

‡Introducing the Proto-Dene *Lex Loci* with Selected Dene Place Names South and West of the Alaska Range

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For further study on PDDL refer to discussions and examples on pages xii, 14, 39, 141, 154, 214–215, 217, 221–222, 227–229, and 309.

Since 2010 I have been taking notes and lecturing on a theory of Dene prehistory I call the “Proto-Dene *Lex Loci*” (‘word/law of location,’ or PDDL). This theory is based upon historical linguistic inferences from place name networks and other linguistic patterns from contiguous Alaska Dene languages. With this article, Table 12-ABC (three groups of place names selected for their traits of significance), and with annotations and cross-references to entries in *SPA*, we can provide a brief introduction to the PDDL.

The PDDL was prompted by the Dene-Yenseian Hypothesis. Edward Vajda’s 2010 article presented grammatical and lexical evidence that the Na-Dene languages of North America are genetically related to Ket and other extinct Yeniseian languages of western Siberia. The symposium volume (Kari and Potter 2010) provided discussions and initial scientific support that a Dene-Yenseian language stock was located in Beringia, c. 14,000–15,000 yrs. ago. One consequence of the DY language stock is that Proto-Na-Dene must have been in Alaska by 12,000–14,000 BP. For background reading see Kari 2010b that discusses the *geolinguistic conservatism* of the Dene (or Athabascan) language family, and a “slow chronology” for the Na-Dene in Northwest North America, with Tlingit and Eyak branching off at early dates from the other Dene languages.

The PDDL theory has accelerated in the past ten years with advances in place names coverage for eight contiguous Dene languages surrounding the Alaska Range (Ahtna, Dena’ina, Upper Kuskokwim, Upper Koyukon, Lower Tanana, Middle Tanana, Tanacross, Upper Tanana); there are nearly 9,000 names on record in similar database formats. (See p. 232, re: a database field “match” that tags names of significance.)

We can reconstruct for Proto-Dene a bipartite SIGN+GENERIC naming system. The more detailed place names lists are very informative. We find technical hydrological or geological naming. Lithic prospecting is indicated by place names for certain stones or minerals. On occasion we can detect band movement trajectories, name provenance (where a name was coined), founding place names ϕ , or environmental change \mathbb{N} . Early Dene bands used clever variations of the SIGN+GENERIC formula to coin names for certain streams, landmarks, and favored habitats. I use the term *watershed tenure devices* for several intentional, pragmatic naming devices such as hydronymic districts and reverse hydronymns (p. 39, Kari 1996a, 1996).

For Table 12 I selected significant names for three subregions south and west of the Alaska Range. Table 12A-B-C has three regional diachronic layers with a convention \mathring{A}^2 - \mathring{A}^3 - \mathring{A}^4 . Table 12A has oldest group of selected names, \mathring{A}^2 , Ahtna in the Upper Susitna River (mainly in Chapter 10 of *SPA*); 12B has the next oldest, \mathring{A}^3 , Upper Kuskokwim or Dena’ina names along the western piedmont of the Alaska Range; and 12C, \mathring{A}^4 , has eight place names that stimulate discussion about phases of the Dena’ina occupation of Cook Inlet Basin.

This is the current outline of *PDDL traits of diachronic significance* (some traits are not presented in Table 12). A selected name can be noted for two or more traits.

1. Locational, overt, or contextual information in the Dene place names networks: overtly informative \odot , environmental change \mathbb{N} , founding place names ϕ , boundary markers \parallel , pass-markers \asymp , favorite themes (lithics \blacktriangle , anatomy \heartsuit), contextually informative (clan-origin locations, myth locations(c)).
2. Watershed tenure (WT) devices: pragmatic SIGN+GENERIC patterns that enhance memorization and recognition of features
 - 2.1 Generic WT: hydronymic districts, reverse hydronyms: \uparrow , double reverse hydronymns ($\rightarrow\uparrow$), regional generic terms (Dena’ina **-tnu** ‘stream’).
 - 2.2 Sign WT: patterned duplications \equiv , $x\equiv$; geo-duplicates $g\equiv$ (noticeable local place name duplications), name ensembles \mathfrak{H} , pairs \gg , resemblant pairs \approx .
3. Dene historical linguistic traits: Dene lexical archaisms \mathring{A} ; semantic opaqueness Ω (esp. hydronymns); irregular sound correspondences in bilingual Dene names \neq ; morpheme or stem irregularities $m\neq$ (ellipsis, contractions); substrate place names ∞ ; regional comparisons of substrate, irregular & opaque names.

