

# Archaeological survey along the Mosquito Fork of the Fortymile River, Eastern Interior Alaska



Sam Coffman<sup>1</sup> and Steve Lanford<sup>2</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>University of Alaska Museum of the North and <sup>2</sup>Bureau of Land Management



## About the survey

An archaeological survey of the Mosquito Fork of the Fortymile River was conducted by a three person crew using a rowing frame inflatable raft (Figure 1) to travel down the river. The crew and equipment was set down on the river by use of a helicopter (Figure 2). The crew floated to areas to be surveyed and then surveyed on foot with shovel tests at selected points. The survey plans were guided by use of a newly identified map of the area, previously selected points from previous year overflights by helicopter and crew selected points as identified along the river. They also used previously recorded site information and updated files for those locations.

A 1918 hand drawn map of the Mosquito Fork drainage by Christian L. Larson (Figure 3) assisted our efforts in surveying for historic features.

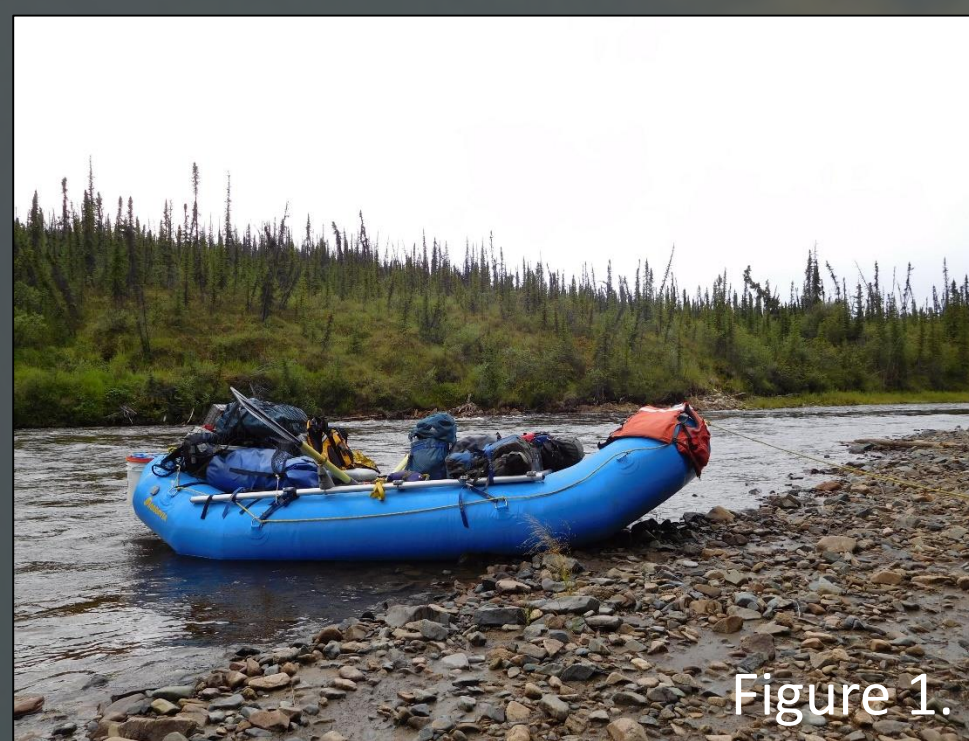


Figure 1.



Figure 2.

Bean Creek Prospect Site (EAG-00888): The site consists of two areas where bulldozer-wide trenches have been cut into a terrace overlooking Bean Creek, a small side tributary of the Mosquito Fork of the Fortymile River. A large, Log Cabin Syrup tin (Figure 4) was collected from this area. This syrup tin has the potential to refine the chronology of Log Cabin Syrup tins because it uses a different spout than previously reported. Additionally, the Bean Creek Prospect Site has evidence for two periods of prospecting: early-20th century hand prospecting; followed by additional mechanized prospecting using a bulldozer to cut the test trench, probably dating to post-World War II. This creek is not named on current USGS maps but the creek name is based on Buzzell's Figure 2 map in the 2014 OHA Report Number 151.

EAG-00872 sits atop a river terrace overlooking the Mosquito Fork and provides excellent views to the west and south. The site is composed of a large, well-mossed, oval depression measuring 640 x 320cm and 80 cm in depth (Fig. 5). Testing of the feature did not yield any artifacts. A single shovel test placed about 17 meters from the depression yielded a single chert flake. Current interpretation of the site is that the feature represents a house-like feature.



