

TROTH YEDDHA' LEGACY

"A place where thinking and working together would happen."

Story by Sam Bishop

Plant and campus illustrations by Jan Sanders Stitt

From the university's earliest days, the distinctive sloping east-west ridge on which it was built seemed to lack a name to encompass its entirety.

Fairbanks residents informally referred to the east end, where the campus originated, as College Hill. The other end became West Ridge. Few knew the name for the whole rise.

A name for the entire ridge does exist, but it wasn't widely used because it came not from English but rather the indigenous language of the area — Lower Tanana Athabascan, or Dene.

That name — Troth Yeddha' — now officially graces the hill, thanks to diligent efforts by a group of Alaskans. The U.S. Board on Geographic Names adopted the Athabascan name on Feb. 14, 2013.

"Troth" refers to the root of the plant known in English as "wild potato," which grows in the area. Troth is the most important traditional vegetable for Athabascan people. "Yeddha'" means "its ridge."

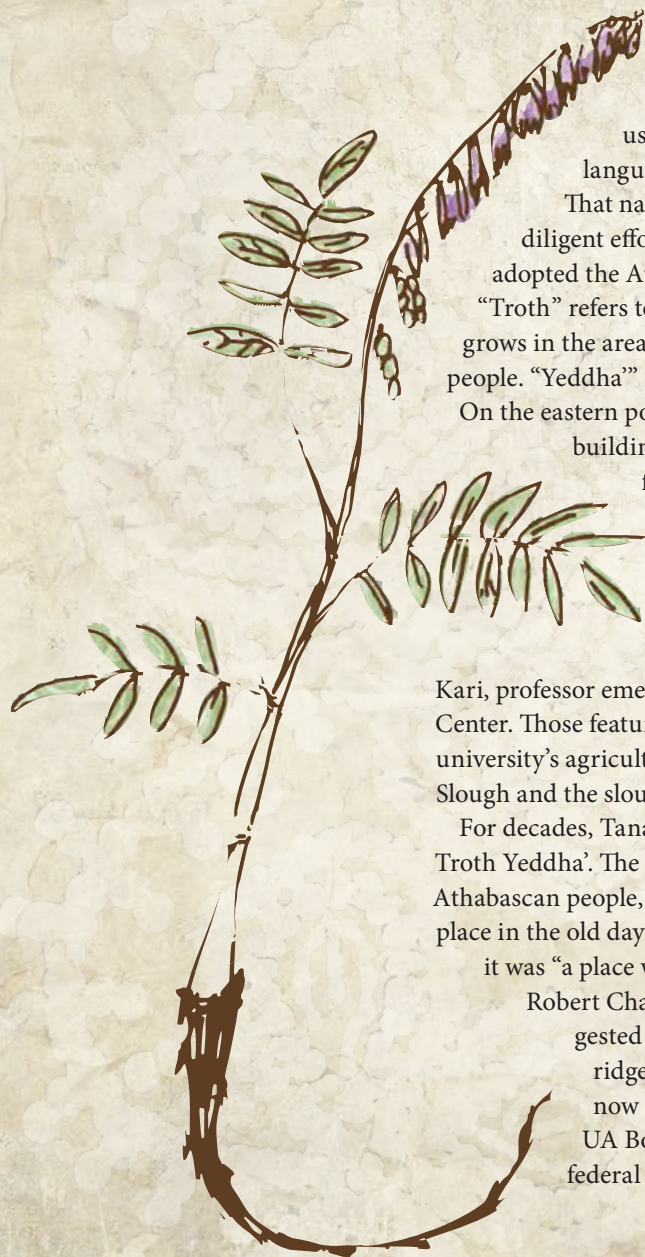
On the eastern point of the ridge, just downhill from the Bunnell and Duckering buildings, archaeological excavations from the 1930s through the 1990s found more than 9,000 artifacts left by people who used the area.

