, under the direction of Dr. William Workman, professor of anthropology, has received a contract from Alyeska Pipeline Service Company to conduct archeological surveillance and salvage operations along the southern 160 miles of the pipeline route.

The University of Alaska in Fairbanks is contracted to do the archeological work along the remainder of the route.

The site near Glennallen had been identified by Alyeska as a possible material source for pipeline construction, so the archeologists were summoned to check the area for artifacts and fossils.

The crew which excavated under Clark's direction was made up largely of students and staff members from the University of Alaska, Anchorage, and Anchorage Community College.

"What we initially found were house-sized depressions in the ground," said Dr. Gerry Clark, AMU archeologist who directed the field work. "We measured the depressions and determined it was a (archeological) site, then received the go-ahead to excavate."

Clark is a native of Alaska, born and raised in Kodiak.

Assisted by a crew of 11, Clark spent the first two weeks of September digging at the site and uncovered the remains of two wooden dwellings, two cooking hearths, and a number of artifacts. He is especially interested in the artifacts.

"We found a copper awl and a flaked stone knife in the same hearth," Clark noted, "which indicates they belonged in the same period."

He said normally the copper piercing instrument would be assigned to the late prehistoric or historic period and the stone tool to the prehistoric or pre-

contact period.

Clark explained that no one is certain when the Indians of the area quit using stone tools and started using copper tools.

When the first white man came to the area the Indians were using mainly copper tools, he said. "We now have an opportunity to date the period when flaked stone and copper were used in association," he added.

In addition to the tools, the dwellings uncovered were described by Clark as being very significant. "We found an architectural style not recorded previously," he said. The frame for the walls and roof were made of poles and covered by bark. Each dwelling contained two rooms, apparently not connected.

The most significant aspect of the dwellings, according to Clark, is they had wood plank floors — not typical of the Indian dwellings of that time period.

And the inhabitants apparently also had problems with permafrost. One of the dwellings had four different floors. There were indications each successive floor had been built after the previous one warped and sank in the unstable soil.

Clark tentatively identified the dwellings as part of a summer camp because the hearths were found outside the dwellings. In a permanent year-round village, the hearths would be inside the dwellings, he explained.

Other artifacts uncovered at the site include bark baskets, fragments of woven baskets, wooden bowls, and pieces of a stone maul or hammer. The items have been shipped to AMU for analysis. They will be kept in trust for the people of Alaska.

The dig near Glennallen was just one of a number of archeological excavations that took place this summer along the 798-mile-long pipeline route from Prudhoe Bay to Valdez.

Alyeska, the firm responsible for the design, construction and operation of the pipeline, is required by federal and state law to preserve for the public all artifacts or fossils found during construction.

In order to meet the requirements of the law, Alyeska contracted with the two Alaskan universities to do the surveillance and salvage work.



ARCHEOLOGISTS scrape away the soil covering the remains of a prehistoric dwelling discovered near Glennallen. The site has been tentatively identified as a summer camp for Ahthna Indians. The archeological surveillance and salvage work along the trans Alaska pipeline route is funded by Alyeska Pipeline Service Company.