Figure 5. Oval depression, EAG-00872

Gold Creek Wolf Trap Site (EAG-00886): This site is defined by the wolf trap (Figure 6) found hanging in a spruce tree on a raised "knob" along Gold Creek. The trap is stamped "PROPERTY OF THE UNITED STATES" on the underside of the frame, and one jaw is stamped "US". The pan is stamped with

\S. NEWHOUSE\ No 114\ PAT. SEPT. 26, '11\ ONEIDA COMMUNITY N.Y.\

It was collected and has been assigned UAMN accession number, UA2016-065 at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, Fairbanks. The trap was found along a trail marked on a 1957 USGS map. According to local trapping experts, this style of traps was phased out in Alaska in the 1980s or early 1990s.



Figure 5. Wolf trap, EAG-00886

Gold Creek Cabin 2016-1 (EAG-00885): The site consists of two features. Feature 1 is a collapsed cabin ruin measuring 14'X 16' (Figure 6). Feature 2, approximately 4 meters to the SE of the cabin ruin, is a small rectangular depression. This feature is interpreted as the outhouse location. Based on the apparent age (the use of axe cut logs throughout and the deteriorated condition of the logs), this ruin is likely one of the cabins depicted in the 1918 sketch map by Christian L. Larson (Figure 3).



Figure 6. Feature 1 from EAG-00885



Figure 4. Log Cabin Syrup tin



Figure 3. 1918 map by Christian Larson.

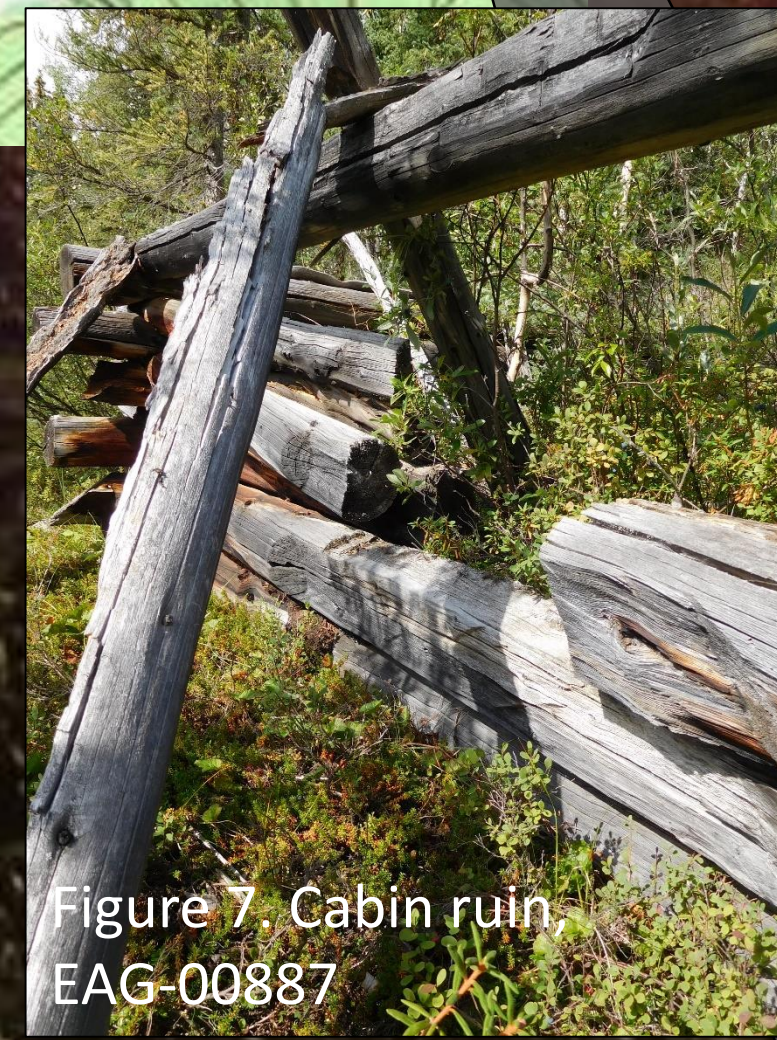


Figure 7. Cabin ruin EAG-00887

Moose Creek Cabin (EAG-00887): The site consists of two features. Feature 1 is a cabin ruin (Figure 7) which measures 12' E-W x 14' 8" N-S. Feature 2, approximately 5 meters to the SW of the cabin ruin, is a 1m square depression. This feature is interpreted as potentially the outhouse location. A metal detector was used to locate metal artifacts scattered outside of the ruin. Some of these included items that provide a date of occupation use for the site, placed in the early 20th century, pre-World War I. This ruin is likely the cabin depicted in the 1918 sketch map by Christian L. Larson. (Figure 3)