PDDL is a stimulating theory for Dene and Na-Dene prehistory due to the interplay between the selection of significant names among the rule-driven Dene name networks, and the traits that span a wide range of information types. These three regional case studies demonstrate how the PDDL leads to hypotheses on relative antiquity, temporal benchmarks, and trajectories for Alaska Dene band movements

TABLE 12. DIACHRONICALLY SIGNIFICANT DENE PLACE NAMES SOUTH AND WEST OF THE ALASKA RANGE

Å ² SPA#	Ing	first Copper R Basin names	location, Maps 41, 55	literal	PDLL traits	comments; other sources
10.64	A	'Atna'	Copper River	beyond river	☀	coined in Tanana Valley
10.63	A	Ben Daes Bene'	Old Man Lake	shallows lake lake	x≡	7 distant duplicates, Healy L., Mentasta L, cf. ⑧
10.29	A	Hwtsaay Nene'	West Ahtna Uplands	dwarf tree country	x≡	3 PA duplicated ecoregions, cf. ⑨
10.62	A	Nen' Yese'	Nen' Yese' Ridge	land ridge	≡, »	also Nen' Yese' Ggaay (esker N of Glennallen)
10.61	A	K'ey Tsaaygha	hill N of Tyone R	by dwarf birch	≡	same as name for Hogan Hill
10.24	A	Sasnuu' Bene'	Lake Louise	sand island lake	≡, g≡	same as Summit Lake
10.12	A	Nataghi'aade	Devil Canyon	current flows down	≡	same as Baird Canyon, see Fig. 135A,
10.28	D	Yusdikda,	Lone Butte	dear one far ahead	, ~	cf. 10.35, both with nes , overt boundary marker
10.35	A	Xensdii	ridge W of Tyone Lake	the next one ahead	~	cf. 10.28, both with nes
14.71	A	Siz'aani	Gunsight Mountain	inside me, my heart	≡	also mt. at Copper Glacier, Figs. 190, 190A
14.1	A D	Ts'itonh Na' Ch'atanhtnu	Matanuska River	trail comes out river	≠	reanalyzed in both A and D

TABLE 12A. EARLY AHTNA NAMES (Å²) ON THE UPPER SUSITNA RIVER

A case study on the Tanana River with 45–50 names shows that the Tanana Valley has the oldest Dene place names within the current corpus. When we summarize *all* linguistic documentation for the Tanana Valley Dene languages and Ahtna in Copper River, there is little substrate linguistic data; there is no linguistic evidence of non-Dene languages having been present in the circum-Alaska Range uplands. Kari 2010b:207, "For the Copper River Basin and the Ahtna language area a strong case can be made for long-term occupation without the presence of any other non-Athabascans."

Table 12A has eleven Å² Ahtna or Dena'ina names in Western Ahtna country. We can point to strong evidence that the Dene entered Copper River from the Tanana Valley (and not the reverse) and that names were coined both before and after Glacial Lake Ahtna was at its maximum: 11,000–10,000 BP. The name 10.64 '**Atna**' 'Beyond (the range) River' Copper River is overtly informative, i.e., the provenance of this name was the Tanana Valley. The initial evidence about early Dene band movements came from three upland ecoregion names with a rare term for

'dwarf trees,' PA **h^wttha:x* 'dwarf tree' which is a true Dene lexical archaism. Kari (1993:242): "These three names suggest an ordering or seriation of band movements: 1st Ketchumstock uplands, 2nd Susitna-West Fork Uplands [10.29], 3rd Mulchatna-Holitna-Stony River Plateau ⑨."

Several patterned duplications ≡, and geoduplicates g≡, indicate that the Dene/Ahtna were naming places in Copper River Basin prior to and following the breaching of Lake Ahtna c. 10,700 BP (Shimer 2009, Reger et al. 2012). Citing just six place names, the pre-/post Lake Ahtna evidence is unequivocal. See the annotations for 1) geoduplicates **Sasnuu' Bene'** (10.34 Lake Louise and Summit Lake), 2) a patterned duplication **K'ey Tsaaygha** (10.61 hill on Tyone River and Hogan Hill, the island of Lake Ahtna; and 3) the two Lake Ahtna shoreline names, a patterned pair **Nen' Yese'** (10.62) and **Nen' Yese' Ggaay**. See other Å² name annotations 10.12, 10.60, 10.61, 10.63, and 10.64 and others not on Table 12 (7.61, 10.57, 10.58, 14.70, and 14.71). There are many affinities between Ahtna names and place names in Tanana Valley (e.g., five mountains that are named for a shiny ochre).

