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

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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 based on a new 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.

Bean Creek Prospect Site (EAG-00886). The site consists of two areas where bulldozer-side 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 mechanical prospecting using a bulldozer to cut the rock trench, probably dating to post World War II. This creek is not named on current USGS maps but the creek name is based on Buzell’s Figure 2 map in the 2014 DHA 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-mixed, oval depression measuring 640 x 320cm and 80cm in depth (Fig. 5). Looting 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 this site is that the feature represents a house-like feature.

Gold Creek Wolf Trap Site (EAG-00888). 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 “U.S. NEWHOUSE No 1349 PAT. SEP 26, 1911 ONEIDA COMMUNITY N.Y.” It was collected and has been assigned UAMN accession number, UAM2016-005 at the University of Alaska Museum of the North, Fairbanks. The trap was found along a trail marked on a 1973-1975 USGS map. According to local trapping records, this site of traps was phased out in Alaska in the 1980s or early 1990s.

EAG-00890 is a site where a collapsed log cabin ruin (Figure 7) measures 12’ x 14’ x 5’ N. Feature 2, approximately 5 meters to the SW of the ruin, is a 1m square depression. This feature is interpreted as the hearth location based on the apparent age (the use of awe 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 8).

EAG-00874 is a site that overlooks the Mosquito Fork (Figure 11). The site of interest is in it contains cultural occupation that is clearly below the presumed White River ash. The radiocarbon readings on eight microblades and a single piece of obsidian sourced to Mintur Ediza (797540m away). Calcined Bone was also recovered in association with the artifacts. This site may assist in dating and understanding human use of the area prior to deposition of the ash.

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 3) 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 stratiographically 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. Ediza, Wiki Peak).

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References cited


Table 2. Summary of artifact proveniences for the EAG-00885—EAG-00892. Artifacts comprised of obsidian, rare tools were observed.

Figure 1. 1918 map by Christian Larson

Figure 2. Cabin ruin, EAG-00890

Figure 3. 1918 map by Christian Larson

Figure 4. Log Cabin Syrup tin, EAG-00888

Figure 5. Oval depression, EAG-00872

Figure 6. Wolf trap, EAG-00886

Figure 7. Cabin ruin, EAG-00890

Figure 8. Cabin ruin, EAG-00890

Figure 9. Stratigraphy from source(s) to site recovered artifacts have also shed light on how material traveled from source(s) to site — all in small, tertiary form.