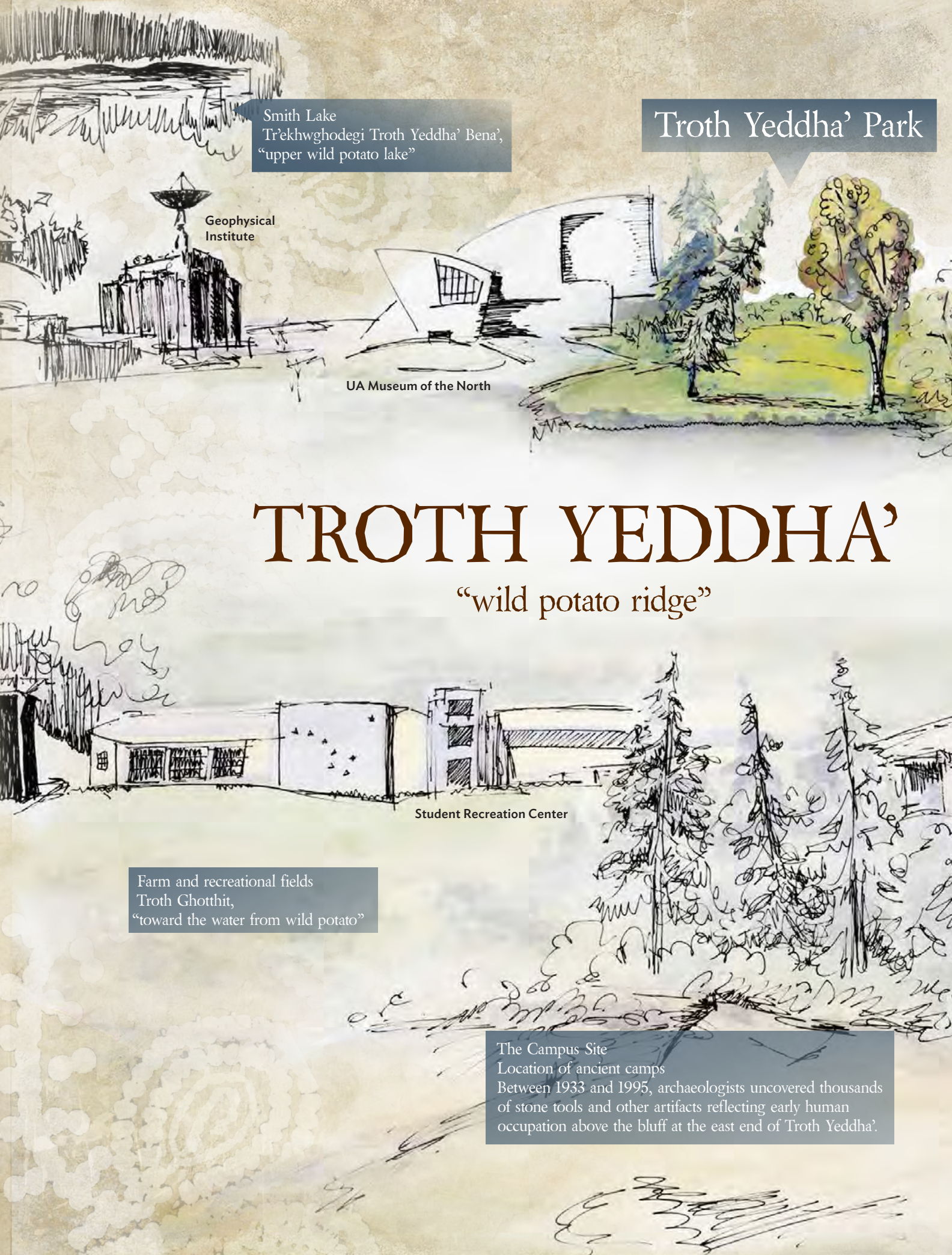
Archaeologists debate the age of the artifacts from the location, known as the Campus Site, but there's no doubt that many are thousands of years old.

The word "troth" also forms the base for 11 other place names in the area, according to a report compiled by James Kari, professor emeritus, and published in 2012 by UAF's Alaska Native Language Center. Those features include Smith and Ballaine lakes and the flats occupied by the university's agricultural and recreational fields, as well as Ballaine Creek, Deadman Slough and the slough's mouth at the Chena River.

For decades, Tanana Valley Athabascan speakers have proudly shared the name Troth Yeddha'. The late Peter John, of Minto, traditional chief of Interior Alaska's Athabascan people, said in 1994 that Troth Yeddha' had been an important meeting place in the old days. The university rightly continued that tradition, he said, because it was "a place where thinking and working together would happen."

Robert Charlie, also a Lower Tanana Athabascan speaker from Minto, suggested the idea of formally adopting the traditional name for the full ridge. During the past few years, he, Kari and Annette Freiburger, who now directs UAF's Rural Student Services, obtained approval from the UA Board of Regents, the Alaska Historical Commission and finally the federal board.





Smith Lake
Tr'ekhwghodegi Troth Yeddha' Bena',
"upper wild potato lake"

Troth Yeddha' Park

Geophysical
Institute

UA Museum of the North

TROTH YEDDHA'

"wild potato ridge"

Student Recreation Center

Farm and recreational fields
Troth Ghotthit,
"toward the water from wild potato"

The Campus Site
Location of ancient camps
Between 1933 and 1995, archaeologists uncovered thousands of stone tools and other artifacts reflecting early human occupation above the bluff at the east end of Troth Yeddha'.



Reichardt Building

Ballaine Lake
Tr'ekhwghotthidi Troth Yeddha' Bena',
"lowland wild potato lake"



Wood Center

Charles Bunnell statue

LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

As a ridge where Athabascan people gathered and watched the landscape, Troth Yeddha' offered a natural metaphor for UAF to build upon.

The university, after all, also brings people together to study the surrounding world for insight. The institution's role is rooted in the legacy of the place.

A dozen years ago, efforts began to establish the Troth Yeddha' Park on the Fairbanks campus. In 2008, the UA Board of Regents approved the location between the museum and the Reichardt Building.

Two years later, a committee of supporters, working with the architectural firm Jones and Jones, completed a park development plan designed to recognize and honor Alaska Native peoples.

Since then, the concept has grown to include an indigenous studies center — an academic hub for the study of Native cultures in Alaska and beyond. It will feature not only classrooms, labs and a library but also space to gather, perform and display art.

Advocates expect this unique park and center of scholarship to create an enduring connection between indigenous cultures and higher education in Alaska.

Last year, the committee launched a \$25 million fundraising campaign to build the park and center — to complete the Troth Yeddha' Legacy.

For more information, contact UAF Development at 907-474-2619 or uaf-giving@alaska.edu, or visit www.uaf.edu/trothyeddha/.

Sam Bishop is an editor and writer at Marketing and Communications. Born in Alaska, he worked previously as a newspaper journalist for 27 years in Fairbanks, Anchorage and Washington, D.C.

Raven, aka Jan Sanders Stitt, can be spotted almost anywhere in Alaska with an easel and either watercolor or oil paint. She is a resident artist at Alaskan Raven Studio and creative director emeritus from UAF. She gathered her memories (more than 40 years of them) and tramped around the Fairbanks campus to create the illustration.

Web extra: Learn more about Troth Yeddha', including audio recordings of elders speaking about it, at www.uaf.edu/aurora/.

Alumni in this story: Annette Freiburger, '14; Peter John, '94H*

*H = honorary degree



Illustrations on this page courtesy of Jones + Jones.