Å³ Map 26	Ing	founding names W of Alaska Range	location, Map 26	literal	PDLL traits	comments; other sources
① 6.61	UKD	Dichina Nek' Kenaniq'	Kuskokwim R	stick river	-↓, φ	Ξ 1st order stream w reverse hydronym
②	UK	Tsat'asr Nek'	Highpower Ck	stone charcoal stream	»-↓, Λ, φ	Ξ linked reverse hydronym
③ 6.42	D UK	Idzitnu, Izitnu Edze No'	South Fork Kuskokwim R	Ω stream	Ω, ≠, ≡, φ	iconic, ambiguous, see 6.42
④	UK	Mazr'a Nek'	Kuchaynanik Ck	stone type stream	»-↓, Λ, φ	Ξ clever, double reverse hydronym cf. ⑥
⑤	UK	Hwtsash Nek'	Creek on Middle Windy Fork	ahead/first stream	-↓, φ	Ξ
⑥	D	Vazh'atnu	North Babel River	stone type stream	»-↓, Λ, φ	Ξ clever, cf. ④
⑦	D	K'qizaghetnu	Stony River	Ω "distant" stream	Ω, ≠	ellipsis, irregular
⑧	D	Ven Dash Vena	Tundra Lake	shallows lake lake	x≡	cf. Old Man Lake 10.63, Mentasta L, Healy Lake
⑨	D	Htsay Nenq'	Stony-Holitna- Mulchatna Plateau	"first land"	x≡, ≠, φ	ancient homeland; cognate w A.10.29, also in Tc 'dwarf tree land'
⑩ 6.41	D	Dzel Ken	Southern Alaska Range	mountain base	x≡	same as UT pass at Nabesna-Chisana- White R
⑪	D	Nduk'eyux Dghil'u	Telaquana Mt	game enters mountain	☀	rare mythic place name; Kari 2007:ii
⑫	D	Talchatnaq'	Hook Ck	muskrat stream	≠-↓, φ	Ξ, irregular sound for 'muskrat'
⑬	D	Valts'atnaq'	Mulchatna R	Ω-stream	Ω -↓, φ	Ξ, irregular and opaque

TABLE 12 B FOUNDING DENE NAMES WEST OF ALASKA RANGE (Å³)

Thirteen Å³ names on Map 26 are ordered north to south along the west piedmont of the Alaska Range. These Å³ names appear to be a set of initial pioneering Dene place names. From the corner of the Central/Southern Alaska Range to Mulchatna River is a set of seven reverse hydronyms (Map 26: ①, ②, ④, ⑤, ⑥, ⑫ and ⑬); a trail of *linked founding place names* (first presented in Kari 1996a:458–59).

The Upper Kuskokwim name for Highpower Creek ② illustrates ancient Dene geographical naming ingenuity. Highpower Creek at the northwest corner of the Alaska Range was the first sidestream in the Kuskokwim drainage to be named with a reverse hydronym:

Tsat'asr Nek' (in UK). The Dene also gave a name **Tsat'asr No'** to a small tributary of Highpower Creek, the same sign 'black rock' with the dominant hydronym **-no'**, a clever device that flags this confluence as a trail intersection. I call this a *double reverse hydronym* (»-↓). Note that two streams to the south ④ and ⑥ are another double reverse hydronym. The south-most founding name, Mulchatna River **Valts'atnaq'** is conspicuous; the syllables **val-ts'at** are opaque. Two stems for 'stream' **na'** and **niq'** were blended into **naq'**. The name for Hook Creek to the north **Talchatnaq'** has this same blended stem. Opaque and irregular hydronyms (Ω or ≠) are relevant to the PDLL.