## Results of the survey

During this survey, 20 new archaeological sites (14 prehistoric; 6 historic) were identified and documented. The historic sites have assisted in better addressing Euro-American use of the area. Cabin ruins documented along the Gold Creek and Moose Creek have demonstrated how important historical maps (Figure 1) or other historical accounts and documents can be when surveying for archaeological resources.

The prehistoric sites documented during this survey ranged from; ephemeral lithic scatters with little deposition, to a large house-like feature, as well as two sites containing microblade technology, that were stratigraphically below the presumed White River Ash (cf. Preece et al. 2014; Workman 1979). The few obsidian artifacts recovered have also shed light on how material traveled from source(s) to site – all in small, tertiary form. Additionally there is a trend or focus on southern obsidian sources (e.g. Edziza, Wiki Peak).

Acknowledgements: Thanks to Robin Mills (BLM) for Project Coordination and Funding; Sara Polachek (BLM, SCA Archaeology)

Figure 9. Stratigraphy at EAG-00878



### References cited

- Buzzell, Rolf G.  
2014 History of Mining in the Mosquito Fork Basin and its tributaries (except Chicken Creek), as reported in Mining Records, Mining Reports and Newspapers, 1898-2014. OHA Report Number 151
- Larson, Christian L.  
1918 Map of the Mosquito Fork of the Fortymile Drainage: downloaded from <https://text-message.blogs.archives.gov/2016/03/01/>.
- Preece, S.J., R.G. McGimsey, J.A. Westgate, N.J.G. Pearce, W.K. Hart, and W.T. Perkins  
2014 Chemical complexity and source of the White River Ash, Alaska and Yukon. Geosphere vol. 10; no. 5; p. 1020-1042.
- Workman, W.B.  
1979 The significance of volcanism in the prehistory of subarctic North America, in Sheets and Grayson, eds., Volcanic Activity and Human Ecology. New York, Academic Press, p. 339-371.

EAG-00878: occupies a river terrace that overlooks the Mosquito Fork. Two shovel tests at the site yielded microblades and several flakes all recovered from below a presumed representation of the White River ash (Figure 9). Calcined bone was also recovered and in association with the artifacts. Given the artifacts were recovered from below the tephra, this site has potential to shed light on human use prior to the depositional event

Figure 10. Stratigraphy at EAG-00878



EAG-00880: is a prehistoric site, situated atop a bedrock knoll on the north side of the Mosquito Fork. The knoll is not heavily vegetated and increases in slope gradually. A single shovel test at the site, yielded numerous lithic flakes. This site had one of the highest densities of artifacts found during the 2016 Mosquito Fork surveys. Artifacts consisted of both high quality dark grey chert and obsidian – sourced to Wiki Peak. The cultural zone occurs just below the root mat, within the A/B-Horizon (Figure 10).

Mosquito Fork Cabin (EAG-00890): The site consists of one feature, a collapsing log cabin (Figure 8). The cabin measures 13' 3" x 8' 6". The ruin indicates a 1970s reuse of an earlier constructed cabin. The style of construction using wooden pegs in the doorframe, wall pegs in the wall and a closed-in window on the southwest wall near the doorway indicate that it was originally constructed decades earlier. An artifact particular to that earlier period is a square 5 gallon kerosene can that has been split along one side and the edges rolled back to form a "basin" or "dog feeder." The site may have originally been a prospector's or trapper's cabin. Its later reuse may also be trapping related, or else may be associated with the back-to-the-land movement in the 1970s, as witnessed throughout the Fortymile drainage and elsewhere in Alaska.



