

Kenai Fjords Project

Article by Forest Kvasnikoff

Jagged mountaintops, engraved deeply by receding glaciers, silence echoing all around whispering the past with every motion of the calm rolling waves filtering through cobble stones, through the wind and the changing shades of the blue sky above. A dream perhaps? No, no, much too vivid, this is the home of the Alutiiq people. A home encircled by the very greatest of God's majesty, and I got to live among the greatness of this wonder. For six weeks of my life during the summer of 2003 I took part in an archeological dig. The Pratt Museum offered a position as a High School intern in order to work in collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution, such an offer is not to be turned down and thus my participation in the Archeological dig has brought about a revived respect mingled with curiosity for the past.

My life has been a roller coaster of different places in which I have lived but the Kenai Peninsula, in my perspective, provides roots from which I derive my own self. This dig, which took place in Aialik Bay just southwest of Seward, further, implanted my roots to the area. Day to day, finding little pieces of the past, eventually putting things together to form a wild, vivid picture of the life of an Alutiiq. Arrow heads of bone and stone, planks of an old house pit, right down to the smallest of the beads bringing a burst of color to the earth tones that one becomes accustomed to soon after beginning to dig. All of these things formulated in my mind bring to life what had been a motionless culture of a people I felt were so far gone that their presence would never be fully felt fulfilled again. Culturally, I am indebted to all who put together the dig and would never exchange my experiences that have rejuvenated my connection to past.

With rejuvenation came my curiosity. How did people get along in such an unforgiving environment? Why this place? What did they eat? Who walked upon the very spot that I have dug? All these questions wafted in my thoughts during and following the dig. Some of my questions were answered by being able to participate in uncovering the past such as the basic constructions of houses, hunting tools and methods, the animals traditionally hunted such as the porpoise, and beads, yes the beads, the use of them that in



High school intern Forest Kvasnikoff digs alongside University of California Berkeley archaeology students and professional archaeologists

some cases stratified social classes. Without working out on this archaeological study I am almost certain the interesting facts just reflected would be absent from my knowledge.

Though participation in this awesome excavation fulfilled voids within my own understanding of the local Native people it also gave me some valuable working experience in the field. Up promptly at 8:00 to eat some breakfast then quickly off to the dig site. The everyday tools consisted of mainly the trowel (essential for an archaeologist), a folder for notes regarding artifacts, stratum, and level which the item is found, and last but certainly not least rain gear to work in when the weather got a little nasty. Yes, the whole experience of working out in the wilderness on substantial archeological data was a huge step in the right direction for me. Expanding my horizons in not only the archaeology field but also giving me a huge curiosity and

insight to Geology (a field that I am very interested in studying). In fact, I have gotten to utilize my experiences for beefing up my resume and also involvement in programs that offer a chance to further my education.

I cannot express enough my gratitude for the opportunity to envelop myself in a rather unique field of study and what's more a study about relations that I carry within. I encourage anyone who wish's to learn more about their culture to take the initiative to get involved with opportunities such as that offered by the Pratt Museum. By participating I have acquired a great deal of knowledge and background that I can apply for the rest of my life.