One other likely founding place name is **Nduk'eyux Dghil'u** Telaquana Mountain (see Kari 2007:ii). This is an overtly informative name (☀) 'game enters mountain,' and a rare instance

of a Dene place name referencing a sacred myth, an emergence story. A connection between the Dene of the upper Tanana River and the west piedmont is indicated by the extra-territorial duplication (x≡) of the UT names **Ddhāl Chin** and Dena'ina **Dzel Ken** Southern Alaska Range. The Upper Tanana name refers to the valley and passes that connect the upper White-Chisana-Nabesna Rivers. This pair of x≡ cognates at opposite ends of the Alaska Range horseshoe is striking. The most conspicuous Å³ names show meta-pragmatism: the trail of eight reverse hydronyms, the two x≡ distant duplications for ecoregions **Htsay Nenq'** and **Dzel Ken**.

The Inland Dena'ina regard **Htsay Nenq'** as the ancestral homeland (Balluta 2008). The Stony River was the first sockeye salmon that early Dene named. Wherever Dena'ina coined stream names, they have the unique Dena'ina stem **-tnu**. Also there are suggestions of an early "westward Dena'ina spread" based on numerous stream names with syllables ending in **-tneq** in Yupik, and **-tno'** in Lower Koyukon, and Deg Hit'an. The initial place names in this Proto-Dena'ina homeland could have been coined 10,000 years ago. The arrowheads, bone points, & microblades at the Lime Hills Cave site (Ackerman 1997) that date from ca. 8100–9500 are situated in time and space to represent this early Dene presence.

Å ⁴ SPA#	Ing	notable Cook Inlet names	location Map 26	literal	PDLL traits	comments; other sources
14	D	Ulcha Dghil'u	Roadhouse Mountain	a people's mountain	∞	ul'cha, ul'chena an ancient people, Norton-era, true substrate p.n.
15 6.2	D	Shqitnu	Swentna River	∞-stream	∞	possible substrate p.n. in D; shqit in two others 16.18 and hill in Kenai
16 7.19	D	K'ich'atnu	Kichatna River	Ω-stream	Ω	opaque ancient name, see 7.19
17 1.30	D	Tubughnenq'	Tyonek area	beach land	☀, φ, 🖐	founding ensemble, overt proclamation
18 1.121	D	Qezdeghnen	Kustatan Peninsula	peninsula land	φ, 🖐	founding ensemble
19 16.23	D	Yaghenen	Kenai Peninsula	good ... land	φ, 🖐	founding ensemble, yaghe- an innovation
20 16.23	D	Unhghenesditnu	creek at Kalifornsky	farthest ahead stream	☀,	boundary name, cf. nes in 10.28, 10.35
21	D	Ggasilatnu	Kasilof River	∞ stream	∞	true substrate p.n. in D

TABLE 12C. SOME SIGNIFICANT DENA'INA NAMES AROUND COOK INLET (Å⁴)

There have been some vanished languages and place names around Cook Inlet, however the Dena'ina vigorously rejected substrate names. Eight names around Cook Inlet point to distinct layers of naming in Cook Inlet Basin. We can note three substrate place names (∞): **14 Ulcha Dghil'u** Roadhouse Mountain refers to a vanished people who were at Iliamna Lake (perhaps at c. 3000–4000 BP). The name **Shqitnu 15** Skwentna River stands out as a likely substrate name. (There are two other Dena'ina names with the stem **shqit**). **Ggasilatnu 21** Kasilof River has a substrate word with D. -**tnu**. Opaque hydronyms such as **3** South Fork of the Kuskokwim, and **16** Kichatna River stand out as likely founding place names (φ) that mark several passes (≡).

Three ecoregion names with **nen** 'land' on the shore of Cook Inlet **17, 18, 19** have the sense that they were coined as an founding ensemble of names, with an implied trajectory from west-to-east. This set of names branded the first Dena'ina coastal habitats. We can speculate about the date of this ensemble. Three names—**19, 20, 21**—on the Kenai Peninsula show that the Dena'ina moved south after arriving at the Swanson River area. The overt boundary name for the small stream at Kalifornsky **20**, only ¼ mile from the mouth of a substrate name **Ggasilatnu 21**, implies there was communication between the first Kenai Peninsula Dena'ina and the last Riverine Kachemak people, which could be dated at c. 1000–1100 BP (Reger & Boraas 1996).

MAP 26

‡Selected Upper Kuskokwim and Dena'ina names west of the range and in Cook Inlet Basin.