Figure 8. Cabin ruin, EAG-00890

EAG-00883 is a site that overlooks the Mosquito Fork (Figure 11). This site of interest, in that it contains a cultural occupation that is clearly below the presumed White River ash. The artifact assemblage consists of eight microblades and a single piece of obsidian – sourced to Mount Edziza (~975km away). Calcined bone was also recovered and in association with the artifacts. This site may assist in dating and understanding human use of the area prior to depositing of the ash.

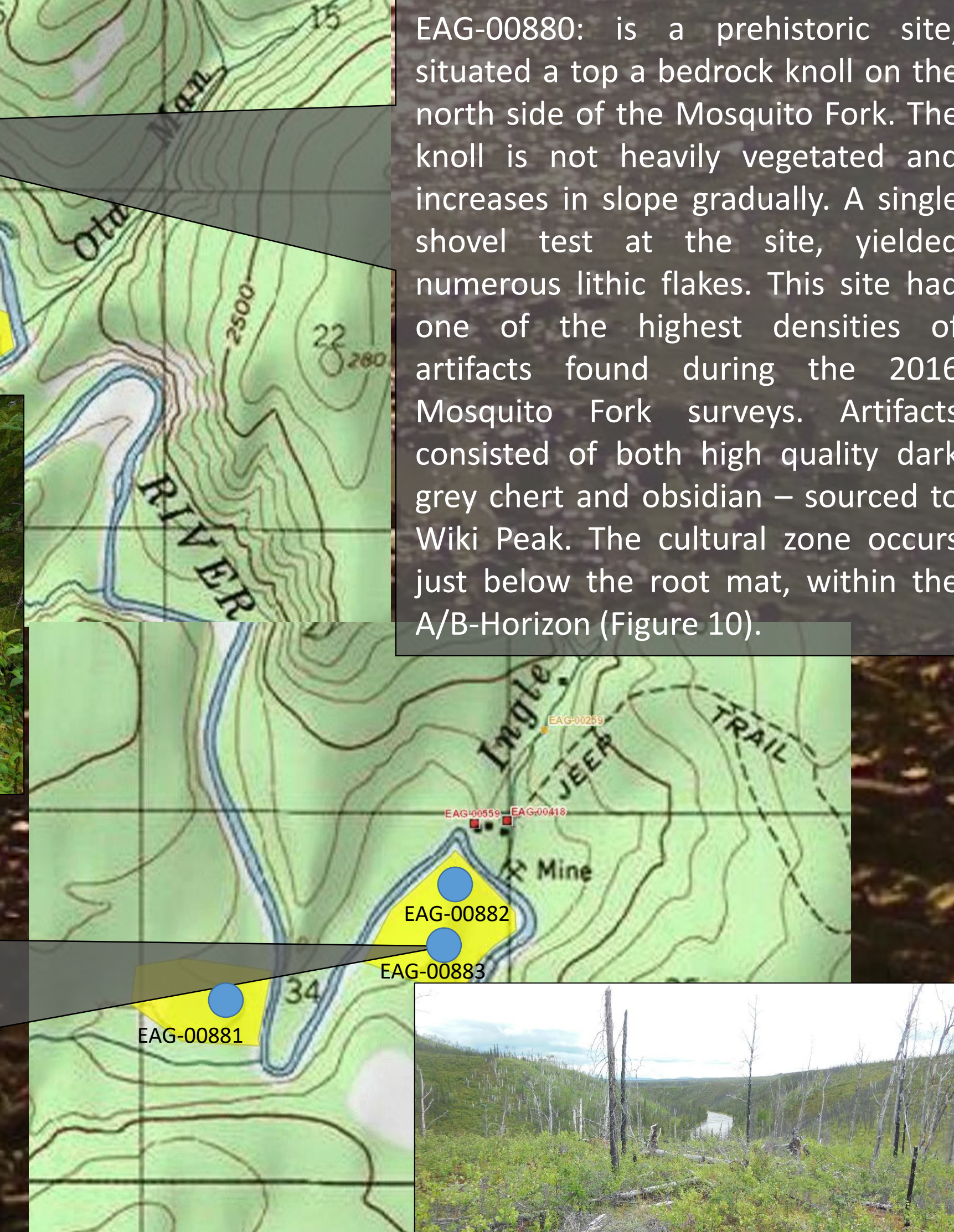


Figure 11. Overview at EAG-00883